



Okay, here's the complete code and markdown, broken into blocks as requested, to create a well-structured Colab notebook addressing the instructions.

Notebook Title: L02_Oluchi_Obinna_ITAI_2377.ipynb

Markdown Cell 1: Introduction

```
# Lesson 2: Understanding Different Data Types for AI
```

Author: [Oluchi Obinna]

Course: ITAI 2377

This notebook explores how AI systems process various data types, including structured, image, and text data. We will load datasets, examine their characteristics, and discuss conceptual questions related to AI's ability to understand and interpret these different formats.

Code Cell 1: Clone the Dataset Repository

```
In [14]: from google.colab import files  
import pandas as pd  
  
# Step 1: Upload the CSV file  
uploaded = files.upload() # This will open a file picker
```

Upload widget is only available when the cell has been executed in the current browser session. Please rerun this cell to enable.

Saving bbc-news-data-2.csv to bbc-news-data-2 (1).csv

```
In [15]: import kagglehub  
  
# Download latest version  
path = kagglehub.dataset_download("hgultekin/bbcnewsarchive")  
  
print("Path to dataset files:", path)
```

Path to dataset files: /kaggle/input/bbcnewsarchive

```
In [16]: !pip install tensorflow
```

```
Requirement already satisfied: tensorflow in /usr/local/lib/python3.12/dist-packages (2.20.0)
Requirement already satisfied: absl-py>=1.0.0 in /usr/local/lib/python3.12/dist-packages (from tensorflow) (1.4.0)
Requirement already satisfied: astunparse>=1.6.0 in /usr/local/lib/python3.12/dist-packages (from tensorflow) (1.6.3)
Requirement already satisfied: flatbuffers>=24.3.25 in /usr/local/lib/python3.12/dist-packages (from tensorflow) (25.2.10)
Requirement already satisfied: gast!=0.5.0,!0.5.1,!0.5.2,>=0.2.1 in /usr/local/lib/python3.12/dist-packages (from tensorflow) (0.6.0)
Requirement already satisfied: google_pasta>=0.1.1 in /usr/local/lib/python3.12/dist-packages (from tensorflow) (0.2.0)
Requirement already satisfied: libclang>=13.0.0 in /usr/local/lib/python3.12/dist-packages (from tensorflow) (18.1.1)
Requirement already satisfied: opt_einsum>=2.3.2 in /usr/local/lib/python3.12/dist-packages (from tensorflow) (3.4.0)
Requirement already satisfied: packaging in /usr/local/lib/python3.12/dist-packages (from tensorflow) (25.0)
Requirement already satisfied: protobuf>=5.28.0 in /usr/local/lib/python3.12/dist-packages (from tensorflow) (6.32.0)
Requirement already satisfied: requests<3,>=2.21.0 in /usr/local/lib/python3.12/dist-packages (from tensorflow) (2.32.4)
Requirement already satisfied: setuptools in /usr/local/lib/python3.12/dist-packages (from tensorflow) (75.2.0)
Requirement already satisfied: six>=1.12.0 in /usr/local/lib/python3.12/dist-packages (from tensorflow) (1.17.0)
Requirement already satisfied: termcolor>=1.1.0 in /usr/local/lib/python3.12/dist-packages (from tensorflow) (3.1.0)
Requirement already satisfied: typing_extensions>=3.6.6 in /usr/local/lib/python3.12/dist-packages (from tensorflow) (4.15.0)
Requirement already satisfied: wrapt>=1.11.0 in /usr/local/lib/python3.12/dist-packages (from tensorflow) (1.17.3)
Requirement already satisfied: grpcio<2.0,>=1.24.3 in /usr/local/lib/python3.12/dist-packages (from tensorflow) (1.74.0)
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Requirement already satisfied: keras>=3.10.0 in /usr/local/lib/python3.12/dist-packages (from tensorflow) (3.10.0)
Requirement already satisfied: numpy>=1.26.0 in /usr/local/lib/python3.12/dist-packages (from tensorflow) (2.0.2)
Requirement already satisfied: h5py>=3.11.0 in /usr/local/lib/python3.12/dist-packages (from tensorflow) (3.14.0)
Requirement already satisfied: ml_dtypes<1.0.0,>=0.5.1 in /usr/local/lib/python3.12/dist-packages (from tensorflow) (0.5.3)
Requirement already satisfied: wheel<1.0,>=0.23.0 in /usr/local/lib/python3.12/dist-packages (from astunparse>=1.6.0->tensorflow) (0.45.1)
Requirement already satisfied: rich in /usr/local/lib/python3.12/dist-packages (from keras>=3.10.0->tensorflow) (14.1.0)
Requirement already satisfied: namex in /usr/local/lib/python3.12/dist-packages (from keras>=3.10.0->tensorflow) (0.1.0)
Requirement already satisfied: optree in /usr/local/lib/python3.12/dist-packages (from keras>=3.10.0->tensorflow) (0.17.0)
Requirement already satisfied: charset_normalizer<4,>=2 in /usr/local/lib/python3.12/dist-packages (from requests<3,>=2.21.0->tensorflow) (3.4.3)
```

```
Requirement already satisfied: idna<4,>=2.5 in /usr/local/lib/python3.12/dist-packages (from requests<3,>=2.21.0->tensorflow) (3.10)
Requirement already satisfied: urllib3<3,>=1.21.1 in /usr/local/lib/python3.12/dist-packages (from requests<3,>=2.21.0->tensorflow) (2.5.0)
Requirement already satisfied: certifi>=2017.4.17 in /usr/local/lib/python3.12/dist-packages (from requests<3,>=2.21.0->tensorflow) (2025.8.3)
Requirement already satisfied: markdown>=2.6.8 in /usr/lib/python3/dist-packages (from tensorflow~=2.20.0->tensorflow) (3.3.6)
Requirement already satisfied: pillow in /usr/local/lib/python3.12/dist-packages (from tensorflow~=2.20.0->tensorflow) (11.3.0)
Requirement already satisfied: tensorboard-data-server<0.8.0,>=0.7.0 in /usr/local/lib/python3.12/dist-packages (from tensorflow~=2.20.0->tensorflow) (0.7.2)
Requirement already satisfied: werkzeug>=1.0.1 in /usr/local/lib/python3.12/dist-packages (from tensorflow~=2.20.0->tensorflow) (3.1.3)
Requirement already satisfied: MarkupSafe>=2.1.1 in /usr/local/lib/python3.12/dist-packages (from werkzeug>=1.0.1->tensorflow~=2.20.0->tensorflow) (3.0.2)
Requirement already satisfied: markdown-it-py>=2.2.0 in /usr/local/lib/python3.12/dist-packages (from rich->keras>=3.10.0->tensorflow) (4.0.0)
Requirement already satisfied: pygments<3.0.0,>=2.13.0 in /usr/local/lib/python3.12/dist-packages (from rich->keras>=3.10.0->tensorflow) (2.19.2)
Requirement already satisfied: mdurl~=0.1 in /usr/local/lib/python3.12/dist-packages (from markdown-it-py>=2.2.0->rich->keras>=3.10.0->tensorflow) (0.1.2)
```

```
In [17]: # Clone the entire dataset repository
!git clone https://github.com/patitimoner/itai2377-datasets.git
%cd itai2377-datasets
!ls
```

```
Cloning into 'itai2377-datasets'...
remote: Enumerating objects: 21, done.
remote: Counting objects: 100% (21/21), done.
remote: Compressing objects: 100% (16/16), done.
remote: Total 21 (delta 6), reused 16 (delta 2), pack-reused 0 (from 0)
Receiving objects: 100% (21/21), 30.86 MiB | 34.20 MiB/s, done.
Resolving deltas: 100% (6/6), done.
/content/itai2377-datasets/itai2377-datasets
data ITAI2377_Lab_Student_Notebook.ipynb README.md
```

Markdown Cell 2: Conceptual Question - Dataset Repository

⌚ **Conceptual Question:** Why is it beneficial to use a shared dataset repository rather than each student downloading datasets manually?

Answer:

Using a central data source makes research and projects smoother by making sure everyone works with the same version, which avoids errors and supports reproducibility. It saves time and storage by cutting out duplicate downloads, while making it easier to update or fix.

datasets since changes apply to everyone right away. Finally, it gives students and researchers a shared start to collaborate more effectively.

```
### **Markdown Cell 3: Part 3 - Understanding Structured Data**
```

```
```markdown
◇ Part 3: Understanding Structured Data (Tabular Data)
```

Structured data, often stored in tables with rows and columns, is a common data type in various fields like finance, healthcare, and e-commerce. AI systems can analyze this data to find patterns, make predictions, and automate decisions.

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## Code Cell 2: Load and Explore Customer Dataset

```
In [18]: import pandas as pd

Load structured dataset from the cloned repository
df = pd.read_csv("data/structured/Online Retail.csv")

Display the first few rows
display(df.head())
```

	InvoiceNo	StockCode	Description	Quantity	InvoiceDate	UnitPrice	CustomerID
0	536365	85123A	WHITE HANGING HEART T-LIGHT HOLDER	6	12/1/2010 8:26	2.55	17850
1	536365	71053	WHITE METAL LANTERN	6	12/1/2010 8:26	3.39	17850
2	536365	84406B	CREAM CUPID HEARTS COAT HANGER	8	12/1/2010 8:26	2.75	17850
3	536365	84029G	KNITTED UNION FLAG HOT WATER BOTTLE	6	12/1/2010 8:26	3.39	17850
4	536365	84029E	RED WOOLLY HOTTIE WHITE HEART.	6	12/1/2010 8:26	3.39	17850

---

## Markdown Cell 4: Conceptual Question - Customer Purchase Prediction

◇ \*\*Conceptual Question:\*\* If an AI system were built to predict customer purchases, what kind of patterns would it need to detect?

\*\*Answer:\*\*

To predict customer purchases, an AI system would need to identify various patterns, including things such as demographics provided by what describes type of person such as their gender and age. It would also look into purchase trends, history, preferences, and price range. External conditions of the economy/ season, holidays, and weather may be included as well.

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## Markdown Cell 5: Part 4 - Understanding Image Data

## ◇ Part 4: Understanding Image Data (Computer Vision)

Image data, unlike structured data, is represented as grids of

pixels. Computer vision, a subfield of AI, focuses on enabling computers to "see" and interpret images.

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## Code Cell 3: Load CIFAR-10 with TensorFlow/Keras

```
In [19]: from tensorflow.keras.datasets import cifar10
import numpy as np

Load CIFAR-10 dataset
(x_train, y_train), (x_test, y_test) = cifar10.load_data()

Select 10 images per class
images_per_class = 10
selected_images = []
selected_labels = []

for class_label in range(10): # CIFAR-10 has 10 classes
 indices = np.where(y_train == class_label)[0][:images_per_class]
 selected_images.extend(x_train[indices])
 selected_labels.extend(y_train[indices])

♦ TIP: The code above filters images based on class labels using NumPy's `w
```

---

## Code Cell 4: Load CIFAR-10 with PyTorch (TorchVision)

```
In [20]: import torchvision
import torchvision.transforms as transforms
import torch
from torch.utils.data import Subset

Load CIFAR-10 dataset from TorchVision
dataset = torchvision.datasets.CIFAR10(
 root='./data', train=True, download=True, transform=transforms.ToTensor()
)

Extract a subset of 10 images per class
images_per_class = 10
selected_indices = []

for class_label in range(10):
 class_indices = [
 i for i, (_, label) in enumerate(dataset) if label == class_label
]
 selected_indices.extend(class_indices[:images_per_class])

subset = Subset(dataset, selected_indices)

♦ TIP: PyTorch's `Subset` allows sampling specific indices from a dataset.
```

---

## Markdown Cell 6: Conceptual Question - AI vs. Human Image Recognition

◇ \*\*Conceptual Question:\*\* Why does AI need millions of images to accurately classify objects, while humans can recognize patterns with just a few examples?

\*\*Answer:\*\*

The difference is the fact that humans learn and recognize things in a manner AI does not. Humans have years upon years of conceptual understanding, context clue pickups, and the ability to see the same things as our lives progress. AI, on the other hand, must be trained rigorously with correct data in order to decode what is being fed to it.

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## Markdown Cell 7: Part 5 - Understanding Text Data

## ◇ Part 5: Understanding Text Data (Natural Language Processing)

Text data presents unique challenges for AI due to its inherent ambiguity, context-dependent meaning, and the presence of figurative language like sarcasm and metaphors. Natural Language Processing (NLP) is the field dedicated to enabling computers to understand and process human language.

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## Code Cell 5: Read a Sample Text File

```
In [23]: # Load and display a sample news article

Replace with a valid path to a text file if you want to read a file.
sample_article_path = "/content/itai2377-datasets/data/text/bbc-news-data.csv"

try:
 with open(sample_article_path) as file:
 content = file.read()
 print(content)
except FileNotFoundError:
 print(f"Error: File not found at path: {sample_article_path}")
 print("Please make sure to provide a valid path to a text file within the")
```

category	filename	title	content
"business	001.txt	Ad sales boost Time Warner profit	Quarterly profits at US media giant TimeWarner jumped 76% to \$1.13bn (£600m) for the three months to December", from \$639m year-earlier. The firm, which is now one of the biggest investors in Google, benefited from sales of high-speed internet connections and higher advert sales. TimeWarner said fourth quarter sales rose 2% to \$11.1bn from \$10.9bn. Its profits were buoyed by one-off gains which offset a profit dip at Warner Bros, and less users for AOL. Time Warner said on Friday that it now owns 8% of search-engine Google. But its own internet business, AOL, had mixed fortunes. It lost 464,000 subscribers in the fourth quarter profits were lower than in the preceding three quarters. However, the company said AOL's underlying profit before exceptional items rose 8% on the back of stronger internet advertising revenues. It hopes to increase subscribers by offering the online service free to TimeWarner internet customers and will try to sign up AOL's existing customers for high-speed broadband. TimeWarner also has to restate 2000 and 2003 results following a probe by the US Securities Exchange Commission (SEC), which is close to concluding. Time Warner's fourth quarter profits were slightly better than analysts' expectations. But its film division saw profits slump 27% to \$284m, helped by box-office flops Alexander and Catwoman, a sharp contrast to year-earlier, when the third and final film in the Lord of the Rings trilogy boosted results. For the full-year, TimeWarner posted a profit of \$3.36bn, up 27% from its 2003 performance," while revenues grew 6.4% to \$42.09bn. ""Our financial performance was strong", meeting or exceeding all of our full-year objectives and greatly enhancing our flexibility," chairman and chief executive Richard Parsons said. For 2005, TimeWarner is projecting operating earnings growth of around 5%, and also expects higher revenue and wider profit margins. TimeWarner is to restate its accounts as part of efforts to resolve an inquiry into AOL by US market regulators. It has already offered to pay \$300m to settle charges, in a deal that is under review by the SEC. The company said it was unable to estimate the amount it needed to set aside for legal reserves, which it previously set at \$500m. It intends to adjust the way it accounts for a deal with German music publisher Bertelsmann's purchase of a stake in AOL Europe, which it had reported as advertising revenue. It will now book the sale of its stake in AOL Europe as a loss on the value of that stake.
business	002.txt	Dollar gains on Greenspan speech	The dollar has hit its highest level against the euro in almost three months after the Federal Reserve head said the US trade deficit is set to stabilise. And Alan Greenspan highlighted the US government's willingness to curb spending and rising household savings as factors which may help to reduce it. In late trading in New York, the dollar reached \$1.2871 against the euro, from \$1.2974 on Thursday. Market concerns about the deficit has hit the greenback in recent months. On Friday, Federal Reserve chairman Mr Greenspan's speech in London ahead of the meeting of G7 finance ministers sent the dollar higher after it had earlier tumbled on the back of worse-than-expected US jobs data. I think the chairman's taking a much more sanguine view on the current account deficit than he's taken for some time"," said Robert Sinche, head of currency strategy at Bank of America in New York. He's taking a longer-term view"," laying out a set of conditions under which the current account deficit can improve this year and next." Worries about the deficit concerns about China do", however, remain. China's currency remains pegged to the dollar and the US currency's sharp falls in recent months have therefore made Chinese export prices highly competitive. But calls for

a shift in Beijing's policy have fallen on deaf ears," despite recent comments in a major Chinese newspaper that the ""time is ripe"" for a loosening of the peg. The G7 meeting is thought unlikely to produce any meaningful movement in Chinese policy. In the meantime", the US Federal Reserve's decision on 2 February to boost interest rates by a quarter of a point - the sixth such move in as many months - has opened up a differential with European rates. The half-point window, some believe, could be enough to keep US assets looking more attractive, and could help prop up the dollar. The recent falls have partly been the result of big budget deficits, as well as the US's yawning current account gap, both of which need to be funded by the buying of US bonds and assets by foreign firms and governments. The White House will announce its budget on Monday, and many commentators believe the deficit will remain at close to half a trillion dollars.

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"business 003.txt Yukos unit buyer faces loan claim The owners of embattled Russian oil giant Yukos are to ask the buyer of its former production unit to pay back a \$900m (£479m) loan. State-owned Rosneft bought the Yugansk unit for \$9.3bn in a sale forced by Russia to part settle a \$27.5bn tax claim against Yukos. Yukos' owner Menatep Group says it will ask Rosneft to repay a loan that Yugansk had secured on its assets. Rosneft already faces a similar \$540m repayment demand from foreign banks. Legal experts said Rosneft's purchase of Yugansk would include such obligations. ""The pledged assets are with Rosneft", so it will have to pay real money to the creditors to avoid seizure of Yugansk assets," said Moscow-based US lawyer Jamie Firestone, who is not connected to the case. Menatep Group's managing director Tim Osborne told the Reuters news agency: If they default", "we will fight them where the rule of law exists under the international arbitration clauses of the credit." Rosneft officials were unavailable for comment. But the company has said it intends to take action against Menatep to recover some of the tax claims and debts owed by Yugansk. Yukos had filed for bankruptcy protection in a US court in an attempt to prevent the forced sale of its main production arm. The sale went ahead in December and Yugansk was sold to a little-known shell company which in turn was bought by Rosneft. Yukos claims its downfall was punishment for the political ambitions of its founder Mikhail Khodorkovsky and has vowed to sue any participant in the sale.

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"business 004.txt High fuel prices hit BA's profits British Airways has blamed high fuel prices for a 40% drop in profits. Reporting its results for the three months to 31 December 2004", the airline made a pre-tax profit of £75m (\$141m) compared with £125m a year earlier. Rod Eddington, BA's chief executive," said the results were ""respectable"" in a third quarter when fuel costs rose by £106m or 47.3%. BA's profits were still better than market expectation of £59m", and it expects a rise in full-year revenues. To help offset the increased price of aviation fuel, BA last year introduced a fuel surcharge for passengers. In October, it increased this from £6 to £10 one-way for all long-haul flights, while the short-haul surcharge was raised from £2.50 to £4 a leg. Yet aviation analyst Mike Powell of Dresdner Kleinwort Wasserstein says BA's estimated annual surcharge revenues - £160m - will still be way short of its additional fuel costs - a predicted extra £250m. Turnover for the quarter was up 4.3% to £1.97bn, further benefiting from a rise in cargo revenue. Looking ahead to its full year results to March 2005, BA warned that yields - average r

venues per passenger - were expected to decline as it continues to lower prices in the face of competition from low-cost carriers. However," it said sales would be better than previously forecast. ""For the year to March 2005", the total revenue outlook is slightly better than previous guidance with a 3% to 3.5% improvement anticipated," BA chairman Martin Broughton said. BA had previously forecast a 2% to 3% rise in full-year revenue. It also reported on Friday that passenger numbers rose 8.1% in January. Aviation analyst Nick Van den Brul of BNP Paribas described BA's latest quarterly results as pretty modest"". ""It is quite good on the revenue side and it shows the impact of fuel surcharges and a positive cargo development", however, operating margins down and cost impact of fuel are very strong," he said. Since the 11 September 2001 attacks in the United States, BA has cut 13,000 jobs as part of a major cost-cutting drive. Our focus remains on reducing controllable costs and debt whilst continuing to invest in our products", Mr Eddington said. For example," we have taken delivery of six Airbus A321 aircraft and next month we will start further improvements to our Club World flat beds."" BA's shares closed up four pence at 274.5 pence.

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"business 005.txt Pernod takeover talk lifts Domecq Share s in UK drinks and food firm Allied Domecq have risen on speculation that it could be the target of a takeover by France's Pernod Ricard. Reports in the Wall Street Journal and the Financial Times suggested that the French spirits firm is considering a bid", but has yet to contact its target. Allied Domecq shares in London rose 4% by 1200 GMT, while Pernod shares in Paris slipped 1.2%. Pernod said it was seeking acquisitions but refused to comment on specifics. Pernod's last major purchase was a third of US giant Seagram in 2000, the move which propelled it into the global top three of drinks firms. The other two-thirds of Seagram was bought by market leader Diageo. In terms of market value, Pernod - at 7.5bn euros (\$9.7bn) - is about 9% smaller than Allied Domecq, which has a capitalisation of £5.7bn (\$10.7bn; 8.2bn euros). Last year Pernod tried to buy Glenmorangie, one of Scotland's premier whisky firms, but lost out to luxury goods firm LVMH. Pernod is home to brands including Chivas Regal Scotch whisky, Havana Club rum and Jacob's Creek wine. Allied Domecq's big names include Malibu rum, Courvoisier brandy, Stolichnaya vodka and Ballantine's whisky - as well as snack food chains such as Dunkin' Donuts and Baskin-Robbins ice cream. The WSJ said that the two were ripe for consolidation, having each dealt with problematic parts of their portfolio. Pernod has reduced the debt it took on to fund the Seagram purchase to just 1.8bn euros, while Allied has improved the performance of its fast-food chains.

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"business 006.txt Japan narrowly escapes recession Japan's economy teetered on the brink of a technical recession in the three months to September", figures show. Revised figures indicated growth of just 0.1% - and a similar-sized contraction in the previous quarter. On an annual basis, the data suggests annual growth of just 0.2%, suggesting a much more hesitant recovery than had previously been thought. A common technical definition of a recession is two successive quarters of negative growth. The government was keen to play down the worrying implications of the data. ""I maintain the view that Japan's economy remains in a minor adjustment phase in an upward climb", and we will monitor developments carefully," said economy minister Heizo Takenaka. But in the face of the strengthening yen making exports less competitive and indications of weakening economic conditions ahead, observers were less sanguine. It's painting a picture of a recovery... much patchier than previously thought", "sa

id Paul Sheard, economist at Lehman Brothers in Tokyo. Improvements in the job market apparently have yet to feed through to domestic demand, with private consumption up just 0.2% in the third quarter.

business 007.txt Jobs growth still slow in the US The US created fewer jobs than expected in January, but a fall in jobseekers pushed the unemployment rate to its lowest level in three years. According to Labor Department figures, US firms added only 146,000 jobs in January. The gain in non-farm payrolls was below market expectations of 190,000 new jobs. Nevertheless it was enough to push down the unemployment rate to 5.2%, its lowest level since September 2001. The job gains mean that President Bush can celebrate - albeit by a very fine margin - a net growth in jobs in the US economy in his first term in office. He presided over a net fall in jobs up to last November's Presidential election - the first President to do so since Herbert Hoover. As a result, job creation became a key issue in last year's election. However, when adding December and January's figures, the administration's first term jobs record ended in positive territory. The Labor Department also said it had revised down the jobs gains in December 2004, from 157,000 to 133,000. Analysts said the growth in new jobs was not as strong as could be expected given the favourable economic conditions. It suggests that employment is continuing to expand at a moderate pace", " said Rick Egelton, deputy chief economist at BMO Financial Group. We are not getting the boost to employment that we would have got given the low value of the dollar and the still relatively low interest rate environment." "The economy is producing a moderate but not a satisfying amount of job growth", " said Ken Mayland, president of ClearView Economics. That means there are a limited number of new opportunities for workers."

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"business 008.txt India calls for fair trade rules India", which attends the G7 meeting of seven leading industrialised nations on Friday, is unlikely to be cowed by its newcomer status. In London on Thursday ahead of the meeting, India's finance minister, lashed out at the restrictive trade policies of the G7 nations. He objected to subsidies on agriculture that make it hard for developing nations like India to compete. He also called for reform of the United Nations, the World Bank and the IMF. Palaniappan Chidambaram, India's finance minister, argued that these organisations need to take into account the changing world order," given India and China's integration into the global economy. He said the issue is not globalisation but "the terms of engagement in globalisation." " Mr Chidambaram is attending the G7 meeting as part of the G20 group of nations", which account for two thirds of the world's population. At a conference on developing enterprise hosted by UK finance minister Gordon Brown on Friday," he said that he was in favour of floating exchange rates because they help countries cope with economic shocks. "A flexible exchange rate is one more channel for absorbing both positive and negative shocks", " he told the conference. India, along with China, Brazil, South Africa and Russia, has been invited to take part in the G7 meeting taking place in London on Friday and Saturday. China is expected to face renewed pressure to abandon its fixed exchange rate, which G7 nations, in particular the US, have blamed for a surge in cheap Chinese exports. Some countries have tried to use fixed exchange rates. I do not wish to make any judgements", " Mr Chidambaram said. Separately, the IMF warned on Thursday that India's budget deficit was too large and would hamper the country's economic growth, which it forecast to be around 6.5% in the year to March 2005. In the year to March 2004, the Indian economy grew by 8.5%.

business 009.txt Ethiopia's crop production up 24% Ethiopia produced 14.27 million tonnes of crops in 2004, 24% higher than in 2003 and

21% more than the average of the past five years, a report says. In 2003, crop production totalled 11.49 million tonnes, the joint report from the Food and Agriculture Organisation and the World Food Programme said. Good rains, increased use of fertilizers and improved seeds contributed to the rise in production. Nevertheless, 2.2 million Ethiopians will still need emergency assistance. The report calculated emergency food requirements for 2005 to be 387,500 tonnes. On top of that, 89,000 tonnes of fortified blended food and vegetable oil for targeted supplementary food distributions for a survival programme for children under five and pregnant and lactating women"" will be needed. In eastern and southern Ethiopia", a prolonged drought has killed crops and drained wells. Last year, a total of 965,"000 tonnes of food assistance was needed to help seven million Ethiopians. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) recommend that the food assistance is bought locally. ""Local purchase of cereals for food assistance programmes is recommended as far as possible", so as to assist domestic markets and farmers," said Henri Josserand, chief of FAO's Global Information and Early Warning System. Agriculture is the main economic activity in Ethiopia, representing 45% of gross domestic product. About 80% of Ethiopians depend directly or indirectly on agriculture.

business 010.txt Court rejects \$280bn tobacco case A US government claim accusing the country's biggest tobacco companies of covering up the effects of smoking has been thrown out by an appeal court. The demand for \$280bn (£155bn) - filed by the Clinton administration in 1999 - was rejected in a 2-1 decision. The court in Washington found that the case could not be brought under federal anti-racketeering laws. Among the accused were Altria Group, RJ Reynolds Tobacco, Lorillard Tobacco, Liggett Group and Brown and Williamson. In its case, the government claimed tobacco firms manipulated nicotine levels to increase addiction, targeted teenagers with multi-billion dollar advertising campaigns, lied about the dangers of smoking and ignored research to the contrary. Prosecutors wanted the cigarette firms to surrender \$280bn in profits accumulated over the past 50 years and impose tougher rules on marketing their products. But the Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia ruled that the US government could not sue the firms under legislation drawn up to counteract Mafia infiltration of business. The tobacco companies deny that they illegally conspired to promote smoking and defraud the public. They also say they have already met many of the government's demands in a landmark \$206bn settlement reached with 46 states in 1998. Shares of tobacco companies closed higher after the ruling, with Altria rising 5% and Reynolds showing gains of 4.5%.

business 011.txt Ask Jeeves tips online ad revival Ask Jeeves has become the third leading online search firm this week to thank a revival in internet advertising for improving fortunes. The firm's revenue nearly tripled in the fourth quarter of 2004, exceeding \$86m (£46m). Ask Jeeves, once among the best-known names on the web, is now a relatively modest player. Its \$17m profit for the quarter was dwarfed by the \$204m announced by rival Google earlier in the week. During the same quarter, Yahoo earned \$187m, again tipping a resurgence in online advertising. The trend has taken hold relatively quickly. Late last year, marketing company Doubleclick, one of the leading providers of online advertising, warned that some or all of its business would have to be put up for sale. But on Thursday, it announced that a sharp turnaround had brought about an unexpected increase in profits. Neither Ask Jeeves nor Doubleclick thrilled investors with their profit news, however. In both cases, their shares fell by some 4%. Analysts attributed the falls to excessive expectations in some quarters, fuelled by the dramatic outperformance of Google on Tuesday.

business 012.txt Indonesians face fuel price rise Indonesia's government has confirmed it is considering raising fuel prices by as much

as 30%. Millions of Indonesians use kerosene for basic cooking, and prices have been heavily subsidised for years. President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's government has said it wants to curb fuel subsidies and direct the money into aid programmes for the poor. But critics argue cutting subsidies will hurt the poorer families that his government says it wants to help. Millions of people were left homeless in Indonesia Aceh's region following the earthquake and tsunami disaster in late December. Indonesia pays subsidies to importers in order to stabilise domestic fuel prices, but higher oil prices have forced the government to spend more on holding prices down. It spent 59.2 trillion rupiah (\$6.58bn; £3.5 bn) on fuel subsidies in 2004, a sum far in excess of its original projection of 14.5 trillion rupiah. Since President Yudhoyono's government came to power in October, it has indicated its intention of raising domestic fuel prices by cutting subsidies. The (January to March) quarter of this year is the best time for us to increase fuel prices", said Sri Mulyani Indrawati, State Minister for National Development Planning. We are still considering if a 30% hike is suitable at the moment. The sooner the better for the state budget." The BBC's correspondent in Jakarta", Rachel Harvey," told World Business Report that there was likely to be a strong public reaction to any price rise. "The big question is whether they go for one big", short, sharp shock and raise prices between 20% and 30% or whether they try to stagger it," she said. Indonesia's previous government, led by President Megawati Sukarnoputri, also attempted to cut subsidies in 2003, but was forced to back down in the face of public protests.

business 013.txt Peugeot deal boosts Mitsubishi Struggling Japanese car maker Mitsubishi Motors has struck a deal to supply French car maker Peugeot with 30,000 sports utility vehicles (SUV). The two firms signed a Memorandum of Understanding, and say they expect to seal a final agreement by Spring 2005. The alliance comes as a badly-needed boost for loss-making Mitsubishi, after several profit warnings and poor sales. The SUVs will be built in Japan using Peugeot's diesel engines and sold mainly in the European market. Falling sales have left Mitsubishi Motors with underused capacity, and the production deal with Peugeot gives it a chance to utilise some of it. In January, Mitsubishi Motors issued its third profits warning in nine months, and cut its sales forecasts for the year to March 2005. Its sales have slid 41% in the past year, catalysed by the revelation that the company had systematically been hiding records of faults and then secretly repairing vehicles. As a result, the Japanese car maker has sought a series of financial bailouts. Last month it said it was looking for a further 540bn yen (\$5.2bn; £2.77bn) in fresh financial backing, half of it from other companies in the Mitsubishi group. US-German carmaker DaimlerChrysler, a 30% shareholder in Mitsubishi Motors, decided in April 2004 not to pump in any more money. The deal with Peugeot was celebrated by Mitsubishi's newly-appointed chief executive Takashi Nishioka, who took over after three top bosses stood down last month to shoulder responsibility for the firm's troubles. Mitsubishi Motors has forecast a net loss of 472bn yen in its current financial year to March 2005. Last month, it signed a production agreement with Japanese rival Nissan Motor to supply it with 36,000 small cars for sale in Japan. It has been making cars for Nissan since 2003.

business 014.txt Telegraph newspapers axe 90 jobs The Daily and Sunday Telegraph newspapers are axing 90 journalist jobs - 17% of their editorial staff. The Telegraph Group says the cuts are needed to fund an £150m investment in new printing facilities. Journalists at the firm met on Friday afternoon to discuss how to react to the surprise announcement. The cuts come against a background of fierce competition for readers and sluggish advertising revenues amid competition from online advertising. The National Union of Journalists has called on the management to recall the notice of redundancy by midday o

n Monday or face a strike ballot. Pearson's Financial Times said last week it was offering voluntary redundancy to about 30 reporters. The National Union of Journalists said it stood strongly behind the journalists and did not rule out a strike. Managers have torn up agreed procedures and kicked staff in the teeth by sacking people to pay for printing facilities", " said Jeremy Dear, NUJ General Secretary. NUJ official Barry Fitzpatrick said the company had ignored the 90-day consultation period required for companies planning more than 10 redundancies. They have shown a complete disregard for the consultative rights of our members", " said Mr Fitzpatrick, who added that the company now planned to observe the consultation procedures. The two Telegraph titles currently employ 521 journalists. Some broadsheet newspapers - especially those which have not moved to a tabloid format - have suffered circulation declines, which are hitting revenues. The Telegraph has announced no plans to go tabloid although both The Independent and The Times have seen circulation rise since shrinking in size. The Guardian is hedging its bets, planning a larger tabloid format like those popular in continental Europe. The Telegraph Group was bought by the Barclay twins - Frederick and David - last year, having previously been owned by Lord Conrad Black's Hollinger International. The brothers are currently mulling the sale of another of their businesses, retailer Littlewoods. Telegraph executive Murdoch MacLennan said the two newspapers would add eight colour pages in the coming months. Journalists are the lifeblood of any newspaper", and maintaining the quality of The Daily Telegraph and The Sunday Telegraph for our readers is vital, he said. However, "action to improve our production capability and secure our titles against the competition is also vital." Many newspapers are investing in new printing machinery that enables them to print more colour pages", or in some cases, have colour on every page. They are hoping that by boosting colour it will make their publications more attractive to advertisers and readers alike. In recent months News Corp's News International unit, which publishes The Sun and the News of the World, the Guardian Media Group, Trinity Mirror and the Daily Mail & General Trust have all announced substantial investments in new printing plants.

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"business 015.txt Air passengers win new EU rights Air passengers who are unable to board their flights because of overbooking", cancellations or flight delays can now demand greater compensation. New EU rules set compensation at between 250 euros (£173) and 600 euros, depending on the length of the flight. The new rules will apply to all scheduled and charter flights, including budget airlines. Airlines have attacked the legislation saying they could be forced to push prices higher to cover the extra cost. The European Commission is facing two legal challenges - one from the European Low-fare Airlines Association (ELAA) and the other from the International Air Transport Association (IATA), "which has attacked the package as a ""bad piece of legislation""". Previously", passengers could claim between 150 euros and 300 euros if they had been stopped from boarding. However, only scheduled flight operators were obliged to offer compensation in cases of overbooking and they did not have to offer compensation for flight cancellations. The EU decided to increase passenger compensation in a bid to deter airlines from deliberately overbooking flights. Overbooking can often lead to 'bumping' - when a passenger is moved to a later flight. When this happens against a passenger's will, airlines will now have to offer compensation. In addition, if a flight is cancelled or delayed for more than two hours through the fault of the airline, all passengers must be paid compensation. However," airlines do not have to offer compensation if flights are cancelled or delayed due to ""extraordinary circumstances""". Airlines fear that

"extraordinary circumstances"" may not include bad weather", security alerts or strikes - events which are outside of their control. All EU-based airlines and operators of flights which take off from the EU will have to adhere to the new compensation regime which came into force on Thursday. Low-cost airlines have criticised the new compensation levels," arguing that the pay-out could be worth more than the ticket. ""It's a preposterous piece of legislation", we among all airlines are fighting this," Ryanair deputy chief executive Michael Cawley told Radio 4's Today programme. The European Regions Airline Association (ERAA) claims that neither airlines nor consumers were consulted over the changes. Andy Clarke, ERAA director of air transport, said that the EC advice misleads customers as it leads them to believe that airlines could be liable for payouts if flights are delayed because of bad weather. EC spokeswoman Marja Quillinan-Meiland conceded there were grey areas"" but said ""these are not as big as the airlines are making out"". In cases of dispute", national enforcement bodies would decide whether the passenger had a case, she said. New technology means it is easier for airlines to take off and land in bad weather, she added. The ERAA's Mr Clarke also warned that while airlines would comply with the new rules," the extra costs would be passed onto passengers. ""We reckon it's going to cost European air passengers - not the airlines", the airlines have no money, it has to be paid by passengers - 1.5bn euros, that's over f1bn a year loaded onto European passengers," Mr Clarke said. That's basically a transfer of money from passengers whose journeys are not disrupted to passengers whose journeys are disrupted." On Wednesday", Jacques Barrot, vice president of the European Commission and also Commissioner for Transport," said that the changes were necessary. ""The boom in air travel needs to be accompanied by proper protection of passengers' rights." "This is a concrete example of how the Union benefits people's daily lives", he added. The EC has launched an information campaign in airports and travel agencies to inform airline passengers of their new rights.

business 016.txt China keeps tight rein on credit China's efforts to stop the economy from overheating by clamping down on credit will continue into 2005, state media report. The curbs were introduced earlier this year to ward off the risk that rapid expansion might lead to soaring prices. There were also fears that too much stress might be placed on the fragile banking system. Growth in China remains at a breakneck 9.1%, and corporate investment is growing at more than 25% a year. The breakneck pace of economic expansion has kept growth above 9% for more than a year. Rapid tooling-up of China's manufacturing sector means a massive demand for energy - one of the factors which has kept world oil prices sky-high for most of this year. In theory, the government has a 7% growth target, but continues to insist that the overshoot does not mean a hard landing"" in the shape of an overbalancing economy. A low exchange rate - China's yuan is pegged to a rate of 8.28 to the dollar", which seems to be in relentless decline - means Chinese exports are cheap on world markets. China has thus far resisted international pressure to break the link or at least to shift the level of its peg. To some extent, the credit controls do seem to be taking effect. Industrial output grew 15.7% in the year to October, down from 23% in February, and inflation slowed to 4.3% - although retail sales are still booming.

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"business 017.txt Parmalat boasts doubled profits Parmalat", the Italian food group at the centre of one of Europe's most painful corporate scandals, has reported a doubling in profit. Its pre-tax earnings in the fourth quarter were 77m euros (£53m; \$100m), up from 38m in the same period of 2003. Less welcome was the news that the firm had been fined 11m euros for havin

g violated takeover rules five years ago. The firm sought bankruptcy protection in December 2003 after disclosing a 4bn-euro hole in its accounts. Overall, the company's debt is close to 12bn euros, and is falling only slowly. Its brands, well-known in Italy and overseas, have continued to perform strongly, however, and have barely lost revenue since the scandal broke. But a crucial factor for the company's future is the legal unwinding of its intensely complex financial position. On Tuesday, the company's administrator, turnaround expert Enrico Bondi, sued Morgan Stanley, its former banker, to return 136m euros relating to a 2003 bond deal. That brought to 49 the number of banks that Mr Bondi has sued, a mass of legal action that could bring in as much as 3bn euros. The company has also sued former auditors and financial advisors for damages. And criminal cases against the company's former management are proceeding separately.

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"business 018.txt India's rupee hits five-year high India a's rupee has hit a five-year high after Standard & Poor's (S&P) raised the country's foreign currency rating. The rupee climbed to 43.305 per US dollar on Thursday", up from a close of 43.41. The currency has gained almost 1% in the past three sessions. S&P, which rates borrowers' creditworthiness, lifted India's rating by one notch to 'BB+'. With Indian assets now seen as less of a gamble, more cash is expected to flow into its markets," buoying the rupee. ""The upgrade is positive and basically people will use it as an excuse to come back to India", " said Bhanu Baweja, a strategist at UBS. Money has moved out from India in the first two or three weeks of January into other markets like Korea and Thailand and this upgrade should lead to a reversal." India's foreign currency rating is now one notch below investment grade", which starts at 'BBB-'. The increase has put it on the same level as Romania, Egypt and El Salvador, and one level below Russia.

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"business 019.txt India widens access to telecoms India has raised the limit for foreign direct investment in telecoms companies from 49% to 74%. Communications Minister Dayanidhi Maran said that there is a need to fund the fast-growing mobile market. The government hopes to increase the number of mobile users from 95 million to between 200 and 250 million by 2007. ""We need at least \$20bn (£10.6bn) in investment and part of this has to come as foreign direct investment", " said Mr Maran. The decision to raise the limit for foreign investors faced considerable opposition from the communist parties, which give crucial support to the coalition headed by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Potential foreign investors will however need government approval before they increase their stake beyond 49%, Mr Maran said. Key positions, such as those of chief executive, chief technology officer and chief financial officer are to be held by Indians, he added. Analysts and investors have welcomed the government decision. It is a positive development for carriers and the investment community", looking to take a longer-term view of the huge growth in the Indian telecoms market, said Gartner's principal analyst Kobita Desai. The FDI relaxation coupled with rapid local market growth could really ignite interest in the Indian telecommunication industry," added Ernst and Young's Sanjay Mehta. Investment bank Morgan Stanley has forecast that India's mobile market is likely to grow by about 40% a year until 2007. The Indian mobile market is currently dominated by four companies, Bharti Televentures which has allied itself with Singapore Telecom, Essar which is linked with Hong Kong-based Hutchison Whampoa, the Sterling group and the Tata group.

business 020.txt Call centre users 'lose patience' Custom

ers trying to get through to call centres are getting impatient and quicker to hang up, a survey suggests. Once past the welcome message, callers on average hang up after just 65 seconds of listening to canned music. The drop in patience comes as the number of calls to call centres is growing at a rate of 20% every year. Customers are getting used to the idea of an 'always available' society", " says Cara Diemont of IT firm Dimension Data, which commissioned the survey. However, call centres also saw a sharp increase of customers simply abandoning calls, she says, from just over 5% in 2003 to a record 13.3% during last year. When automated phone message systems are taken out of the equation, where customers have to pick their way through multiple options and messages, the number of abandoned calls is even higher - a sixth of all callers give up rather than wait. One possible reason for the lack in patience, Ms Diemont says, is the fact that more customers are calling 'on the move' using their mobile phones. The surge in customers trying to get through to call centres is also a reflection of the centres' growing range of tasks. Once a call centre may have looked after mortgages", now its agents may also be responsible for credit cards, insurance and current accounts," Ms Diemont says. Problems are occurring because increased responsibility is not going hand-in-hand with more training, the survey found. In what Dimension Data calls an alarming development""", the average induction time for a call centre worker fell last year from 36 to just 21 days," leaving ""agents not equipped to deal with customers"". This", Ms Diemont warns," is ""scary"" and not good for the bottom line either. Poor training frustrates both call centre workers and customers. As a result", call centres have a high ""churn rate""", with nearly a quarter of workers throwing in the towel every year, which in turn forces companies to pay for training new staff. Resolution rates - the number of calls where a customer's query is resolved to mutual satisfaction - are running at just 50%. When the query is passed on to a second or third person - a specialist or manager - rates rise to about 70%, but that is still well below the industry target of an 85% resolution rate. Suggestions that ""outsourcing"" - relocating call centres to low-cost countries like India or South Africa - is to blame are wrong", Ms Diemont says. There are ""no big differences in wait time and call resolution"" between call centres based in Europe or North America and those in developing countries around the world. ""You can make call centres perform anywhere if you have good management and the right processes in place", she says. However, companies that decide to offshore"" their operations are driven not just by cost considerations. Only 42% of them say that saving money is the main consideration when closing domestic call centre operations. Half of them argue that workers in other countries offer better skills for the money. But not everybody believes that outsourcing and offshoring are the solution. Nearly two-thirds of all firms polled for the survey have no plans to offshore their call centres. They give three key reasons for not making the move: - call centre operations are part of their business ""core function""", - they are worried about the risk of going abroad, - they fear that they will damage their brand if they join the offshoring drive. The survey was conducted by Sunovate on behalf of Dimension Data, and is based on in-depth questionnaires of 166 call centres in 24 countries and five continents. What are your experiences with call centres? Are you happy to listen to Vivaldi or Greensl eevs, or do you want an immediate response? And if you work in a call centre: did your training prepare you for your job?

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"business 021.txt Rank 'set to sell off film unit' Leisure group Rank could unveil plans to demerge its film services unit and sell its media business", reports claim. Rank, formerly famous for the Carry On series,

will expose the shake-up at the announcement of its results on Friday, the Sunday Telegraph reported. Advisors Goldman Sachs are understood to have valued its demerged Deluxe Film unit at £300m, the report added. Speculation of a possible shake-up has mounted since Rank announced a study into a possible demerger in September. Since Mike Smith's appointment as chief executive in 1999, the group has focused on fewer businesses and embarked on a major cost-cutting programme which has seen it dispose of a number of businesses, including the Odeon cinema chain and the Pinewood studios. The move left the group with three core divisions: gaming, Hard Rock and Deluxe Films, which provides technical services to Hollywood studios. Rank now aims to concentrate on its gaming, bars and hotels business, including extending its Hard Rock brand to its casinos - trials of which have been a success. It also owns Deluxe Media, which makes and distributes DVDs and videos. However, that business is seen as less successful. Last year it made profits of £21.5m on a turnover of £392.1m and experts suggest its success in moving to DVDs from VHS video could make it an attractive target for a private equity buyer. A spokesman for the firm refused to comment on the reports, but said any results from the demerger study were likely to be set out when it unveiled its results on Friday. Analysts predict the firm is likely to report a slight drop in annual pre-tax profits to £170m from £194m last year. Formed in the 1940s the firm was a leading UK film producer and cinema owner for many years. It has now diversified into a range of other leisure activities - mainly in the UK - including hotels, roadside service areas and holiday centres. It now owns 34 Grosvenor casinos, the Mecca Bingo chain and more than 100 Hard Rock Cafes in 38 countries.

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"business 022.txt Sluggish economy hits German jobs The number of people out of work in Europe's largest economy has risen for the tenth straight month as growth remains stubbornly slow. German unemployment rose 7,000 in November to 4.464 million people, or 10.8% of the workforce. The seasonally adjusted rise showed a smaller rise than expected," as government measures to encourage job creation began to take effect. But officials said stagnant growth was still stifling the job market. ""There are clear signs of a revival in domestic demand"," said Frank-Juergen Weise, head of the Federal Labour Agency, in a statement. But growth of 0.1%... in the third quarter is still insufficient to deliver positive momentum to the labour market." High oil prices and the soaring euro - which damages the competitiveness of exporters - were also having a negative effect", he said. The brunt of the unemployment is still being felt in the eastern part of Germany, where the rate is 18.8%. With unemployment stuck above 4 million for years, the government of Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder has put job creation at the top of the agenda. A controversial package of measures to shake up incentives to get back to work, paid for by cutting some cherished benefits, has sparked anger among some German workers. Strikes in a number of industries, notably among the country's iconic carmakers," have demonstrated the displeasure - as well as fears about further job losses as outsourcing takes hold. Among the new initiatives are the so-called ""one-euro jobs"" which top up unemployment benefit. The scheme's formal launch is January", but hiring for these positions are already taking place and affecting the unemployment statistics," economists said. ""The deterioration of the labour market does not come as a surprise"," said Isabelle Kronawitter at Hypovereinsbank. Job creation measures probably prevented a stronger increase in the seasonally adjusted numbers."

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"business 023.txt Mixed signals from French economy The French economy picked up speed at the end of 2004", official figures show - but still looks set to have fallen short of the government's hopes. According to state statistics body INSEE, growth for the three months to December was a seasonally-adjusted 0.7-0.8%, ahead of the 0.6% forecast. If confirmed, that would be the best quarterly showing since early 2002. It leaves GDP up 2.3% for the full year, but short of the 2.5% which the French government had predicted. Despite the apparent shortfall in annual economic growth," the good quarterly figures - a so-called ""flash estimate"" - mark a continuing trend of improving indicators for the health of the French economy. The government is reiterating a 2.5% target for 2005", while the European Central Bank is making positive noise s for the 12-nation eurozone as a whole. Also on Friday, France's industrial output for December was released," showing 0.7% growth. ""The numbers are good"" said David Naude, economist at Deutsche Bank. They send a positive signal of a rebound in output... and open the way for a continuation in that trend into the New Year." "Service sector activity improved in January", hitting a seven-month high. But unemployment remains high at about 10%.

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"business 024.txt US trade gap hits record in 2004 The gap between US exports and imports hit an all-time high of \$671.7bn (£484bn) in 2004", latest figures show. The Commerce Department said the trade deficit for all of last year was 24.4% above the previous record - 2003's imbalance of \$49.6bn. The deficit with China, up 30.5% at \$162bn, was the largest ever recorded with a single country. However, on a monthly basis the US trade gap narrowed by 4.9% in December to £56.4bn. The US consumer's appetite for all things from oil to imported cars, and even wine and cheese, reached record levels last year and the figures are likely to spark fresh criticism of President Bush's economic policies. Democrats claim the administration has not done enough to clamp down on unfair foreign trade practices. For example, they believe China's currency policy - which US manufacturers claim has undervalued the yuan by as much as 40% - has given China's rapidly expanding economy an unfair advantage against US competitors. Meanwhile, the Bush administration argues that the US deficit reflects the fact the America is growing at faster rate than the rest of the world, spurring on more demand for imported goods. Some economists say this may allow an upward revision of US economic growth in the fourth quarter. But others point out that the deficit has reached such astronomical proportions that foreigners may choose not to hold as many dollar-denominated assets, which may in turn harm growth. For all of 2004, US exports rose 12.3% to \$1.15 trillion, but imports rose even faster by 16.3% to a new record of \$1.76 trillion. Foreign oil exports surged by 35.7% to a record \$180.7bn," reflecting the rally in global oil prices and increasing domestic demand. Imports were not affected by the dollar's weakness last year. ""We expect the deficit to continue to widen in 2005 even if the dollar gets back to its downward trend"" said economist Marie-Pierre Ripert at IXIS.

business 025.txt Yukos loses US bankruptcy battle A judge has dismissed an attempt by Russian oil giant Yukos to gain bankruptcy protection in the US. Yukos filed for Chapter 11 protection in Houston in an unsuccessful attempt to halt the auction of its Yugansk division by the Russian authorities. The court ruling is a blow to efforts to get damages for the sale of Yugansk, which Yukos claims was illegally sold. Separately, former Yukos boss Mikhail Khodorkovsky began testimony on Friday in his trial for fraud and tax evasion. Mr Khodorkovsky - who has been in jail for more than a year - pleaded not guilty to the charges brought against him and denied involvement in any criminal

activities. I pride myself on heading for 15 years a number of successful companies and helping other enterprises rise from their knees", " he told a Russian court. Yugansk was auctioned to help pay off \$27.5bn (£14.5bn) in unpaid taxes. It was bought for \$9.4bn by a previously-unknown group, which was in turn bought up almost immediately by state-controlled oil company Rosneft. Texas Judge Letitia Clark said Yukos did not have enough of a US presence to establish US jurisdiction. The vast majority of the business and financial activities of Yukos continue to occur in Russia", " Judge Clark said in her ruling. Such activities require the continued participation of the Russian government." " Yukos had argued that a US court was entitled to declare it bankrupt before its Yugansk unit was sold", since it has local bank accounts and its chief finance officer Bruce Misamore lives in Houston. Yukos claimed it sought help in the US because other forums - Russian courts and the European Court of Human Rights - were either unfriendly or offered less protection. Russia had indicated it would in any case not abide by the rulings of the US courts. In her ruling, " the judge acknowledged that ""it appears likely that agencies of the Russian government have acted in a manner that would be considered confiscatory under United States law"" . But she said her role was simply to decide on jurisdiction. The US court's jurisdiction had been challenged by Deutsche Bank and Gazpromneft", a former unit of Russian gas monopoly Gazprom which is due to merge with Rosneft. Analysts said the ability of Gazprom and Rosneft to trade freely overseas had been stifled while the ownership of Yugansk remained unclear. Yukos said it would consider its options in light of the ruling. However, " it claimed that the court had backed its argument in four out of five key issues. ""We believe the merits of our case are strong and simple", " said chief executive Steven Theede. Our assets were illegally seized. We want them back or damages paid." "

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"business 026.txt Safety alert as GM recalls cars The world's biggest carmaker General Motors (GM) is recalling nearly 200",000 vehicles in the US on safety grounds, according to federal regulators. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) said the largest recall involves 155,465 pickups, vans and sports utility vehicles (SUVs). This is because of possible malfunctions with the braking systems. The affected vehicles in the product recall are from the 2004 and 2005 model years, GM said. Those vehicles with potential faults are the Chevrolet Avalanche, Express, Kodiak, Silverade and Suburban; the GMC Savana, Sierra and Yukon. The NHTSA said a pressure accumulator in the braking system could crack during normal driving and fragments could injure people if the hood was open. This could allow hydraulic fluid to leak, which could make it harder to brake or steer and could cause a crash, it warned. GM is also recalling 19,924 Cadillac XLR coupes, SRX SUVs and Pontiac Grand Prix sedans from the 2004 model year. This is because the accelerator pedal may not work properly in extremely cold temperatures, requiring more braking. In addition, the car giant is calling back 17,815 Buick Raniers, Chevrolet Trailblazers, GMC Envoys and Isuzu Ascenders from the 2005 model years because the windshield is not properly fitted and could fall out in a crash. However, GM stressed that it did not know of any injuries related to the problems. News of the recall follows an announcement last month that GM expects earnings this year be lower than in 2004. The world's biggest car maker is grappling with losses in its European business, weak US sales and now a product recall. In January, GM said higher healthcare costs in North America, and lower profits at its financial services subsidiary would hurt its performance in 2005.

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"business 027.txt Steel firm 'to cut' 45", "000 jobs Mittal Steel", one of the world's largest steel producers, could cut up to 45,000 jobs over the next five years, its chief executive has said. The Netherlands-based company is due to complete its \$4.5bn acquisition of US firm ISG next month, making it one of the largest global firms of its kind. However, Lakshmi Mittal has told investors the combined company will have to shed thousands of jobs. The Indian-born magnate did not say where the job losses would fall. Mr Mittal told US investors that once the acquisition of International Steel Group was completed, the company would aim to reduce its workforce by between 7,000 and 8,000 annually. This could see its workforce trimmed from 155,000 to 110,"000 staff by 2010. ""We are investing in modernisation so employees will go down", Mr Mittal told the conference in Chicago. Mittal Steel was formed last year when Mr Mittal's LNM Holdings merged with Dutch firm Ispat. A combination of Mittal Steel and ISG would have annual sales of \$32bn (£16.7bn; 24.1bn euros) and a production capacity of 70 million tonnes. A Mittal Steel spokesman said that no decisions on job cuts have been made yet. We are trying to create a sustainable steel industry and if we want to do that, we have to invest in new technology," a spokesman said. Mittal Steel has operations in 14 countries. Many of its businesses - particularly those in eastern Europe - were previously state owned and have huge workforces. It employs 50,000 staff in Kazakhstan alone, and has large operations in Romania, the Czech Republic, South Africa and the United States.

business 028.txt Strong demand triggers oil rally Crude oil prices surged back above the \$47 a barrel mark on Thursday after an energy market watchdog raised its forecasts for global demand. The International Energy Agency (IEA) warned demand for Opec's crude in the first quarter would outstrip supply. The IEA raised its estimate of 2005 oil demand growth by 80,000 barrels a day to 84 million barrels a day. US light crude rose \$1.64 to \$47.10, while Brent crude in London gained \$1.32 to \$44.45. The Paris-based IEA watchdog, which advises industrialized nations on energy policy, said the upward revision was due to stronger demand from China and other Asian countries. The fresh rally in crude prices followed gains on Wednesday which were triggered by large falls in US crude supplies following a cold spell in North America in January. The US Department of Energy reported that crude stockpiles had fallen 1m barrels to 294.3m. On top of that, ongoing problems for beleaguered Russian oil giant Yukos have also prompted the IEA to revise its output estimates from Russia - a major non-Opec supplier. I think that prices are now beginning to set a new range and it looks like the \$40 to \$50 level", said energy analyst Orin Middleton of Barclays Capital.

business 029.txt UK firm faces Venezuelan land row Venezuela authorities have said they will seize land owned by a British company as part of President Chavez's agrarian reform programme. Officials in Cojedes state said on Friday that farmland owned by a subsidiary of the Vestey Group would be taken and used to settle poor farmers. The government is cracking down on so-called latifundios, or large rural estates, which it says are lying idle. The Vestey Group said it had not been informed of any planned seizure. The firm, whose Agroflora subsidiary operates 13 farms in Venezuela, insisted that it had complied fully with Venezuelan law. Prosecutors in the south of the country have targeted Hato El Charcote, a beef cattle ranch owned by Agroflora. According to Reuters, they plan to seize 12,900 acres (5,200 hectares) from the 32,000 acre (13,000 hectare) farm. Officials claim that Agroflora does not possess valid documents proving its ownership of the land in question. They also allege that areas of the ranch are not being used for any form of active production. The legal boundaries did not match up with the actual boundaries and there is surplus", state prosecutor Alexis Ortiz told Reuters. As a consequence the governme

nt has taken action." Controversial reforms passed in 2001 give the government the right to take control of private property if it is declared idle or ownership cannot be traced back to the 19th Century. Critics say the powers - which President Chavez argues are needed to help the country's poorest citizens and develop the Venezuelan economy - trample all over private property rights. The Vestey Group said it had owned the land since 1920 and would co-operate fully with the authorities. But a spokesman added: "Agroflora is absolutely confident that what it has submitted will demonstrate the legality of its title to the land." The company pointed out that the farm", which employs 300 workers, provides meat solely for the Venezuelan market. Last month, the government said it had identified more than 500 idle farms and had yet to consider the status of a further 40,"000. The authorities said landowners whose titles were in order and whose farms were productive had ""nothing to fear"". Under President Chavez", the Venezuelan government has steadily expanded the state's involvement in the country's economy. It recently said all mining contracts involving foreign firms would be examined to ensure they provided sufficient economic benefits to the state.

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"business 030.txt Soaring oil 'hits world economy' The soaring cost of oil has hit global economic growth", although world's major economies should weather the storm of price rises, according to the OECD. In its latest bi-annual report, the OECD cut its growth predictions for the world's main industrialised regions. US growth would reach 4.4% in 2004, but fall to 3.3% next year from a previous estimate of 3.7%, the OECD said. However, the Paris-based economics think tank said it believed the global economy could still regain momentum. Forecasts for Japanese growth were also scaled back to 4.0% from 4.4% this year and 2.1% from 2.8% in 2005. But the outlook was worst for the 12-member eurozone bloc, with already sluggish growth forecasts slipping to 1.8% from 2.0% this year and 1.9% from 2.4% in 2005, the OECD said. Overall, the report forecast total growth of 3.6% in 2004 for the 30 member countries of the OECD," slipping to 2.9% next year before recovering to 3.1% in 2006. "There are nonetheless good reasons to believe that despite recent oil price turbulence the world economy will regain momentum in a not-too-distant future", said Jean-Philippe Cotis, the OECD's chief economist. The price of crude is about 50% higher than it was at the start of 2004, but down on the record high of \$55.67 set in late October. A dip in oil prices and improving jobs prospects would improve consumer confidence and spending, the OECD said. The oil shock is not enormous by historical standards - we have seen worse in the seventies. If the oil price does not rise any further", then we think the shock can be absorbed within the next few quarters," Vincent Koen, a senior economist with the OECD, told the BBC's World Business Report. The recovery that was underway", and has been interrupted a bit by the oil shock this year," would then regain momentum in the course of 2005." China's booming economy and a ""spectacular comeback"" in Japan - albeit one that has faltered in recent months - would help world economic recovery", the OECD said. ""Supported by strong balance sheets and high profits", the recovery of business investment should continue in North America and start in earnest in Europe," it added. However, the report warned: It remains to be seen whether continental Europe will play a strong supportive role through a marked upswing of final domestic demand." The OECD highlighted current depressed household expenditure in Germany and the eurozone's over-reliance on export-led growth.

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"business 031.txt Irish markets reach all-time high Irish shares have risen to a record high", with investors persuaded to buy into the market by low inflation and strong growth forecasts. The ISEQ index of leading shares closed up 23 points to 6661.89 on Thursday, fuelled by strong growth in banking and financial stocks. A fall in the rate of inflation to 2.3% in January gave a fresh boost to shares which have advanced 4% this month. The economy is set for strong growth in 2005 while interest rates remain low. Several of Ireland's biggest companies saw their market value hit recent highs on Thursday. Allied Irish Banks, Ireland's biggest company by capitalisation, touched a five year peak while Bank of Ireland shares rose to their highest level since August 2002. Telecoms firm Eircom, which recently revealed that it would re-enter the Irish mobile phone market," hit a yearly high. Analysts said that economic conditions were benign and Irish shares were still trading at a discount to other European markets. ""Ireland ticks all the boxes as far as international investors are concerned", " Roy Asher, chief investment officer of Hibernian Investment Managers, told Reuters. Buoyant economic conditions are set to continue in Ireland over the next few years and Irish equities continue to offer quality growth at a reasonable valuation." " Bernard McAlinden", head of equity research at NC B Stockbrokers," said equities represented good value compared to other investments. ""It is still looking good", " he told Reuters. We have seen good economic data on Ireland which benefits the financial stocks." " Ireland's economic 'miracle' is enjoying a second wind", with 5% growth forecast for 2005 and 2006. The economy cooled markedly between 2001 and 2003 after enjoying spectacular growth of more than 10% in 2000. However, it has bounced back strongly with growth of just under 5% expected in 2004.

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"business 032.txt Japanese banking battle at an end Japan's Sumitomo Mitsui Financial has withdrawn its takeover offer for rival bank UFJ Holdings", enabling the latter to merge with Mitsubishi Tokyo. Sumitomo bosses told counterparts at UFJ of its decision on Friday, clearing the way for it to conclude a 3 trillion yen (\$29bn) deal with Mitsubishi. The deal would create the world's biggest bank with assets of about 189 trillion yen (\$1.8 trillion). Sumitomo's exit ends the most high profile fight in Japanese bank history. UFJ Holdings, Japan's fourth-largest bank, has been at the centre of a fierce bid battle over the last year. Sumitomo, Japan's third-largest bank, tabled a higher offer for UFJ than its rival, valuing the company at \$35bn. However, UFJ's management was known to prefer the offer from Mitsubishi Tokyo Financial Group (MTFG), " Japan's second-largest bank. Concerns were also raised about Sumitomo's ability to absorb UFJ and the former has now admitted defeat. ""We believe the market and most investors accept a UFJ-MTFG merger", Sumitomo said in a statement. Given the ongoing integration of UFJ and MTFG operations," persisting with our proposal may not be in the best interests of our shareholders or UFJ's." " Mitsubishi's takeover of UFJ - which will be Japan's largest-ever takeover deal - will still have to be approved by shareholders of the two firms. However", this is expected to be a formality. Sumitomo may now turn its attention to deepening its ties with Daiwa Securities, another Japanese financial firm. The two are set to merge their venture capital operations and there has been speculation that this could lead to a full-blown merger. Japanese banks are increasingly seeking alliances to boost profits.

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"business 033.txt Rich grab half Colombia poor fund Half of the money put aside by the Colombian government to help the country's poor i

s benefiting people who do not need it", a study has found. A total of 24.2 trillion pesos (\$10.2bn; £5.5bn) is earmarked for subsidies for the poor, the government department for planning said. But it also found 12.1 trillion pesos was going to the richest part of the population, rather than to those in need. Sound distribution of the cash could cut poverty levels to 36% from 53%, "the government believes. ""Resources are more than enough to reduce poverty and there is no need for more tax reforms but a better distribution", "deputy planning director Jose Leibovich said. Colombia has a population of about 44 million and half lives below poverty line. However, some large properties are paying less in tax as they are situated inside poor areas, which benefit from cheaper utilities such as electricity and water, government research found. Government expenditure in areas such as pensions, public services, education, property and health should be revised, Mr Leibovich said. He added that the government is now examining the report, but warned there would be no easy solution to the problem. With a good distribution of such subsidies and economic growth of just 2%, by 2019 poverty could fall as low as 15.3%, he said.

business 034.txt Rover deal 'may cost 2,000 jobs' Some 2,000 jobs at MG Rover's Midlands plant may be cut if investment in the firm by a Chinese car maker goes ahead, the Financial Times has reported. Shanghai Automotive Industry Corp plans to shift production of the Rover 25 to China and export it to the UK, sources close to the negotiations tell the FT. But Rover told BBC News that reports of job cuts were speculation"". A tie-up", seen as Rover's last chance to save its Longbridge plant," has been pushed by UK Chancellor Gordon Brown. Rover confirmed the tie-up would take place ""not very far away from this time"". Rover bosses have said they are ""confident"" the £1bn (\$1.9bn) investment deal would be signed in March or early April. Transport & General Worker's Union general secretary Tony Woodley repeated his view on Friday that all mergers led to some job cuts. He said investment in new models was needed to ensure the future of the Birmingham plant. ""This is a very crucial and delicate time and our efforts are targeted to securing new models for the company which will mean jobs for our people", "he said. SAIC says none of its money will be paid to the four owners of Rover, who have been accused by unions of awarding themselves exorbitant salaries, the FT reports. SAIC is extremely concerned to ensure that its money is used to invest in the business rather than be distributed to the shareholders", "the newspaper quotes a source close to the Chinese firm. Meanwhile, according to Chinese state press reports, small state-owned carmaker Nanjing Auto is in negotiations with Rover and SAIC to take a 20% stake in the joint venture. SAIC was unavailable for comment on the job cuts when contacted by BBC News. Rover and SAIC signed a technology-sharing agreement in August.

business 035.txt Ad firm WPP's profits surge 15% UK advertising giant WPP has posted larger-than-expected annual profits and predicted that it will outperform the market in 2005. Pre-tax profits rose 15% from a year ago to reach £546m (\$1.04bn), ahead of average analysts' forecasts of £532m. Revenues were £4.3bn while the firm's operating margins were 14.1%, which it said could reach 14.8% by 2006. During the year WPP bought US rival Grey Global, creating a giant big enough to rival sector leader Omnicom. Chief Executive Martin Sorrell on Friday told Reuters news agency that WPP had submitted a proposal for United Business Media's NOP World market research unit. Analysts say the unit sell could sell for up to £350m. WPP in recent years has also bought firms such as Ogilvy & Mather and Cordiant Communications. It also includes the firms Young & Rubicam and J Walter Thompson. Events such as the Olympics helped boost WPP's profits in 2004. The company said the US Congressional elections and the FIFA World Cup are likely to present advertising opportunities in the near future.

re. The long-term outlook looks very favourable"" because of media and technology developments and the strength of the US economy", WPP said.

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"business 036.txt US gives foreign firms extra time Foreign firms have been given an extra year to meet tough new corporate governance regulations imposed by the US stock market watchdog. The Securities and Exchange Commission has extended the deadline to get in line with the rules until 15 July 2006. Many foreign firms had protested that the SEC was imposing an unfair burden. The new rules are the result of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act", part of the US clean-up after corporate scandals such as Enron and Worldcom. Section 404 of the Sox Act, as the legislation is nicknamed, calls for all firms to certify that their financial reporting is in line with US rules. Big US firms already have to meet the requirements, but smaller ones and foreign-based firms which list their shares on US stock markets originally had until the middle of this year. Over the past few months, delegations of European and other business leaders have been heading to the SEC's Washington DC headquarters to protest. They say the burden is too expensive and the timescale too short and some, particularly the UK's CBI, warned that companies would choose to let their US listings drop rather than get in line with section 404. The latest delegation from the CBI met SEC officials on Wednesday," just before the decision to relax the deadline was announced. "I think this signifies a change of heart at the SEC", CBI director-general Sir Digby Jones told the BBC's Today programme. They have been listening to us and to many overseas companies," who have reminded America what globalisation really means: that they can't make these rules in isolation." The SEC said it had taken into consideration the fact that foreign companies were already working to meet more onerous financial reporting rules in their home countries. The European Union", in particular, was imposing new international financial reporting standards in 2005," it noted. "I don't underestimate the effort (compliance) will require... but this extension will provide additional time for those issuers to take a good hard look at their internal controls", said Donald Nicolaisen, the SEC's chief accountant.

business 037.txt Japanese mogul arrested for fraud One of Japan's best-known businessmen was arrested on Thursday on charges of falsifying shareholder information and selling shares based on the false data. Yoshiaki Tsutsumi was once ranked as the world's richest man and ran a business spanning hotels, railways, construction and a baseball team. His is the latest in a series of arrests of top executives in Japan over business scandals. He was taken away in a van outside one of his Prince hotels in Tokyo. There was a time when Mr Tsutsumi seemed untouchable. Inheriting a large property business from his father in the 1960s, he became one of Japan's most powerful industrialists, with close connections to many of the country's leading politicians. He used his wealth and influence to bring the Winter Olympic Games to Nagano in 1998. But last year, he was forced to resign from all the posts he held in his business empire, after being accused of falsifying the share-ownership structure of Seibu Railways, one of his companies. Under Japanese stock market rules, no listed company can be more than 80% owned by its 10 largest shareholders. Now Mr Tsutsumi faces criminal charges and the possibility of a prison sentence because he made it look as if the 10 biggest shareholders owned less than this amount. Seibu Railways has been delisted from the stock exchange, its share value has plunged and it is the target of a takeover bid. Mr Tsutsumi's fall from grace follows the arrests of several other top executives in Japan as the authorities try to curb the murky business practices which were once widespread in Japanese companies. His determination to stay at the top at all costs may have had its roots in

his childhood. The illegitimate third son of a rich father, who made his money buying up property as Japan rebuilt after World War II, he has described the demands his father made. I felt enormous pressure when I dined with him and it was nothing but pain", Tsutsumi told a weekly magazine in 1987. He scolded me for pouring too much soy sauce or told me fruit was not for children. He didn't let me use the silk futon," saying it's a luxury." There have been corporate governance issues at some other Japanese companies too. Last year", twelve managers from Mitsubishi Motors were charged with covering up safety defects in their vehicles and three executives from Japan's troubled UFJ bank were charged with concealing the extent of the bank's bad loans.

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"business 038.txt Deutsche Telekom sees mobile gain Germany telecoms firm Deutsche Telekom saw strong fourth quarter profits on the back of upbeat US mobile earnings and better-than-expected asset sales. Net profit came in at 1.4bn euros (£960m; \$1.85bn)", a dramatic change from the loss of 364m euros in 2003. Sales rose 2.8% to 14.96bn euros. Sales of stakes in firms including Russia's OAO Mobile Telesystems raised 1.17bn euros. This was more than expected and helped to bring debt down to 35.8bn euros. A year ago, debt was more than 11bn euros higher. T-Mobile USA, the company's American mobile business, made a strong contribution to profits. "It's a seminal achievement that they cut debt so low. That gives them some head room to invest in growth now", said Hannes Wittig, telecoms analyst at Dresdner Kleinwort Wasserstein. The company also said it would resume paying a dividend, after two years in which it focused on cutting debt.

business 039.txt Chinese wine tempts Italy's Illva Italy's Illva Saronno has agreed to buy 33% of Changyu, the largest wine maker in China. Changyu said in a statement to the Shenzhen stock exchange that Illva will pay 481.42m yuan (\$58.16m; £30.7m), once the government approves the deal. The Italian liqueur maker will acquire the shares from the Yantai State Asset Management Bureau. Chinese wine sales are growing, the US Agriculture Department said, with wine sales in 2003 up 25% at 61.1bn yuan. China is encouraging state-owned companies to sell shares to foreign investors. Anheuser-Busch, Heineken and Scottish & Newcastle have all invested in the Chinese beer industry in the last two years and now Illva Saronno is betting on the Chinese wine market. Yantai State Asset Management Bureau - a government agency in the north-eastern city of Yantai - owns 55% of Changyu. The state agency will also sell 10% of its stake in Changyu to another overseas company, although it didn't say who. The remaining 12% will be retained by the Yantai city government. The consumption of wine in China is still low, at just 0.22 litres per capita, said the US Agriculture Department. This compares with 59 litres in France, 12 litres in the US and three litres in Japan.

business 040.txt Umbro profits lifted by Euro 2004 UK sportswear firm Umbro has posted a 222% rise in annual profit after sales of replica England football kits were boosted by the Euro 2004 tournament. Pre-tax profit for 2004 was £15.4m (\$29.4m). Umbro, which recently lost sponsorship deals with Chelsea and Celtic, said on Thursday it had signed a new four-year agreement with Scottish club Rangers. It hopes 2005 sales will benefit from the launch of a new England replica shirt ahead of the 2006 World Cup. In January, Umbro announced its sponsorship agreement with Chelsea, which gave Umbro the lucrative right to make replica shirts, would end in 2006, five years earlier than expected. The firm, which is to receive a payment from Chelsea of £24.5m, said it is appraising a number of additional investment opportunities as a result of this compensation". Chief executive Peter McGuigan said the firm plans to grow sal

es both in the UK and internationally. The firm", reporting its first annual results since listing on the London Stock Exchange in June, said the UK market had seen sales growth of 8% last year. It said the launch of its Evolution X fashion range had boosted sales. Umbro supplies more than 150 teams across the world including the national sides of Ireland, Sweden and Norway. Shares in Umbro were up 1.76% at 115.5 pence in morning trade.

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"business 041.txt Fed chief warning on US deficit Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan has warned that allowing huge US budget deficits to continue could have ""severe"" consequences. Speaking to the House Budget Committee he urged Congress to take action to cut the deficit", such as increasing taxes. While the US economy is growing at a ""reasonably good pace"" he warned that budget concerns were clouding the economic outlook for the US. Pension and healthcare costs posed the greatest risks to the economy", he said. The government program faces severe financial strains in coming decades as the massive baby-boom generation retires. ""I fear that we may have already committed more physical resources to the baby-boom generation in its retirement years than our economy has the capacity to deliver. If existing promises need to be changed", those changes should be made sooner rather than later," Mr Greenspan said. He also warned that unless the nation sees unprecedented rises in productivity retirement and health programmes would need ""significant"" changes. He called on Congress to cut promised benefits for retirees", as the promised benefits for the soon-to-retire baby boom generation were much larger than the government could afford. Meanwhile any move to narrow the deficit gap by raising taxes could pose a significant risk to the economy by dampening growth and spending, he added. He also urged Congress to reinstate lapsed rules that require tax cuts and spending to be offset elsewhere in the budget in an effort to prevent the US heading further into the red. Despite the dire warnings, Mr Greenspan did offer some good news for the short term. As US growth gathers steam and incomes rise that should lead to a narrowing of the deficit. Recent increases in defence and homeland security spending were also not expected to continue indefinitely, which should cut some costs. Since President George W Bush came to office the federal budget has swung from a record surplus to a record deficit of \$412bn last year.

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"business 042.txt UK Coal plunges into deeper loss Shares in UK Coal have fallen after the mining group reported losses had deepened to £51.6m in 2004 from £1.2m. The UK's biggest coal producer blamed geological problems", industrial action and ""operating flaws"" at its deep mines for its worsening fortunes. The South Yorkshire company", led by new chief executive Gerry Spindler, said it hoped to return to profit in 2006. In early trade on Thursday," its shares were down 10% at 119 pence. UK Coal said it was making ""significant progress"" in shaking up the business. It had introduced new wage structures", a new daily maintenance regime for machinery at its mines and methods to continue mining in adverse conditions. The company said these actions should ""significantly uplift earnings"". It expected 2005 to be a ""transitional year"" and to return to profitability in 2006. The recent rise in coal prices has failed to benefit the company as most of its output had already been sold", it said. Total production costs were £1.30 per gigajoule, UK Coal said," but the average selling price was just £1.18 per gigajoule. ""We have a long journey ahead to fix these issues. We continue to make progress and great strides have already been made", said Mr Spindler. UK Coal operates 15 deep and surface mines

across Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Yorkshire, the West Midlands, Northumberland and Durham.

business 043.txt Saudi ministry to employ women Women will be employed in Saudi Arabia's foreign ministry for the first time this year, Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal has been reported as saying. The move comes as the conservative country inches open the door to working women. Last year, Crown Prince Abdullah, the de-facto ruler, told government departments to put plans in place for employing women. But progress has been slow, reports from the country say. Earlier this week, the local Arab News said Labour Minister Ghazi al-Gosaibi had caused uproar"" when he said his ministry was having difficulty hiring women because they demanded segregated offices. The newspaper said many Saudi women found his explanation ""a pitiful excuse for not employing women"". Women now make up more than half of all graduates from Saudi universities but only 5% of the workforce. ""Our educational reforms have created a new generation of highly-educated and professionally trained Saudi women who are acquiring their rightful position in Saudi society," Arab News quoted Prince Saud as saying. I am proud to mention here that this year we shall have women working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the first time.""

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"business 044.txt Japan economy slides to recession The Japanese economy has officially gone back into recession for the fourth time in a decade. Gross domestic product fell by 0.1% in the last three months of 2004. The fall reflects weak exports and a slowdown in consumer spending", and follows similar falls in GDP in the two previous quarters. The Tokyo stock market fell after the figures were announced, but rose again on a widespread perception that the economy will recover later this year. On Wednesday, the government revised growth figures from earlier in 2004 which, when taking into account performance in the most recent period, effectively tips Japan into recession. A previous estimate of 0.1% growth between July and September was downgraded to a 0.3% decline. A recession is commonly defined as two consecutive quarters of negative growth, although the Japanese government takes other factors into account when judging the status of its economy. Figures released by the government's Cabinet Office showed that GDP, on an annualised basis, fell 0.5% in the last three months of 2004. However," politicians remain upbeat about prospects for an economic boost later in the year. ""The economy has some soft patches but if you look at the bigger picture", it is in a recovery stage, said Economic and Fiscal Policy Minister Heizo Takenaka. Gross domestic product measures the overall value of goods and services produced in a country. The economy must be assessed comprehensively and we cannot look at GDP alone," Mr Takenaka stressed. Ministers pointed to the fact that consumer spending had been depressed by one-off factors such as the unseasonably mild winter. Analysts said the figures were disappointing but argued that Japan's largest companies had been recording healthy profits and capital spending was on the rise. Japan's economy grew 2.6% overall last year - fuelled by a strong performance in the first few months - and is forecast to see growth of 2.1% in 2005. However, the economy's fragile recovery remains dependent on an upturn in consumer spending, a fall in the value of the yen and an improvement in global economies. The results came in at the lower end of expectations but we shouldn't be too pessimistic about the current state and the outlook for the economy"," said Naoki Iizuka, senior economist at the Dai-ichi Life Research Institute. Japan's economy has seen stretches of moderate growth over the past decade but has periodically slipped back into recession.

business 045.txt US crude prices surge above \$53 US crude prices have soared to fresh four-month highs above \$53 in the US as refinery pr

oblems propelled petrol prices to an all-time high. US light sweet crude futures jumped to \$53.09 a barrel in New York before closing at \$53.03. The gains tracked a surge in US gasoline futures to a record high of \$1.4850 a gallon. The jump followed a fire at Western Refining Company's refinery in Texas, which shut down petrol production. A spokesman for the group was unable to say when the production unit would be back up and running. This market simply wants to go up," Citigroup Global Markets analyst Kyle Cooper told Reuters news agency. Ed Silliere, analyst at Energy Merchant, added: Gasoline is up because of the refinery issues in Texas," which means there will be a scramble for product in the (US) Gulf Coast." Elsewhere", a refinery in Houston was closed due to mechanical problems, while on Tuesday production at BP's Texas City refinery was taken down for a short time. In the approach to Spring, the market becomes much more sensitive to problems with petrol production as dealers anticipate rising demand for fuel ahead of the holiday season. The rise in prices came despite a US government report that showed domestic supplies of fuel oil and fuel were rising. Meanwhile, oil production cartel Opec's recent announcement that it was now unlikely to cut production levels has also failed to calm fears on the market. Oil prices are roughly 45% higher than a year ago and have risen sharply in recent weeks due to a combination of colder weather, the declining value of the dollar and fears that Opec could rein in production to head off a seasonal drop in demand. Instability in Iraq and underlying fears about terrorism have also played a part in the rally.

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"business 046.txt Industrial output falls in Japan Japane  
se industrial output fell in October while unemployment rose", casting further doubt on the strength of the country's economic recovery. Production dropped 1.6% in October, reflecting a decline in exports, while unemployment levels edged up 0.1% to 4.7%, slightly higher than forecast. The economy has grown for six quarters but growth slowed dramatically in the last quarter amid weaker global demand. Japan's government remains optimistic due to strong domestic demand. Analysts had been forecasting a 0.1% rise in month on month industrial output. According to figures from the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), the decline was led by a fall in demand for electronic parts for mobile phones and digital televisions. Although inventories fell 0.7% month on month," they were 36% higher than a year ago. ""It's a sign that the economy's adjustment phase is stronger than expected"," said Takashi Yamanaka, an economist with UFJ Bank. Japan downgraded its overall economic assessment earlier this month for the first time in a year. Growth slowed to 0.3% in the quarter ending September 30, down from 6.3% in the first quarter of 2004. Experts believe the economy -which stagnated for most of the 1990s -may be entering a softer patch on the back of rising oil prices and the falling dollar. Japanese government officials played down the latest data, arguing that domestic consumer demand was still resilient. The outlook for November is positive so I don't think one can say that conditions have worsened just because of the fall in October"," said a METI official. Despite the rise in unemployment, jobless figures are still some way below historical highs of recent years. The comparatively weak economic data preyed on shares with the Nikkei down 1% in afternoon trade.

"business 047.txt Ryanair in \$4bn Boeing plane deal Budget  
airline Ryanair has placed an order for 70 Boeing 737-800 planes, in a deal valued at \$4bn (£2.1bn) which should lead to 2,500 new Ryanair jobs. It also has an option for a further 70 aircraft, a move which brings the Ryanair/Boeing order book up to 225 firm orders and options on 193 more. Ryanair said the new planes would help it to cut operating costs further. The carrier reported a drop i

n quarterly profit earlier this year after it was hit by higher fuel costs. However, when it reported the results, the airline was upbeat about prospects for 2005, despite tough competition in the budget airline market. Ryanair chairman David Bonderman said that the 737-800 had significantly reduced our unit operating costs and allowed us to reduce air fares each year for the last five years""."With this new order and new pricing in place", Ryanair expects that unit operating costs (excluding fuel) will continue to fall each year for the next five years," he added. At the end of this year, Ryanair will have taken delivery of about 100 new planes, while the 70 new orders are due for delivery between 2008 and 2012. The airline said that when all these planes have been delivered, it will be able to carry more than 70 million passengers a year, making it Europe's largest airline. About 2,500 new jobs should be created in the next seven years, it added. The order can be seen as good news for Boeing, which in recent years has been overtaken by European plane maker Airbus as the world's biggest-selling plane maker.

business 048.txt Parmalat to return to stockmarket Parmalat, the Italian dairy company which went bust after an accounting scandal, hopes to be back on the Italian stock exchange in July. The firm gained protection from creditors in 2003 after revealing debts of 14bn euros (\$18.34bn; £9.6bn). This was eight times higher than it had previously stated. In a statement issued on Wednesday night, Parmalat Finanziaria detailed administrators' latest plans for re-listing the shares of the group. As part of the re-listing on the Italian stock exchange, creditors' debts are expected to be converted into shares through two new share issues amounting to more than 2bn euros. The company's creditors will be asked to vote on the plan later this year. The plan is likely to give creditors of Parmalat Finanziaria shares worth about 5.7% of the debts they are owed. This is lower than the 11.3% creditors previously hoped to receive. Creditors of Parmalat, the main operating company, are likely to see the percentage of debt they receive fall from 7.3% to 6.9%. Several former top Parmalat executives are under investigation for the fraud scandal. Lawmakers said on Wednesday night Enrico Bondi, the turnaround specialist appointed by the Italian government as Parmalat's chief executive, spoke positively about the company during a closed-door hearing of the Chamber of Deputies industry commission. Bondi supplied us with elements of positive results on the industrial positions and on the history of debt which will find a point of solution through the Parmalat group's quotation on the market in July"," Italian news agency Apcom quoted several lawmakers as saying in a statement.

business 049.txt BMW cash to fuel Mini production Less than four years after the new Mini was launched, German car maker BMW has announced £100m of new investment. Some 200 new jobs are to be created at the Oxford factory, including modernised machinery and a new body shell production building. The result of the investment could be to raise output to more than 200,000 cars from 2007. The rise, from 189,000 last year, is a response to rapidly-rising demand and could help wipe out waiting lists. Before Wednesday's announcement, BMW had invested some £280m in Mini production. Since its launch during summer 2001, the new Mini has gone from strength to strength. Last year, almost one in six cars sold by the BMW group was a Mini. The company admits that the success of the brand came despite scepticism from many in the industry. Our decision to produce a new Mini was not received well right away"," said Norbert Reithofer, a member of the BMW management board. Initially, BMW said it would produce 100,000 Mini models a year at its vast Cowley factory on the outskirts of Oxford, but the target was quickly reached, then raised, time and time again. Not everyone is convinced that the boom can continue. The risk is that after they've invested massively in the brand", demand tapers off like it did with the new

VW Beetle," said Brad Wernle, from Automotive News Europe. The price of the car has also gone up. When it was launched, the cheapest Mini cost just more than £10,000. These days, buyers will have to fork out almost £11,500 to own a new Mini One, or even more for the Cooper S which costs up to £17,730. The Mini Convertible, which was launched last spring, costs up to £15,690 for the top model, and there is even a waiting list. Second-hand Minis are not cheap either. A Mini One bought when the model was launched should still fetch at least £8,000 for the cheapest model, while a used Cooper S is likely to be priced from £12,556, according to the-car buying website Parker's. The consumers' association Which operates with slightly different numbers, yet it confirms that the Mini Cooper 1.6 depreciates slower than any other car, other than the Mercedes Benz C180 SE and the BMW 1 Series 116i SE. The Cowley factory, which initially seemed far too large a production plant for just 100,000 Minis, is increasingly being put to good use. There are plans to tear down old buildings and build new ones and there are rumours that a new paint shop could be included in the plans. BMW's Mini adventure has made good much of what went wrong during its stewardship of the UK car maker Rover which it sold for £10 five years ago to the Phoenix consortium. In 1999, when BMW still owned Rover, the Oxford factory was producing the award-winning Rover 75. During that year, 3,500 people produced 56,000 cars. Last year, in the same factory, almost four times as many vehicles were produced by just 4,500 Mini-workers. The Mini factory's current output is equally impressive when compared with the main Rover factory in Longbridge, which in 1999 produced 180,000 Rover cars. Last year, MG Rover, which employs more than 6,000 people, produced just 110,000 cars, though it hopes to land a deal with Shanghai Automotive Industry Corporation (SAIC) that could help double the number of cars produced at Longbridge. Indeed, Mini is not only producing more cars than MG Rover does; it remains ahead even when the current sales of Land Rovers and Range Rovers (which are made by the former Rover unit that BMW sold to Ford) are taken into account.

business 050.txt Bad weather hits Nestle sales A combination of bad weather, rising raw material costs and the sluggish European economy has hit sales at Swiss food and drink giant Nestle. Revenue dipped 1.4% to 86.7bn Swiss francs (\$74.6bn; £39.1bn) in 2004 as sales of ice cream and mineral water were dampened by the wet summer. However, Nestle's profits margins were helped by a strong performance in the Americas and China. Nestle is to raise its dividend by 11% after paying back some of its debt. Nestle said that the strength of the Swiss franc against the US dollar, the disposal of businesses and challenging trading conditions in Europe all dented sales. A poor summer across the continent - in contrast to the prolonged heat wave in 2003 - severely affected " demand for ice cream. Sales of bottled water also fell", although chocolate, coffee, frozen goods and petcare products performed better. Elsewhere," Nestle said it had enjoyed an ""exceptional"" year in North America", outperforming the market in terms of sales growth. Nestle added that it had performed strongly in Africa and Asia despite the impact of high oil prices and political instability. Nestle's total earnings before interest remained broadly flat over the past year, despite the company managing to boost profit margins. As well as increasing its dividend, Nestle plans to buy back shares worth 1bn Swiss francs (\$861m; £451m). Looking forward, Nestle forecasts organic earnings growth of about 5% in 2005, although it warned that trading would remain just as competitive. Uncertainty remains over the future of Perrier, the iconic French mineral water owned by Nestle. Perrier has been locked in a long-standing dispute with unions about productivity levels at the business," which has lead Nestle to consider selling the firm. ""The option of selling is Perrier is still on the table"," chief executive Peter Brabeck-Letmathe confirmed on Thursday.

business 051.txt Fiat mulls Ferrari market listing Ferrari  
i could be listed on the stock market as part of an overhaul of Fiat's carmaking operations, the Financial Times has reported. It said Fiat was set to restructure its business after reaching a \$2bn (1.53bn euros; £1.05bn) settlement with GM about Fiat's ownership. Steps being considered include listing Ferrari and bringing Maserati and Alfa Romeo closer together, it said. Despite strong sales of Alfa Romeo, Fiat's car business is making a loss. Under the proposals - which the paper said could be announced within days - the iconic sportscar maker could be listed separately on the market. Fiat owns a 56% stake in Ferrari - best known for its dominant Formula One motor racing team - having first bought into the business in 1969. It considered floating Ferrari in 2002 but opted to sell a minority stake to Italian bank Mediobanca for 775m euros (\$1bn). That sale valued Ferrari - which owns the Maserati brand - at 2.3bn euros. The price tag would change if Maserati was stripped out. The Financial Times said Fiat may transfer Maserati within its wholly-owned Alfa Romeo division in an effort to exploit commercial synergies. Such a move would help Alfa Romeo and Maserati to share marketing, distribution and research & development costs. Maserati and Ferrari sell about 10,000 cars between them and both companies broke even in 2003. Fiat, Italy's largest private sector employer, did not comment on the reported changes. Fiat recently negotiated an end to its alliance with General Motors. The US firm agreed to pay \$2bn to exit an agreement under which it could have been liable to buy Fiat outright. Analysts said the reported restructuring was evidence of the greater flexibility which Fiat now had to develop the business.

business 052.txt Italy to get economic action plan Italia  
n Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi will unveil plans aimed at kickstarting the country's sputtering economy on Thursday night in Rome. He will present an Action Plan for the Development of Italy"" in a meeting with industrialists and trade union leaders. Mr Berlusconi is expected to table reforms aimed at boosting research and development (R&D) spending", and the competitiveness of small firms. Also in focus will be bankruptcy laws and the slow pace of the legal system. The prime minister is scheduled to start the meeting at 1830 GMT. The government has been accused of underfunding R&D," making it harder for Italy to compete with other European nations and leading to a ""brain-drain"" of the country's brightest talents. Analysts say that hiring and firing staff is still too difficult and expensive", hampering the development of small- and medium-sized businesses. As a result, they say, Italy's corporate landscape is filled with numerous smaller companies that are often reluctant to become bigger because of all the extra hassle that would accompany the running of a larger firm. At the same time, bankruptcy laws make it difficult for failed company directors to set up new businesses and emerge from their debts, a situation that is hampering Italy's entrepreneurial spirit. The government says that it has set about tackling the problems, adding that getting growth going was the responsibility of all of Italy's 60 million population. According to Il Sole 24 Ore, Italy's business newspaper," the government will focus on ""opening up markets", infrastructure, research, making more incentives available, bankruptcy law," the slow pace of the justice system""". Mr Berlusconi has previously promised to cut taxes by 6.5bn euros (\$8.6bn; £4.5bn) this year in an effort to get people and companies to spend. He has also promised to cap spending on transport", education and health so as to trim the ballooning budget deficit. Italy plans to raise as much as 25bn euros from privatisations in 2005, including a partial flotation of the post office and utility Enel. Critics argue that these moves do not go far enough and could make Italy's problems worse. Limiting government spending will lead to job losses, they counter, while the income tax cuts will have a negligible effect on sentiment and ultimately favour the wealthy. The country has been one of

the eurozone's worst economic performers in recent years. Growth was 1.1% in 2004, up from just 0.3% in 2003 and 0.4% in 2002 - an improvement but still a long way from ideal. At the same time, business and consumer confidence has dipped and analysts have raised concerns that what little spending there is stems from Italians dipping into their savings accounts or using credit cards. Without a pick up in national growth, they say, the money could eventually run out, bringing Italy's economy to a juddering halt. Consumer spending accounts for about two-thirds of Italy's economy.

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"business 053.txt Weak dollar hits Reuters Revenues at media group Reuters slipped 11% during 2004", mainly due to the weakness of the dollar, the group said. The company said it was optimistic about growth even as revenues slipped 11% from £3.24bn (\$6.13bn) in 2003 to £2.89bn in 2004. Reuters beat profit forecasts, posting a 52% rise in profits for the year to £198m from the £130m seen a year earlier. Reuters also beat its savings target for 2004, delivering £234m of cuts. Under its three-year Fast Forward turnaround plan it had aimed to save £220m during the 12 months to 31 December. Reuters also managed to slow a decline in underlying revenues to 5.4% from 10.2% in 2003 and cut its debt back to £160m from £610m a year earlier. The news and financial data seller said the year had begun well," adding it expected ""further gradual improvement"" in the second quarter of the year after good January sales. It added it was planning to deliver a further £105m of savings over the coming year - but said it expects to be hit with an £80m restructuring charge to pay for the cost of moving from Fleet Street to new headquarters in London at Canary Wharf. ""Improving customer relationships", more competitive products and continued strong cost discipline position us well for 2005," chief executive Tom Glocer said, adding the company was beginning to look beyond recovery to growth"".

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"business 054.txt Hyundai to build new India plant South Korea's Hyundai Motor has announced that it plans to build a second plant in India to meet the country's growing demand for cars. The company didn't give details of its investment but it said the new plant would produce 150",000 cars a year. This will boost the annual production capacity of the company - India's second-largest car manufacturer - to 400,000 units. Hyundai expects its sales in India to grow 16% to 250,000 in 2005. By 2010, it expects to nearly double sales to 400,000 cars. The new plant will be built close to the existing one in Chennai, in the southern province of Tamil Nadu. South Korea's top car maker estimates that the Indian market will grow 15% this year, to 920,000 vehicles, reaching 1.6 million vehicles by 2010. Demand in India has been driven by the poor state of public transport and the very low level of car ownership," analysts said. Figures show that currently only eight people per thousand are car owners. ""We desperately need to expand our production in order to meet growing demand in the Indian auto market", which is growing over 12 percent every year, and to top our competitors," chairman Chung Mong-koo said in the statement. He said the company plans to use India as a base for exports to Europe, Latin America and the Middle East. The company - which controls half of the South Korean's market - aims to become a global top five auto maker by 2010.

business 055.txt SA unveils 'more for all' budget The South African government has put tax cuts and increased social spending at the centre of its latest budget. Aiming to both stir economic growth and aid the country's poor, finance minister Trevor Manuel said the focus of the 2005 budget was more for all"". The tax cuts target firms and individuals", cutting corporate

tax from 30% to 29% and offering income tax cuts worth 6.8bn rand (\$1.2bn; £910m). Spending on health and education will rise by 9.4% and 8.1% respectively. Spending on housing and sanitation will rise by 12%. All the spending increases will run over the next three years. Unveiling the 418bn-rand budget to parliament, Mr Manuel said the South African economy had grown by an average of 3.2% over the past four years, slightly below the African average of 4%. He predicted that the South African economy would grow by 4.3% in 2005 and 4.2% in 2006. Mr Manuel added that inflation fell to 4.3% in 2004 and is expected to remain at between 3% and 6% from now until at least 2008, helped by interest rates which are at their lowest level in 24 years. Given that both corporate and personal taxes are being cut - under the new measures, those earning less than 35,000 rand a year will be exempt from income tax - the extra 22.3bn rand in social spending will be partly met by higher fuel, tobacco and alcohol taxes. "In this budget", the focus is on more for all, not more for some, and not a hell of a lot more for a few, but spread across all of South Africa," said Mr Manuel. He said that the economic situation was a marked improvement "on the position at the end of apartheid", but acknowledged that more needed to be done to improve the lives and livelihoods of the disadvantaged. About 280,000 jobs a year have been created in South Africa since 2000 but unemployment remains high, "currently close to 30%. Economist Colen Garrow said the budget looked as if it would stimulate economic growth. "It's pleasant to see the cut in company taxes", it's a good incentive for business," he said.

business 056.txt BMW drives record sales in Asia BMW has forecast sales growth of at least 10% in Asia this year after registering record sales there in 2004. The luxury carmaker saw strong sales of its three marques - BMW, Mini and Rolls-Royce - in Asia last year after the launch of three new models. The company, which is vying with Mercedes-Benz for the title of leading premium carmaker, is confident about its prospects for the region in 2005. It is launching a revamped version of its 3-Series saloon class next month. BMW sold nearly 95,000 cars in Asia last year, up 2.6% on 2003. BMW-brand sales rose 2.3% to 80,600 while sales of Mini models rose 3.6% to 14,800. There was also a significant increase in sales of Rolls-Royces on the continent. BMW sold more than 100 of the iconic models compared with just ten the previous year. The German carmaker is aiming to boost annual sales in Asia to 150,000 by 2008. Here in Asia", we consider a double-digit increase in retail on the order of 10 to 15% to be realistic on the basis of current features," said Helmut Panke, BMW's group chief executive. China remains the main area of concern for BMW after sales there fell 16% last year. However, BMW is hopeful of a much better year in 2005 as its direct investment in China begins to pay dividends. The company only began assembling luxury high-powered sedans in China in 2003. 2004 was generally a good year for BMW, which saw revenues from its core car-making operations rise 11%.

business 057.txt Economy 'stronger than forecast' The UK economy probably grew at a faster rate in the third quarter than the 0.4% reported, according to Bank of England deputy governor Rachel Lomax. Private sector business surveys suggest a stronger economy than official estimates, Ms Lomax said. Other surveys collectively show a rapid slowdown in UK house price growth, she pointed out. This means that despite a strong economic growth, base rates will probably stay on hold at 4.75%. Official data comes from the Office for National Statistics (ONS). Though reliable, ONS data takes longer to publish, so now the BoE is calling for faster delivery of data so it can make more effective policy decisions. Recent work by the Bank has shown that private sector surveys add value", even when preliminary ONS estimates are available, Ms Lomax said in a speech to the North Wales Business Club. The ONS is due to publish its second

d estimate of third quarter growth on Friday. The MPC judges that overall growth was a little higher in the third quarter than the official data currently indicate," Ms Lomax said. The Bank said successful monetary policy depends on having good information. Rachel Lomax cited the late 1980s as an example of a time when weak economic figures were published, but substantially revised upwards years later. The statistical fog surrounding the true state of the economy has proved a particularly potent breeding ground for policy errors in the past", she said. Improving the quality of national statistics is the single best way of making sure the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) makes the right decisions, she said. The Bank of England is working in tandem with the ONS to improve the quality and speed of delivery of data. Her remarks follow criticism from the House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee, which said the MPC had held interest rates too high given that inflation was way below the 2% target. A slowdown in the housing market and this year's surge in oil prices has made economic forecasting all the more tricky, leading to a more uncertain outlook. This year rising oil prices and a significant slowdown in the housing market have awoken bad memories of the 1970s and 1980s", Ms Lomax said. The MPC will be doing well if it can achieve the same stability over the next decade as we have enjoyed over the past 10 years." Decisions on interest rates are made after the MPC gathers together the range of indicators available every month. The clearest signals come when all indicators are pointing the same direction", Ms Lomax intimated. "In economic assessment", there is safety in numbers."

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"business 058.txt Electrolux to export Europe jobs Electrolux saw its shares rise 14% on Tuesday after it said it would be shifting more of its manufacturing to low-cost countries. The Swedish firm", the world's largest maker of home appliances, said it is to relocate about 10 of its 27 plants in western Europe and North America. It did not say which facilities would be affected, but intends moving them to Asia, eastern Europe and Mexico. The company has two manufacturing sites in County Durham. It makes lawn and garden products in Newton Aycliffe, and cookers and ovens in Spennymoor. The Newton Aycliffe plant could also be affected by Electrolux's separate announcement that it is to spin-off its outdoor products unit into a new separate company. Electrolux's subsidiary brands include AEG, Zanussi and Frigidaire. The company said it was speeding up its restructuring programme," which aims to save between £190m and £265m annually from 2009. "We see that about half the plants in high-cost countries - that is around 10 - are at risk", said Electrolux chief executive Hans Straberg. It looks pretty grim," said Swedish trades union official Ulf Carlsson. What are we going to end up producing in Sweden?"

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"business 059.txt Worldcom ex-boss launches defence lawyers defending former WorldCom chief Bernie Ebbers against a battery of fraud charges have called a company whistleblower as their first witness. Cynthia Cooper", WorldCom's ex-head of internal accounting, alerted directors to irregular accounting practices at the US telecoms giant in 2002. Her warnings led to the collapse of the firm following the discovery of an \$11bn (£5.7bn) accounting fraud. Mr Ebbers has pleaded not guilty to charges of fraud and conspiracy. Prosecution lawyers have argued that Mr Ebbers orchestrated a series of accounting tricks at WorldCom, ordering employees to hide expenses and inflate revenues to meet Wall Street earnings estimates. But Ms Cooper, who now runs her own consulting business," told a jury in New York on Wednesday that external auditors Arthur Andersen had approved WorldCom's accounting in early 2001 and 2002. She sai

d Andersen had given a ""green light"" to the procedures and practices used by WorldCom. Mr Ebber's lawyers have said he was unaware of the fraud", arguing that auditors did not alert him to any problems. Ms Cooper also said that during shareholder meetings Mr Ebbers often passed over technical questions to the company's finance chief," giving only ""brief"" answers himself. The prosecution's star witness", former WorldCom financial chief Scott Sullivan, has said that Mr Ebbers ordered accounting adjustments at the firm," telling him to ""hit our books"". However", Ms Cooper said Mr Sullivan had not mentioned ""anything uncomfortable"" about WorldCom's accounting during a 2001 audit committee meeting. Mr Ebbers could face a jail sentence of 85 years if convicted of all the charges he is facing. WorldCom emerged from bankruptcy protection in 2004", and is now known as MCI. Last week, MCI agreed to a buyout by Verizon Communications in a deal valued at \$6.75bn.

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"business 060.txt Insurance bosses plead guilty Another three US insurance executives have pleaded guilty to fraud charges stemming from an ongoing investigation into industry malpractice. Two executives from American International Group (AIG) and one from Marsh & McLennan were the latest. The investigation by New York attorney general Eliot Spitzer has now obtained nine guilty pleas. The highest ranking executive pleading guilty on Tuesday was former Marsh senior vice president Joshua Bewlay. He admitted one felony count of scheming to defraud and faces up to four years in prison. A Marsh spokeswoman said Mr Bewlay was no longer with the company. Mr Spitzer's investigation of the US insurance industry looked at whether companies rigged bids and fixed prices. Last month Marsh agreed to pay \$850m (£415m) to settle a lawsuit filed by Mr Spitzer", but under the settlement it ""neither admits nor denies the allegation s"".

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"business 061.txt Further rise in UK jobless total The UK's jobless total rose for the second month in a row in December", official figures show. The number of people out of work rose 32,000 to 1.41 million in the last three months of 2004, even as 90,000 more people were in employment. Average earnings rose by 4.3% in the year to December up from November's 4.2%, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) added. Meanwhile, the benefit claimant total fell 11,000 to 813,200 last month. Throughout 2004, the number of people in work increased by 296,000 to 28.52 million - the highest figure since records began in 1971. The apparent discrepancy between rising unemployment and record numbers in work can be explained by an increase in the working population and a fall in those who are economically inactive. While the UK's jobless rate rose to 4.7% from 4.6% in the previous quarter, the rate still remains one of the lowest in the world, compared with 12.1% in Germany, 10.4% in Spain and 9.7% in France. But, despite more people being in work, the manufacturing sector continued to suffer, with 104,000 workers axed during the last quarter of 2004 - pushing employment in the sector to a record low of 3.24 million by the end of last year. The figures prompted some analysts to forecast that the Bank of England will almost certainly raise rates this year. Marc Ostwald, a strategist at Momentum Securities told Reuters that while no immediate market impact could be expected," ""it is enough to underline that they (the BoE) will be more hawkish on rates"".

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"business 062.txt Wembley firm won't make a profit Shares in Multiplex Group", which is building the new Wembley stadium, fell as much as 19% after it said it would not make any money on the project. The Australian firm said it would only break even on the 1.2bn Australian dollars (£458m; \$874m) rebuild, after a rise in costs on the work. Any profits would depend on the outcome of legal cases resulting from a change in steel contractor, it added. It cut A\$68m from profit targets for Wembley and another UK project. Investors were shaken by the news and the firm's shares fell to a four month low of A\$4.50, before recovering to close 16% down at A\$4.67. The decline came despite Multiplex reporting an 11% rise in pre-tax profits to A\$67.7m for 2004 and reaffirming its 2005 profit forecasts. Increased costs at Wembley and a separate development in London's Docklands saw Multiplex's construction division report profits of A\$35.1m. The firm said the result was below expectations but stressed that the majority of its UK projects - which also include the White City redevelopment scheme in west London - were performing strongly. To recoup any profit from Wembley, where the firm changed its steel contractor due to a legal dispute, "Multiplex will have to win legal claims against subcontractors. These claims could take up to two years to resolve. " "Multiplex believes its claim are sound and ultimately will exceed the level needed to support the break even position," it said. It is expected that profits will be possible in future periods as the claims are finalised." "Wembley Stadium is to due to be completed in January and will officially open for the 2006 FA Cup Final. Analysts expressed concern at the unexpected paring back in profit. " "Such a big writeback on the Wembley project in such a short period has impacted on management credibility", " Simon Wheatley, from Goldman Sachs, told Reuters.

business 063.txt Cars pull down US retail figures US retail sales fell 0.3% in January, the biggest monthly decline since last August, driven down by a heavy fall in car sales. The 3.3% fall in car sales had been expected, coming after December's 4% rise in car sales, fuelled by generous pre-Christmas special offers. Excluding the car sector, US retail sales were up 0.6% in January, twice what some analysts had been expecting. US retail spending is expected to rise in 2005, but not as quickly as in 2004. Steve Gallagher, US chief economist at SG Corporate & Investment Banking, said January's figures were decent numbers". " "We are not seeing the numbers that we saw in the second half of 2004", but they are still pretty healthy," he added. Sales at appliance and electronic stores were down 0.6% in January, while sales at hardware stores dropped by 0.3% and furniture store sales dipped 0.1%. Sales at clothing and clothing accessory stores jumped 1.8%, while sales at general merchandise stores, a category that includes department stores, rose by 0.9%. These strong gains were in part put down to consumers spending gift vouchers they had been given for Christmas. Sales at restaurants, bars and coffee houses rose by 0.3%, while grocery store sales were up 0.5%. In December, overall retail sales rose by 1.1%. Excluding the car sector, sales rose by just 0.3%. Parul Jain, deputy chief economist at Nomura Securities International, said consumer spending would continue to rise in 2005, only at a slower rate of growth than in 2004. Consumers continue to retain their strength in the first quarter", " he said. Van Rourke, a bond strategist at Popular Securities, agreed that the latest retail sales figures were slightly stronger than expected".

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"business 064.txt Lufthansa may sue over Bush visit German airline Lufthansa may sue federal agencies for damages after the arrival of US president George W Bush disrupted flights. Lufthansa said that it may lose millions of euros as a result of Air Force One landing at Frankfurt airport. Fli

ghts were affected for an hour on Wednesday morning", double the time that had been expected," leading to cancellations and delays. Lufthansa accounts for six out of every 10 planes using Frankfurt's airport. ""We are doing research into the possibilities we have", Michael Lamberty, a Lufthansa spokesman told the BBC. We are checking if there is action to be taken and in which courts it could be taken." Mr Lamberty explained that the company did not plan to pursue Germany's air traffic controllers' organisation or the airport authority but wanted instead to see if it was possible to sue the German federal agencies that gave the orders. The company said that it had to cancel 77 short and medium-distance flights", affecting about 5,000 passengers. Long-haul travellers were not disrupted. Central to the problem was that instead of half an hour, the arrival of President Bush on the German leg of his European tour took the best part of an hour, Lufthansa said. During that time, restrictions were put on planes taxiing, taking off and landing at Frankfurt's Rhein-Main airport. The extra time taken by President Bush and his entourage meant that there was a knock-on effect that led to significant delays. Mr Lamberty said that 92 outgoing flights and 86 income flights were delayed by an average of an hour following President Bush's arrival, affecting almost 17,000 passengers. Despite the problems, Mr Lamberty said that it was not certain that Lufthansa would take legal action.

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"business 065.txt EU aiming to fuel development aid European Union finance ministers meet on Thursday to discuss proposals", including a tax on jet fuel, to boost development aid for poorer nations. The policy makers are to ask for a report into how more development money can be raised, the EU said. The world's richest countries have said they want to increase the amount of aid they give to 0.7% of their annual gross national income by 2015. Airlines have reacted strongly against the proposed fuel levy. Profits have been under pressure in the airline industry, with low-cost firms driving down prices and demand dipping after the 11 September terrorist attacks and the outbreak of the killer SARS virus. Things have picked up, but some European and US companies are teetering on the brink of bankruptcy. At present," the fuel used by airlines enjoys either a very low tax rate or is untaxed in EU member states. "Of course we applaud humanitarian initiatives", but why target the airlines?"" said Ulrich Schulte-Strathaus", secretary general of the Association of European Airlines. "Our industry is in the midst of a fundamental crisis...only to be once again confronted with a measure designed to increase our costs", he continued. The EU sought to allay the airlines' fears, stressing that Thursday's meeting was only a first step and that other proposals were also under consideration. It added that any plan to levy taxes on jet fuel should not hinder the competitiveness of the airlines and that they themselves will not be solely funding development". Any tax would only be implemented after full consultation with the airlines", the EU said. There is thought to be widespread support for the plan - tabled by France and Germany following the recent G7 meeting of the world's richest nations - from EU ministers. The issue of poverty in Africa and South Asia has forced itself to the top of the political agenda, with politicians and campaigners calling for more to be done. At their meeting in London, G7 finance ministers backed plans to write off up to 100% of the debts of some of the world's poorest countries.

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"business 066.txt German business confidence slides German business confidence fell in February knocking hopes of a speedy recovery in Europe's largest economy. Munich-based research institute Ifo said that its con

fidence index fell to 95.5 in February from 97.5 in January", " its first decline in three months. The study found that the outlook in both the manufacturing and retail sectors had worsened. Observers had been hoping that a more confident business sector would signal that economic activity was picking up. ""We're surprised that the Ifo index has taken such a knock", said DZ bank economist Bernhard Weidensteiner. The main reason is probably that the domestic economy is still weak," particularly in the retail trade." " Economy and Labour Minister Wolfgang Clement called the dip in February's Ifo confidence figure ""a very mild decline"". He said that despite the retreat", " the index remained at a relatively high level and that he expected ""a modest economic upswing"" to continue. Germany's economy grew 1.6% last year after shrinking in 2003. However", the economy contracted by 0.2% during the last three months of 2004, mainly due to the reluctance of consumers to spend. Latest indications are that growth is still proving elusive and Ifo president Hans-Werner Sinn said any improvement in German domestic demand was sluggish. Exports had kept things going during the first half of 2004, but demand for exports was then hit as the value of the euro hit record levels making German products less competitive overseas. On top of that, the unemployment rate has been stuck at close to 10% and manufacturing firms, including DaimlerChrysler, Siemens and Volkswagen, have been negotiating with unions over cost cutting measures. Analysts said that the Ifo figures and Germany's continuing problems may delay an interest rate rise by the European Central Bank. Eurozone interest rates are at 2%, but comments from senior officials have recently focused on the threat of inflation, prompting fears that interest rates may rise.

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"business 067.txt FAO warns on impact of subsidies Billions of farmers' livelihoods are at risk from falling commodity prices and protectionism", " the UN's Food & Agriculture Organisation has warned. Trade barriers and subsidies ""severely"" distort the market", " the FAO report on the ""State of Agricultural Commodity Markets 2004"" said. As a result", the 2.5 billion people in the developing world who rely on farming face food insecurity. The most endangered are those who live in the least-developed countries. The FAO report said that support for farmers in industrialised nations was equivalent to 30 times the amount provided as aid for agricultural development in poor countries. The FAO has urged the World Trade Organisation to swiftly conclude negotiations to liberalise trade, easing developing countries' access to the world market. It also criticised the high tariffs imposed by both developed and developing nations. It recommends that developing countries reduce their own tariffs to encourage trade and take advantage of market liberalisation. According to the organisation, subsidies and high tariffs have a strong impact on the trade of products such as cotton and rice. Global exports of these products are mainly in the hands of the European Union and the US, who - thanks to subsidies - sell them at very low prices. In fact, almost 30 wealthy nations spend more than \$300bn (£158.8bn; 230.9bn euros) in agricultural subsidies. The market situation has divided developing nations in two groups, the FAO said. The first group have a reasonably diverse range of agricultural products while in the second group, agriculture lies largely in the hands of small-scale producers. For 43 developing countries, more than 20% of their export incomes come from the sale of just one product. These countries are mainly situated in Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean.

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"business 068.txt India seeks to boost construction India

has cleared a proposal allowing up to 100% foreign direct investment in its construction sector. Kamal Nath", Commerce and Industry Minister, announced the decision in Delhi on Thursday following a cabinet meeting. Analysts say improving India's infrastructure will boost foreign investment in other sectors too. The Indian government's decision has spread good cheer in the construction sector, according to some Indian firms. A spokesman for DLF Builders, Dr Vancheshwar," told the BBC this will mean ""better offerings"" for consumers as well as builders. He said the firm will benefit from world class ""strategic partnerships", design expertise and technology," while consumers will have better choice." The government proposal states that foreign investment of up to 100% will be allowed on the 'automatic route' in the construction sector", on projects including housing, hotels, resorts, hospitals and educational establishments. The automatic route means that construction companies need only get one set of official approvals and do not need to gain clearance from the Foreign Investment Promotion Board, which can be bureaucratic. The government hopes its new policy will create employment for construction workers," and benefit steel and brick-making industries. Mr Nath also announced plans to allow foreign investors to develop a smaller area of any land they acquired. ""Foreign investors can enter any construction development area", be it to build resorts, townships or commercial premises but they will have to construct at least 50,000 square meters (538,000 square feet) within a specific timeframe," said Mr Nath, without specifying the timeframe. Previously foreign investors had to develop a much larger area, discouraging some from entering the Indian market. This measure is designed to discourage foreign investors from buying and selling land speculatively, without developing it. Anshuman Magazine, managing director, of CB Richard Ellis - an international real estate company - told the BBC this was a big positive step." However", Chittabrata Majumdar, general secretary of the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU)," said allowing FDI in the country is compromising India's own ""self reliance"". He said," ""No country can develop on the basis of foreign investment alone."" Mr Majumdar also said an assessment should be made as to whether foreign investment is indeed beneficial to the country - in terms of employment and money generated - or just another way of international companies filling their deep pockets.

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"business 069.txt Boeing unveils new 777 aircraft US aircraft firm Boeing has unveiled its new long-distance 777 plane", as it tries to regain its position as the industry's leading manufacturer. The 777-200LR will be capable of flying almost 11,000 miles non-stop, linking cities such as London and Sydney. Boeing, in contrast to European rival Airbus, hopes airlines will want to fly smaller aircraft over longer distances. Airbus, which overtook Boeing as the number one civilian planemaker in 2003, is focusing on so-called super jumbos. Analysts are divided over which approach is best and say that this latest tussle between Boeing and Airbus may prove to be a defining moment for the airline industry. Boeing plans to offer twin-engine planes that are able to fly direct to many of the world's airports, getting rid of the need for connecting flights. It is banking on smaller, slimmer planes such as the 777-200LR and its much-anticipated 787 Dreamliner plane, which is set to take to the skies in 2008. The 777-200LR, which had its launch delayed by the 11 September attacks in the US," is the fifth variation of Boeing's twin-aisle 777 plane. The company officially ""rolled-out"" the new 777 in Seattle at 2200 GMT. Better fuel efficiency from engines made by GE and lighter materials mean that the plane can connect almost any two cities worldwide. ""Boeing has the latest variant in a very successful line of airplanes and there is no doubt it will continue to be very

successful," said David Learmount, operations and safety editor at industry magazine Flight International. But the 777-200LR is a niche player""", Mr Learmount continued, adding that reach was not the only criteria airlines used when picking their aircraft. Mr Learmount pointed out that the 777-200LR has been on the market for a couple of years and only had limited success at attracting orders. He also said that while the plane may be able to fly to Sydney from London in one hit, prevailing winds meant that it would have to stop somewhere on the return journey. For Airbus, the future is big - it is pinning its hopes on planes that can carry as many as 840 people between large hub airports. From there, passengers would be ferried to their final destinations by smaller planes. Airbus is also keeping its options open and plans to compete in all the main categories of aircraft. It has been producing a rival to Boeing's 777 line for more than a year. ""Airbus is now where Boeing was a few years ago"" with its product range", said Flight International's Mr Learmount. Both Boeing and Airbus have been taking orders for their new planes. Boeing said it expected to sell about 500 of its 777-200LR planes over the next 20 years. It already has orders from Pakistan International Airlines and EVA of Taiwan. These orders should help underpin the company's profits. Boeing said earnings during the last three months of 2004 dropped by 84% because of costs relating to stopping production of its smallest airliner, the 717, and the cancellation of a US air force 767 tanker contract. Net profit was \$186m (£98m; 143m euros) in the quarter, compared with \$1.13bn in the same period in 2003.

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"business 070.txt Circuit City gets takeover offer Circuit City Stores", the second-largest electronics retailer in the US, has received a \$3.25bn (£1.7bn) takeover offer. The bid has come from Boston-based private investment firm Highfields Capital Management," which already owns 6.7% of Circuit City's shares. Shares in the retailer were up 19.6% at \$17.04 in Tuesday morning trading in New York following the announcement. Highfield said that it intends to take the Virginia-based firm private. ""Such a transformation would eliminate the public-company transparency into the company's operating strategy that is uniquely damaging in a highly competitive industry where Circuit City is going head-to-head with a tough and entrenched rival",, Highfield said. One analyst suggested that a bidding battle may now begin for the company. Bill Armstrong, a retail analyst at CL King & Associates, said he expected to see other private investment firms come forward for Circuit City. The retailer is debt free with a good cash flow, despite the fact that it is said to be struggling to keep up with market leader Best Buy and cut-price competition from the likes of Wal-Mart, said Mr Armstrong.

"business 071.txt Japan turns to beer alternatives Japanese brewers are increasingly making money from beer-flavoured drinks rather than beer itself Beer and spirits are heavily taxed in Japan, driving breweries to search for alternatives. Japan's long economic downturn helped drive the trend, as drinkers looked for cheaper opportunities to drown their sorrows. Now, according to Asahi Breweries, the market for so-called beer-like" drinks is set to grow 84% this year. Asahi is predicting profits to rise 50% in 2005 as it launches a drink based on soybean peptides rather than malt. The chosen name",, ""Shinnama"" or ""new draft""", disguises its non-beer nature. But despite a record profit in 2004 of 30.6bn yen (\$291m; £154m), up 31.8% on the previous year," Asahi is coming late to the market. Key rival Sapporo is already well-established with the beer-flavoured ""Draft One"". Suntory", meanwhile," is doing well with ""Super Blue""", which combines hoppo - an existing low-cost beer alternative made with malt and seawater - and shochu, a distilled alcohol derived fro

m sweet potatoes or barley. Happoshu has been a mainstay of brewery profits for years, taking over from beer thanks to its low tax and therefore low cost. Kirin, the fourth big name," is launching its own ""third-type"" drink in April.

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"business 072.txt S Korean consumers spending again South Korea looks set to sustain its revival thanks to renewed private consumption", its central bank says. The country's economy has suffered from an overhang of personal debt after its consumers' credit card spending spree. Card use fell sharply last year," but is now picking up again with a rise in spending of 14.8% year-on-year. ""The economy is now heading upward rather than downward",," said central bank governor Park Seung. The worst seems to have passed." Mr Park's statement came as the bank decided to keep interest rates at an all-time low of 3.25%. It had cut rates in November to help revive the economy", but rising inflation - reaching 0.7% month-on-month in January - has stopped it from cutting further. Economic growth in 2004 was about 4.7%, with the central bank predicting 4% growth this year. Other indicators are also suggesting that the country is inching back towards economic health. Exports - traditionally the driver for expansion in Asian economies - grew slower in January than at any time in 17 months. But domestic demand seems to be taking up the slack. Consumer confidence has bounced back from a four-year low in January, and retail sales were up 2.1% in December. Credit card debt is falling, with only one in 13 of the 48 million cards now in default - down from one in eight at the end of 2003. One of its biggest card issuers, LG Card, was rescued from collapse in December, having almost imploded under the weight of its customers' bad debts. The government last year tightened the rules for card lending to keep the card glut under control.

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"business 073.txt German growth goes into reverse German y's economy shrank 0.2% in the last three months of 2004", upsetting hopes of a sustained recovery. The figures confounded hopes of a 0.2% expansion in the fourth quarter in Europe's biggest economy. The Federal Statistics Office said growth for the whole of 2004 was 1.6%, after a year of contraction in 2003, down from an earlier estimate of 1.7%. It said growth in the third quarter had been zero, putting the economy at a standstill from July onward. Germany has been reliant on exports to get its economy back on track, as unemployment of more than five million and impending cuts to welfare mean German consumers have kept their money to themselves. Major companies including Volkswagen, DaimlerChrysler and Siemens have spent much of 2004 in tough talks with unions about trimming jobs and costs. According to the statistics office, Destatis, rising exports were outweighed in the fourth quarter by the continuing weakness of domestic demand. But the relentless rise in the value of the euro last year has also hit the competitiveness of German products overseas. The effect has been to depress prospects for the 12-nation eurozone as a whole, as well as Germany. Eurozone interest rates are at 2%, but senior officials at the rate-setting European Central Bank are beginning to talk about the threat of inflation, prompting fears that interest rates may rise. The ECB's mandate is to fight rising prices by boosting interest rates - and that could further threaten Germany's hopes of recovery.

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"business 074.txt Turkey-Iran mobile deal 'at risk' Turkey's investment in Iran's mobile industry looks set to be scrapped after its biggest mobile firm saw its investment there slashed by MPs. Iran's parliament voted by a large majority to cut Turkcell's stake in a new mobile network from 7

0% to 49%. The move", which was justified on national security grounds," follows an earlier vote by MPs to give themselves a veto over foreign investments. Turkcell said the decision ""increases the risks"" attached to the project. Although the company's statement said it would continue to monitor developments", observers said they thought Turkcell was set to pull out of the \$3bn deal. ""The possibility of carrying out this project is next to zero", said Atinc Ozkan, a analyst at Finans Investment in Istanbul. If Turkcell does back out, MTN - the South African firm which lost out in the original tender - may well be back in the running. The company has said it is prepared to accept a minority stake if Iran will award it the mobile deal. Turkcell's mobile deal is the second Turkish investment in Iran to run into trouble. Turkish-Austrian consortium TAV was chosen to build and run Tehran's new Imam Khomeini International Airport - but the army closed it just hours after it opened in May 2004. In both cases, the justification has been national security, amid allegations that the Turkish firms are too close to Israel. The hardline posture taken by parliament, which is dominated by religious conservatives, could yet impact other inward investments.

business 075.txt EU ministers to mull jet fuel tax Europe  
an Union finance ministers are meeting on Thursday in Brussels, where they are to discuss a controversial jet fuel tax. A levy on jet fuel has been suggested as a way to raise funds to finance aid for the world's poorest nations. Airlines and aviation bodies have reacted strongly against the plans, saying they would hurt companies at a time when earnings are under pressure. The EU said a tax would only be passed after full consultation with airlines. It was keen to point out earlier this week that any new tax on jet fuel should not hurt the competitiveness of the airlines"". Ministers will also be discussing reforms to regulations governing European public spending. Global leaders have focused attention on poverty reduction and development at recent meetings of the G7 Group and World Economic Forum. The world's richest countries have said they want to boost the amount of aid they give to 0.7% of their annual gross national income by 2015. Many EU ministers are thought to support the plan to tax jet fuel - tabled by France and Germany following the recent G7 meeting. At present", the fuel used by airlines enjoys either a very low tax rate or is untaxed in EU member states.

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"business 076.txt Palestinian economy in decline Despite a short-lived increase in Palestinian jobs in 2003", the economy is performing well below its potential, said a World Bank report. Unemployment stood at 25%, compared with 10% before the uprising against Israeli occupation four years ago. Young people are particularly hard hit with 37% out of work, compared with 14% four years ago. But 104,000 new jobs were created last year during a brief easing of violence and closures. However, during the first half of this year, the Palestinian economy lost more than 22,000 jobs. Last year's growth rate of 6% can also be attributed to this temporary gap in violence, the report said. According to the report, Intifada, Closures and Palestinian Economic Crisis: An Assessment, there is a close link between the number of closures - both border closures and internal closures between cities - and Palestinian economic problems. The closures arranged by Israel restrict the movement of Palestinian people and goods," slowing down trade. ""Closures are a key factor behind today's economic crisis in the West Bank", said Nigel Roberts, World Bank country director for the West Bank and Gaza. Nearly half of all Palestinians - some 47% - live below the poverty line and are particularly vulnerable to economic shocks. The report said even more would be on the poverty line without an average of \$950m a year from international donors, some of which goes towards job creation. It also

called on the Palestinian Authority to revive its reform programme and maintain financial discipline to create an investment-friendly climate. This week Colin Powell, US Secretary of State was visiting the West Bank to stress US support for a smooth Palestinian election in January.

business 077.txt China had role in Yukos split-up China lent Russia \$6bn (£3.2bn) to help the Russian government renationalise the key Yuganskneftegas unit of oil group Yukos, it has been revealed. The Kremlin said on Tuesday that the \$6bn which Russian state bank VEB lent state-owned Rosneft to help buy Yugansk in turn came from Chinese banks. The revelation came as the Russian government said Rosneft had signed a long-term oil supply deal with China. The deal sees Rosneft receive \$6bn in credits from China's CNPC. According to Russian newspaper Vedomosti, these credits would be used to pay off the loans Rosneft received to finance the purchase of Yugansk. Reports said CNPC had been offered 20% of Yugansk in return for providing finance but the company opted for a long-term oil supply deal instead. Analysts said one factor that might have influenced the Chinese decision was the possibility of litigation from Yukos, Yugansk's former owner, if CNPC had become a shareholder. Rosneft and VEB declined to comment. The two companies [Rosneft and CNPC] have agreed on the pre-payment for long-term deliveries", said Russian oil official Sergei Oganesyan. There is nothing unusual that the pre-payment is for five to six years." The announcements help to explain how Rosneft", a medium-sized, indebted, and relatively unknown firm, was able to finance its surprise purchase of Yugansk. Yugansk was sold for \$9.3bn in an auction last year to help Yukos pay off part of a \$27bn bill in unpaid taxes and fines. The embattled Russian oil giant had previously filed for bankruptcy protection in a US court in an attempt to prevent the forced sale of its main production arm. But Yugansk was sold to a little known shell company which in turn was bought by Rosneft. Yukos claims its downfall was punishment for the political ambitions of its founder Mikhail Khodorkovsky. Once the country's richest man, Mr Khodorkovsky is on trial for fraud and tax evasion. The deal between Rosneft and CNPC is seen as part of China's desire to secure long-term oil supplies to feed its booming economy. China's thirst for products such as crude oil," copper and steel has helped pushed global commodity prices to record levels. "Clearly the Chinese are trying to get some leverage [in Russia]", said Dmitry Lukashov, an analyst at brokerage Aton. They understand property rights in Russia are not the most important rights", and they are more interested in guaranteeing supplies." "If the price of oil is fixed under the deal", which is unlikely, it could be very profitable for the Chinese, Mr Lukashov continued. And Rosneft is in desperate need of cash," so it's a good deal for them too."

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"business 078.txt Deadline nears for Fiat-GM deal Fiat and General Motors (GM) have until midnight on 1 February to settle a disagreement over a potential takeover. The deadline marks the point at which Fiat will gain the right to sell its car division to GM", part of an alliance agreed in 2000. GM, whose own European operations are losing money, no longer wants to own the unprofitable Fiat unit. Reports of deadlocked talks sent Fiat shares down 1.2% on Tuesday, after Monday's 4% gain on hopes of a payoff. The US firm is thought to be offering about \$2bn (£1.06bn) to extricate itself from the arrangement. It has argued the deal was voided by Fiat's decision to sell off Fiat's finance arm and halve GM's stake via a capital-raising effort. The 2000 deal resulted from a race between GM and DaimlerChrysler to ally with Fiat. The German firm wanted to buy Fiat outright. But Gianni Agnelli, the godfather of the group, wanted to keep control, and preferred GM's offer to buy a 20% stake and give

Fiat the right to sell in the future," known as a ""put option"". Since then", however, Fiat cars have lost market share and the firm has piled up losses, while a plan to raise new money in 2003 cut GM's stake in half to 10%. For its part, GM's European units Opel and Saab have both had trouble, with Opel management threatening to cut 12,000 jobs. ""The last thing they need is additional production capacity in Europe", said Patrick Juchemich, auto analyst at Sal Oppenheim Bank.

business 079.txt ID theft surge hits US consumers Almost a quarter of a million US consumers complained of being targeted for identity theft in 2004, official figures suggest. The Federal Trade Commission said two in five of the 635,173 reports it had from consumers concerned ID fraud. ID theft occurs when criminals use someone else's personal information to steal credit or commit other crimes. Internet auctions were the second biggest source of fraud complaints, comprising 16% of the total. The total cost of fraud reported by consumers was \$546m (£290m). The report marks the fifth year in a row in which identity fraud has topped the table. The biggest slice of the 246,570 ID fraud cases reported - almost 30% - concerned abuses of people's credit. Misusing someone's identity to claim new credit cards or loans comprised 16.5% of the total, with almost 12% coming from false claims on existing credit. Another 18% came from attempts to rip off people's bank accounts, while 13% of cases concerned attempts to defraud employers by abusing someone else's identity. Outside the field of ID theft, 53% of the near-400,000 complaints were internet-related. Among the 100,000 internet auction complaints, the failure of sellers to deliver or the supply of sub-standard goods were the most common woes reported. Catalogue and home-shopping frauds were next in line, accounting for 8% of total complaints, while concerns about internet services and computers - including spyware found on people's PCs and undisclosed charges for websites - amounted to 6% of complaints.

business 080.txt Argentina, Venezuela in oil deal Argentina and Venezuela have extended a food-for-oil deal, which helped the former to overcome a severe energy crisis last year. Argentine President Nestor Kirchner and Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez signed the deal in Buenos Aires on Tuesday. Last April, Argentina signed a \$240m agreement to import Venezuelan fuel in exchange for agricultural goods and this deal has now been extended. Venezuela will now import cattle, medicines and medical equipment. Last year, Argentina's severe energy crisis forced President Kirchner to suspend gas exports to Chile. Argentina fears that rising demand could spark another crisis and wants to prevent it by signing this deal. The two countries also formalised a co-operation deal between Venezuelan energy firm PDVSA and Argentina's Enarsa. Under this deal, the Argentine market will be opened to Venezuelan investment. President Chavez added that Brazil's Petrobras could join soon the co-operation deal. President Chavez is an ardent promoter of the concept of a South American oil company, which could include the state-owned companies of Venezuela, Argentina, Brazil and Bolivia. The two presidents also agreed to create 'Television Sur', a Latin American network of state-owned television channels.

business 081.txt BMW to recall faulty diesel cars BMW is to recall all cars equipped with a faulty diesel fuel-injection pump supplied by parts maker Robert Bosch. The faulty part does not represent a safety risk and the recall only affects pumps made in December and January. BMW said that it was too early to say how many cars were affected or how much the recall would cost. The German company is to extend a planned production break at one of its plants due to the faulty Bosch part. The Dingolfing site will now be closed all next week instead of for just two days. The additional three-day stoppage will mean a production loss of up to 3,600 vehicles, BMW said, adding that it was co

nfident it could make up the numbers later. Bosch has stopped production of the part but expects to restart by 2 February. The faulty component does not represent a safety risk but causes the motor to stall after a significant amount of mileage. When asked if BMW would be seeking compensation from Bosch, the carmaker's chief executive Helmut Panke said: we will first solve the problem before talking about who will pay"". Audi and Mercedes Benz were also supplied with the defective diesel fuel-injection pumps but neither of them have to recall any vehicles. A spokesman for DaimlerChrysler", parent company of Mercedes Benz, said it will however have to halt some production. It is to close the Mercedes factory in Sindelfingen on Monday and Tuesday. Audi said it had been hit by production bottlenecks, due to a shortage of unaffected Bosch parts.

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"business 082.txt Takeover rumour lifts Exel shares Share  
s in storage and delivery firm Exel closed up 9% at a two-and-a-half year high on Tuesday on speculation it is to receive an imminent takeover bid. The talk in the City is that US giant United Parcel Services (UPS) is the most likely bidder for the firm. Yet other names mentioned in connection to buying Exel are DHL-owner Deutsche Post and finance firm GE Capital. With its shares closing Tuesday at 873p", Bracknell-based Exel is currently valued at £2.6bn (\$6.3bn). Exel employs 109,000 people in more than 120 countries and has itself been active in the consolidation of the logistics sector, paying £328m to buy fellow UK firm Tibbett & Britten last August. Its customers include Boots, Burberry, Mothercare and consumer products giant Procter & Gamble. Andrew Beh, of brokers ING," said UPS and Deutsche Post were the most likely bidders and an offer of 950p a share would be fair if a bidding battle did not break out. ""It's a great strategic fit for both companies", he said. Both are interested in expanding in logistics and you can make a decent case for cost synergies which could justify the premium and that's before you make any argument about revenue synergies.""

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"business 083.txt Yukos accused of lying to court Russian  
oil firm Yukos lied to a US court in an attempt to stop the Russian government selling off its key production unit", the court has heard. The unit, Yugansk, was sold to pay off a \$27.5bn (£14.5bn) back tax bill. Yukos argued that since it had a US subsidiary and local bank accounts, the US court could declare it bankrupt and stop the auction of Yugansk. But Deutsche Bank - itself a target of a Yukos lawsuit - said documents had been backdated to strengthen the case. Deutsche Bank's evidence came on the first day of a two-day hearing in Houston. Its lawyer, Hugh Ray, told the court that Yukos had claimed it had transferred \$27m into two Texas bank accounts opened by its new US subsidiary. By doing so, he said, the firm had intended to reinforce its US presence - and thus its chances of getting its case heard in US courts. But he said that the papers documenting the transaction were not drawn up till weeks after Yukos made its bankruptcy application on 14 December, and then backdated. Yukos chief financial officer Bruce Misamore, who had moved to the US in early December to set up Yukos US A, acknowledged the point. He said the discrepancy was only in the paperwork, but that money had indeed been transferred on 14 December. Even so, he told the court that only \$480,000 had been in the accounts that day, with the rest arriving a day later. Deutsche Bank is involved in the case because it is itself being sued by Yukos. It had agreed to loan to an arm of Russian state gas firm Gazprom the money to bid for Yuganskneftegaz, as the Yukos unit is formally known. The sale went ahead, despite an order from the US bankruptcy court ordered that it should be stopped. In the end, the auction was won by an unknown shell c

ompany for \$9.4bn - much less than most assessments of its value - before ending up in the hands of state-controlled oil firm Rosneft. Rosneft, meanwhile, has agreed to merge with Gazprom, bringing a large chunk of Russia's very profitable oil business back under state control. Yukos maintains that it filed for bankruptcy in the US because it feared it would not be able to do so in Russia. It also said that in the event of going bust, "it could offer the chance of restructuring. ""It gives us a kind of life after death alternative," said Yukos chief executive Steven Theede. Yukos is currently suing four companies - Gazprom, its unit Gazpromneft, Rosneft and the shell company which won the bidding - for their part in Yugansk's disposal. It has also threatened to sue the Russian government for \$28bn. Analysts have questioned whether a US court has any jurisdiction over Russian companies, while Moscow officials have dismissed Yukos' legal wrangling as meaningless. Yukos claims that the rights of its shareholders have been ignored and that it has been punished for the political ambitions of its founder Mikhail Khodorkovsky. Mr Khodorkovsky, once Russia's richest man, is in prison, having been charged with fraud and tax evasion and repeatedly denied bail.

business 084.txt Mexican in US send \$16bn home Mexican labourers living in the US sent a record \$16.6bn (£8.82bn) home last year. The Bank of Mexico said that remittances grew 24% last year and now represent the country's second-biggest source of income after oil. Better records and greater prosperity of Mexican expatriates in the US are the main reasons behind the increase. About 10 million Mexicans live in the US, where there are 16 million citizens of Mexican origin. Remittances now represent more than 2% of the country's GDP, according to the Bank of Mexico's figures. Last year, there were 50.9 million transactions, with an average value of \$327 per remittance, the bank said. According to Standard & Poor's, which has recently upgraded Mexico's sovereign debt rating, the rise in remittances helps protect the Mexican economy against a potential fall in the international oil prices. The growth in remittances has sparked fierce competition between banks. Bank of America announced last week that it planned to eliminate transfer fees for some customers. Remittance charges are estimated to have dropped by between 50 and 60%, reports from the US Treasury and the Inter-American Development Bank have said. The Inter-American Development Bank estimates that remittances to Latin America and the Caribbean reached \$45bn in 2004.

business 085.txt Home loan approvals rising again The number of mortgages approved in the UK has risen for the first time since May last year, according to lending figures from the Bank of England. New loans in December rose to 83,000, slightly higher than November's nine-year low of 77,000. Mortgage lending rose by £7.1bn in December, up from a £6.4bn rise in November. The figures contradict a survey from the British Bankers' Association, which said approvals were at a five-year low. Analysts say the figures show the market may be stabilising but still point to further house price softness. The modest rise in mortgage approvals and lending in December reinforces the impression that the housing market is currently slowing steadily rather than sharply," said Global Insight analyst Howard Archer, commenting on the BoE's figures. The BBA believes that the property market is continuing to cool down. Changes to mortgage regulation may have artificially depressed figures in November, thus flattening the December figures, analysts said. In October last year, new rules came into force, which meant some lenders were forced to withdraw mortgage products temporarily in November and defer some lending until they had made sure they had complied with the rules properly. Separately, the Bank of England said that consumer credit rose by £1.5bn in December, more than the £1.4bn expected and above the £1.4bn reported in the previous month.

business 086.txt Manufacturing recovery 'slowing' UK manu  
facturing grew at its slowest pace in one-and-a-half years in January, accordin  
g to a survey. The Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply (CIPS) said it  
s purchasing manager index (PMI) fell to 51.8 from a revised 53.3 in December.  
But, despite missing forecasts of 53.7, the PMI number remained above 50 - indi  
cating expansion in the sector. The CIPS said that the strong pound had dented  
exports while rising oil and metals prices had kept costs high. The survey add  
ed that rising input prices and cooling demand had deterred factory managers fr  
om hiring new workers in an effort to cut costs. That triggered the second succ  
essive monthly fall in the CIPS employment index to 48.3 - its lowest level sin  
ce June 2003. The survey is more upbeat than official figures - which suggest t  
hat manufacturing is in recession - but analysts said the survey did suggest th  
at the manufacturing recovery was running out of steam. It appears that the UK  
is in a two-tier economy again", said Prebon Yamane economist Lena Komileva. Yo  
u have weakness in manufacturing," which I think would concern policymakers at  
the Bank of England. ""

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"business 087.txt Worldcom boss 'left books alone' Former  
Worldcom boss Bernie Ebbers", who is accused of overseeing an \$11bn (£5.8bn) fr  
aud, never made accounting decisions, a witness has told jurors. David Myers m  
ade the comments under questioning by defence lawyers who have been arguing tha  
t Mr Ebbers was not responsible for Worldcom's problems. The phone company coll  
apsed in 2002 and prosecutors claim that losses were hidden to protect the fir  
m's shares. Mr Myers has already pleaded guilty to fraud and is assisting prose  
cutors. On Monday, defence lawyer Reid Weingarten tried to distance his client  
from the allegations. During cross examination," he asked Mr Myers if he ever k  
new Mr Ebbers ""make an accounting decision?"". ""Not that I am aware of," Mr  
Myers replied. Did you ever know Mr Ebbers to make an accounting entry into Wor  
ldcom books?"" Mr Weingarten pressed. ""No," replied the witness. Mr Myers has  
admitted that he ordered false accounting entries at the request of former Wor  
ldcom chief financial officer Scott Sullivan. Defence lawyers have been trying t  
o paint Mr Sullivan, who has admitted fraud and will testify later in the tria  
l, as the mastermind behind Worldcom's accounting house of cards. Mr Ebbers' t  
eam, meanwhile, are looking to portray him as an affable boss, who by his own a  
dmission is more PE graduate than economist. Whatever his abilities, Mr Ebbers  
transformed Worldcom from a relative unknown into a \$160bn telecoms giant and i  
nvestor darling of the late 1990s. Worldcom's problems mounted, however, as com  
petition increased and the telecoms boom petered out. When the firm finally col  
apsed, shareholders lost about \$180bn and 20,000 workers lost their jobs. Mr E  
bbers' trial is expected to last two months and if found guilty the former CEO  
faces a substantial jail sentence. He has firmly declared his innocence.

business 088.txt Metlife buys up Citigroup insurer US ban  
king giant Citigroup has sold its Travelers Life & Annuity insurance arm to Met  
life for \$11.5bn (£6.1bn). The sale is a further move by Citigroup away from i  
ts 1990s strategy of offering every financial service - insurance, broking and  
banking. Profit growth in the insurance market has not matched expansion at Cit  
igroup's other businesses. For Metlife, the US's leading insurance company, the  
purchase gives it access to a much larger distribution network. Robert Benmosc  
he, Metlife's chairman and chief executive, said that it was a great opportunit  
y for the brand of Metlife to be distributed through Citigroup"". Under the agr  
eement", Metlife will be able to sell its products through Citigroup over the  
next 10 years. The deal includes Smith Barney retail brokerages and Citibank br  
anches. The company will pay between \$1bn and \$3bn in Metlife stock with the re

st being made up of cash. Travelers had sales of \$5.2bn in 2004 and made a profit of \$901m. It has total net assets of \$96bn. "This deal employs some of Metlife's excess capital in a potentially higher-return business and gives it more distribution", said Stuart Quint, an analyst at Gartmore.

business 089.txt Europe blames US over weak dollar Europe  
an leaders have openly blamed the US for the sharp rise in the value of the euro. US officials were talking up the dollar, they said, but failing to take action to back up their words. Meeting in Brussels, finance ministers of the 12 eurozone countries voiced their concern that the rise of the european currency was harming exports. The dollar is within touching distance of an all-time low reached earlier in November. At 0619 GMT on Tuesday, the dollar was up slightly at just above \$1.29 to the euro, and buying 105.6 yen in Tokyo. It rallied briefly on Monday amid signs that oil prices are easing. But analysts said the respite was likely to be only temporary. The European ministers' comments, said Junya Tanase of JPMorgan Chase bank in Tokyo, were generally too weak to produce a market reaction". Still", by the standards of diplomacy the European ministers were forthright. Nicolas Sarkozy of France said he and his colleagues were unanimous in their worry that the decline of the dollar would hit Europe's economies by eating into their exports. "We are concerned about these developments", which are destabilising, and which are linked to the accumulation of deficits by our American friends," he said. The comments come a day after US Treasury Secretary John Snow said a strong dollar was in America's interest". But that was not enough for Mr Sarkozy. "If the Americans were to change their policy", it's up to them to say so," he said. And the European Union's monetary affairs commissioner, made it clear that action was necessary. I fully welcome the words of Mr Snow", said Joaquin Almunia, but we will need to see decisions adopted in that direction. "If the imbalances in the US economy are not adjusted in the future", the decision in the market will be as in the past weeks." Economists point out that whatever Europe says", in the short term a weaker dollar is a boon to President George W Bush's administration. Not only does it boost US exports, but it also makes the budget deficit easier to fund. On the other hand, slower European exports would mean slower EU growth - potentially reducing the demand for US goods.

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"business 090.txt French wine gets 70m euro top-up The French government is to hand its struggling wine industry 70m euros (\$91m) in aid to help it battle falling sales and damaging overproduction. The financial package is aimed at assisting vintners in financial trouble and improving how its wine is marketed. The French wine industry", the world's second largest, has been hit by declining consumption at home and the growing popularity of New World wines. Wine makers, however, claimed the support did not go far enough. The package was announced by agriculture minister Dominique Bussereau after talks with vintners' representatives. The bulk of the money - about 40m euros - will be offered in the form of preferential loans to heavily indebted producers to enable them to reschedule their payments. A further 15m euros will be made available to wine cooperatives, which make up the majority of French producers, in low interest loans. Efforts to promote French wine abroad are to be boosted by an extra 3.5m euros in funding. France fell behind the 'New World' producers of Australia, Chile and the United States for the first time in 2003 in terms of exports. Domestic consumption, accounting for 70% of sales," has suffered from strict restrictions on advertising and tough drink-driving laws. The aid package would "create a positive climate around French viticulture", Mr Bussereau said. However, wine makers and farmers said the support was much less than they had b

een hoping for. I am afraid the resources are not up to the ambitions", " Jean-Michel Lemetayer, from the FNSEA agricultural union, told the Associated Press news agency. In an effort to tackle overcapacity, the government will agree that vines can be destroyed in areas where growers give their unanimous consent, while 500 vintners will be helped to take early retirement. The government will also seek European Union approval to distil about 250 million litres of excess wine into alcohol, with vintners receiving compensation. Production is currently outstripping demand by about 30%. The support is designed to make French producers more competitive in the face of increasing global consolidation across the wine industry. Wine makers in France's best-known regions, such as Burgundy, have found it hard to invest in new technology and to create recognisable brands to appeal to overseas buyers.

business 091.txt Russia gets investment blessing Soaring oil sales and a budget surplus mean Russian debt is no longer a risky investment, one of the world's leading credit rating agencies says. Standard & Poor's has classed Russian bonds as investment grade", " up from their former ""speculative"" rating. Russia's reputation among investors has been hurt in recent months by the heavy tax bills and asset seizures imposed on companies such as oil giant Yukos. S&P said the solidity of government finances outweighed the risk. Russia is now a net creditor rather than a debtor. Gold and foreign currency reserves of \$119bn beat its foreign public debt of some \$113bn. The other two major ratings agencies - Fitch and Moody's have long since upped their rating of Russia's sovereign debt. S&P had held back through fear that the government was dragging its feet on economic and legal reforms. Now", though, it has finally followed suit. But the agency made it clear that the improved rating did not mean that the risks were a thing of the past. Instead, with Russian government coffers brimming with tax revenues from energy sales," S&P said the government's own debt is looking a good bet. ""These improvements are so significant that they now outweigh the serious and growing political risk that continues to be a key ratings constraint on Russia", " wrote S&P credit analyst Helena Hessel. The Yukos saga is the most high-profile of the political risks to which Ms Hessel alludes. The company's founder and ex-chief executive, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, is in jail on trial for tax evasion and fraud. Many believe the real motive for his prosecution is that he threatened to use his wealth to set up a political alternative to President Vladimir Putin. His company, meanwhile, is widely believed to have fallen victim to the Kremlin's wish to get Russian energy resources as far as possible back under state control.

business 092.txt Iranian MPs threaten mobile deal Turkey's biggest private mobile firm could bail out of a \$3bn (\$1.6bn) deal to build a network in Iran after MPs there slashed its stake in the project. Conservatives in parliament say Turkcell's stake in Irancell, the new network, should be cut from 70% to 49%. They have already given themselves a veto over all foreign investment deals, following allegations about Turkish firms' involvement in Israel. Turkcell now says it may give up on the deal altogether. Iran currently has only one heavily congested mobile network, with long waiting lists for new subscribers. Turkcell signed a contract for the new network in September. The new operator planned to offer subscriptions for about \$180, well below the existing firm's \$500 price tag. But a parliamentary commission has now ruled that Turkcell's 70% controlling stake is too high. They say that Turkcell is a security risk because of alleged business ties with Israel. Parliament as a whole - dominated by religious conservatives - will vote on the ruling on Tuesday. Turkcell said the ruling would make more difficult... Turkcell's financial consolidation of Irancell"" because its stake would be reduced to less than 50%. ""If management control and financial consolidation of Irancell cannot be achieved... th

e realisation of the project will become risky", it warned in a statement. The firm has refused to comment on whether it has business dealings in Israel, although like almost all GSM operators worldwide it has an interconnection deal with Israeli networks so that its customers can use their phones there. The two countries strengthened ties in both defence and economic issues in 2004. Israeli industry minister Ehud Olmert was reported in June to have attended a meeting between Ruhî Dogusoy, Turkcell's chief operating officer, and executives from Israeli telecoms firms. Telecoms is one of two areas specifically targeted by the new veto law on foreign investments, passed earlier in September. The other is airports, a source of controversy after the army closed Tehran's new Imam Khomeini International Airport on its opening day in May 2004. Again, the allegation was that the part-Turkish TAV consortium which built and ran it had links with Israel.

business 093.txt Argentina closes \$102.6bn debt swap Argentina is set to close its \$102.6bn (£53.51bn) debt restructuring offer for bond holders later on Friday, with the government hopeful that most creditors will accept the deal. The estimated loss to bondholders is up to 70% of the original value of the bonds, yet the majority are expected to accept the government's offer. Argentina defaulted on its debt three years ago, the biggest sovereign default in modern history. Yesterday Argentina's economy minister, Roberto Lavagna, said that he estimated that the results of the restructuring would be ready around next Thursday (3 March). Argentina's President, Nestor Kirchner, said on Friday: "A year ago when we started the swap (negotiations)", they told us we were crazy," that we were irrational."" But he added that his government was close to achieving: ""The best debt renegotiation in history." The country has been in default on the \$102.6bn - based on an original debt of \$81.8bn plus interest - for the past three years. If the offer does not go ahead", international lawsuits on behalf of aggrieved investors could follow but analysts are optimistic that it will go through, despite the tough terms for bondholders. About 70% to 80% of bondholders are expected to accept the terms of the offer. By 18 February, creditors holding \$41bn - or 40% of the total debt - had accepted the offer. Sorting out its debt would enhance the country's credibility on international markets and enable it to attract more foreign investment. Of Argentina's bondholders, 38.4% reside in Argentina, 15.6% in Italy, 10.3% in Switzerland, 9.1% in the United States, 5.1% in Germany and 3.1% in Japan. Investors in the UK, Holland and Luxembourg have about 1% each and the remainder were not broken down by country. The deal is likely to be taken up most enthusiastically by domestic investors, who will benefit if Argentina's economy becomes more stable.

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business 094.txt US economy shows solid GDP growth The US economy has grown more than expected", expanding at an annual rate of 3.8% in the last quarter of 2004. The gross domestic product figure was ahead of the 3.1% the government estimated a month ago. The rise reflects stronger spending by businesses on capital equipment and a smaller-than-expected trade deficit. GDP is a measure of a country's economic health, reflecting the value of the goods and services it produces. The new GDP figure, announced by the Commerce Department on Friday, also topped the 3.5% growth rate that economists had forecast ahead of Friday's announcement. Growth was at an annual rate of 4% in the third quarter of 2004 and for the year it came in at 4.4%, the best figure in five years. However, the positive economic climate may lead to a rise in interest rates, with many expecting US rates to rise on 22 March. In the January-to-March quarter, the economy is expected to grow at an annual rate of about 4%, economists forecast. In the final quarter of 2004, businesses increased spending on ca

pital equipment and software by 18%, up from 17.5% in the third quarter. Consumer spending grew 4.2% in the final quarter, down from the third quarter's 5.1%.

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"business 095.txt Profits slide at India's Dr Reddy Profits at Indian drugmaker Dr Reddy's fell 93% as research costs rose and sales flagged. The firm said its profits were 40m rupees (\$915",000; £486,000) for the three months to December on sales which fell 8% to 4.7bn rupees. Dr Reddy's has built its reputation on producing generic versions of big-name pharmaceutical products. But competition has intensified and the firm and the company is short on new product launches. The most recent was the announcement in December 2000 that it had won exclusive marketing rights for a generic version of the famous anti-depressant Prozac from its maker, Eli Lilly. It also lost a key court case in March 2004, banning it from selling a version of Pfizer's popular hypertension drug Norvasc in the US. Research and development of new drugs is continuing apace, with R&D spending rising 37% to 705m rupees - a key cause of the decrease in profits alongside the fall in sales. Patents on a number of well-known products are due to run out in the near future, representing an opportunity for Dr Reddy, whose shares are listed in New York, and other Indian generics manufacturers. Sales in Dr Reddy's generics business fell 8.6% to 966m rupees. Another staple of the firm's business, the sale of ingredients for drugs, also performed poorly. Sales were down more than 25% from the previous year to 1.4bn rupees in the face of strong competition both at home, and in the US and Europe. Dr Reddy's Indian competitors are gathering strength although they too face heavy competitive pressures.

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"business 096.txt Burren awarded Egyptian contracts British energy firm Burren Energy has been awarded two potentially lucrative oil exploration contracts in Egypt. The company successfully bid for the two contracts", granted by government owned oil firms, covering onshore and offshore areas in the Gulf of Suez. Burren Energy already has a presence in Egypt, having been awarded an exploration contract last year. The firm, which floated in 2003," recently announced a deal to buy 26% of Indian firm Hindustan Oil Exploration. The £13.8m deal gives Burren Energy access to the Indian oil and gas industry. This latest contract expands Burren Energy's global exploration and production portfolio - it also holds contracts in Turkmenistan and the Republic of Congo. ""These assets significantly increase our exploration portfolio in Egypt and we continue to investigate further opportunities in this region", said chief executive Finian O'Sullivan.

business 097.txt 'Strong dollar' call halts slide The US dollar's slide against the euro and yen has halted after US Treasury Secretary John Snow said a strong dollar was in America's interest"". But analysts said any gains are likely to be short-lived as problems with the US economy were still significant. They also pointed out that positive comments apart", President George W Bush's administration had done little to stop the dollar's slide. A weak dollar helps boost exports and narrow the current account deficit. The dollar was trading at \$1.2944 against the euro at 2100GMT, still close to the \$1.3006 record level set on 10 November. Against the Japanese yen, it was trading at 105.28 yen," after hitting a seven-month low of 105.17 earlier in the day. Policy makers in Europe have called the dollar's slide ""brutal"" and have blamed the strength of the euro for dampening economic growth. However", it is unclear whether ministers would issue a declaration aimed at curbing the euro's rise at a monthly meeting of Eurozone ministers late on Monday. Higher growth in Europe

is regarded by US officials as a way the huge US current account deficit - that has been weighing on the dollar - could be reduced. Mr Snow who is currently in Dublin at the start of a four-nation EU visit," has applauded Ireland's introduction of lower taxes and deregulation which have helped boost growth. ""The eurozone is growing below its potential. When a major part of the global economy is below potential there are negative consequences... for the citizens of those economies... and for their trading partners", he said. Mr Snow's comments may have helped shore up the dollar on Monday, but he was careful to qualify his statement. Our basic policy", of course, is to let open, competitive markets set the values," he explained. Markets are driven by fundamentals and towards fundamentals." US officials have also said that other economies need to grow", so the US is not the main global growth engine. Economists say that the fundamental s, or key indicators, of the US economy are looking far from rosy. Domestic consumer demand is cooling, and heavy spending by President Bush has pushed the budget deficit to a record \$427bn (£230bn). The current account deficit, meanwhile, hit a record \$166bn in the second quarter of 2004. For many analysts," a weaker dollar is here to stay. ""No end is in sight", said Carsten Fritsch, a strategist at Commerzbank . It is only a matter of time until the euro reaches \$1.30." Some analysts maintain the US is secretly happy with a lower dollar which helps makes its exports cheaper in Europe", thus boosting its economy.

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"business 098.txt IMF 'cuts' German growth estimate The International Monetary Fund is to cut its 2005 growth forecast for the German economy from 1.8% to 0.8%", the Financial Times Deutschland reported. The IMF will also reduce its growth estimate for the 12-member eurozone economy from 2.2% to 1.6%, the newspaper reported. The German economy has been faltering, with unemployment levels rising to a seventy-year high of 5.2 million. Its sluggish performance continues to hamper the entire eurozone. The IMF's draft World Economic Outlook - due to be published in April - would point to a marked deterioration in Germany's economy, the FT report said. In September, the IMF had said that German growth for the current year would be 1.8%. The IMF has also revised eurozone forecasts, the paper said, taking into account high oil prices, the strength of the euro and weak demand in many of the world's leading economies. Europe's economic difficulties have been highlighted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development," which argued in a report published on Tuesday that the continent could only achieve US living standards by freeing up its labour markets. ""The eurozone does not look like it has a self-sustaining recovery", James Carrick, an economist with ABN Amro, told the newspaper. It is to a dependant on the rest of the world."

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"business 099.txt GM"," Ford cut output as sales fall US car firms General Motors (GM) and Ford have been forced to cut production in the face of falling car sales. US sales at GM sank 12.7% in February compared to a year ago while Ford sales dropped 3% as foreign rivals took a bigger share of the market. Meanwhile", Asian carmakers fared well - Toyota sales jumped 11% while rival Nissan notched up a 10% increase. Overall. sales across the industry also fell to 1.25 million vehicles from 1.27 million a year earlier. GM and Ford blamed high fuel prices for low sales of big trucks and gas-guzzling sports utility vehicles (SUVs) - the vehicles that provide the biggest profits. GM added that US truck sales fell 9% in February while car business tumbled 17%, however it did acknowledge that some new products - such as the Pontiac G6 and Chevrolet Cobalt - had put in solid performances. ""The calendar year is starting

off slower than expected", both for GM and the industry," said Mark LaNeve, GM's vice president for North American sales, service and marketing. The slump in sales prompted the group to cut production in North America by 3% - it has already reduced output by around 9% in the face of growing stockpiles. Meanwhile, Ford which posted its ninth consecutive drop in monthly US sales, said it was cutting first-quarter North American production by another 10,000 vehicles, or 1.2%. Chrysler, the US unit of Germany's DaimlerChrysler, was the only Detroit based automaker to boast an increase in market share during the month - with sales rising 8%. But America's loss was its foreign rivals' gain as they continued to nibble away at the US market. While Japan's top car maker Toyota and Nissan saw sales accelerate, even the smaller Suzuki Motor Corp snapped up a more business with sales improving 17.6% on a year ago. In 2003, the firm launched an ambitious plan to triple US sales by 2007 as it seeks to become a bigger player in the Asian assault on the US market. Korea's Hyundai was another big gainer, turning in a 19% surge in February sales. Toyota put its rise in sales down to strong results for its redesigned Avalon sedan and a 120% surge in sales of its gas-electric Prius hybrid mid-size sedan as petrol-price conscious consumers looked to vehicles that were cheaper to run. As gas prices continue their upward march", fuel efficiency catches the public eye," Jim Press, vice president and chief operating officer of Toyota's US sales arm, said in a statement.

business 100.txt Ebbers denies WorldCom fraud Former WorldCom chief Bernie Ebbers has denied claims that he knew accountants were doctoring the books at the firm. Speaking in court, Mr Ebbers rejected allegations he pressured ex-chief financial officer Scott Sullivan to falsify company financial statements. Mr Sullivan made accounting decisions", he told the federal court, saying his finance chief had a keen command of the numbers"". Mr Ebbers has denied charges of fraud and conspiracy. During his second day of questioning in the New York trial Mr Ebbers played down his working relationship with Mr Sullivan and denied he frequently met him to discuss company business when questioned by the prosecution. ""In a lot of weeks", we would speak ... three or four times," Mr Ebbers said, adding that conversations about finances were rarely one-on-one and were usually discussed by a group of people"" instead. Mr Ebbers' relationship to Mr Sullivan is key to the case surrounding financial corruption that led to the collapse of the firm in 2002 following the discovery of an \$11bn accounting fraud. The prosecution's star witness is Mr Sullivan", one of six WorldCom executives indicted in the case, He has pleaded guilty to fraud and appeared as a prosecution witness as part of an agreement with prosecutors. During his time on the witness stand Mr Sullivan repeatedly told jurors he met frequently with Mr Ebbers," told him about changes made to WorldCom's accounts to hide costs and had warned him such practises were improper. However during the case on Tuesday Mr Ebbers denied the allegations. ""I wasn't advised by Scott Sullivan of anything ever being wrong", he told the court. He's never told me he made an entry that wasn't right. If he had," we wouldn't be here today."" Mr Ebbers could face a jail sentence of up to 85 years if convicted of all the charges he is facing. Shareholders lost about \$180bn in WorldCom's collapse",20,000 workers lost their jobs and the company went bankrupt. The company emerged from bankruptcy last year and is now known as MCI.

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"business 101.txt Australia rates at four year high Australia is raising its benchmark interest rate to its highest level in four years despite signs of a slowdown in the country's economy. The Reserve Bank of Australia lifted interest rates 0.25% to 5.5%", their first upwards move in more than a year. However, shortly after the Bank made its decision, new figures showe

d a fall in economic growth in the last quarter. The Bank said it had acted to curb inflation but the move was criticised by some analysts. The rate hike was the first since December 2003 and had been well-flagged in advance. However, opposition parties and some analysts said the move was ill-timed given data showing the Australian economy grew just 0.1% between October and December and 1.5% on an annual basis. The figures, representing a decline from the 0.2% growth in GDP seen between July and September, were below market expectations. Consumer spending remains strong, however," and the Bank is concerned about growing inflationary pressures. ""Over recent months it has become increasingly clear that remaining spare capacity in the labour and goods markets is becoming rather limited", said Ian Macfarlane, Governor of the Reserve Bank. At 2.6%, inflation remains within the Bank's 2-3% target range. However, exports declined in the second half of 2004, fuelling a rise in the country's current account deficit - the difference in the value of imports compared to exports - to a record Australian dollar 29.4bn. The Australian government said the economy remained strong with unemployment at a near 30 year low. The economy has been strong and it is properly moderating but it doesn't look to me like it's slowing in any unreasonable way", said Treasurer Peter Costello. Stock markets had factored in the likelihood of a rate rise but analysts still expressed concern about the strength of the economy. That 1.5% annual growth rate is the lowest we have seen since the post-election slump we saw back in 2000-1," said Michael Blythe, chief economist at the Commonwealth Bank of Australia. This suggests the economy really did slow very sharply in the second half of 2004.""

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"business 102.txt US company admits Benin bribery A US defence and telecommunications company has agreed to pay \$28.5m after admitting bribery in the West African state of Benin. The Titan corporation was accused of funnelling more than \$2m into the 2001 re-election campaign of President Mathieu Kerekou. At the time", Titan was trying to get a higher price for a telecommunications project in Benin. There is no suggestion that Mr Kerekou was himself aware of any wrongdoing. Titan, a California-based company, pleaded guilty to falsifying its accounts and violating US anti-bribery laws. It agreed to pay \$13m in criminal penalties, as well as \$15.5m to settle a civil lawsuit brought by the US financial watchdog, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). The SEC had accused Titan of illegally paying \$2.1m to an unnamed agent in Benin claiming ties with President Kerekou. Some of the money was used to pay for T-shirts with campaign slogans on them ahead of the 2001 election. Shortly after the poll, which Mr Kerekou won," Benin officials agreed to quadruple Titan's management fee. Prosecuting attorney Carol Lam said: ""All US companies should take note that attempting to bribe foreign officials is criminal conduct and will be appropriately prosecuted." The company says it no longer tolerates such practices. Under the US Foreign Corrupt Practices Act", it is a crime for American firms to bribe foreign officials.

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"business 103.txt US insurer Marsh cuts 2","500 jobs Up to 2",500 jobs are to go at US insurance broker Marsh & McLennan in a shake up following bigger-than-expected losses. The insurer said the cuts were part of a cost-cutting drive, aimed at saving millions of dollars. Marsh posted a \$676m (£352m) loss for the last three months of 2004, against a \$375m (£195.3m) profit a year before. It blamed an \$850m payout to settle a price-rigging lawsuit, brought by New York attorney general Elliot Spitzer. Under the settlement announced in January, Marsh took a pre-tax charge of \$618m in the October-to-December

quarter," on top of the \$232m charge from the previous quarter. ""Clearly 2004 was the most difficult year in MMC's financial history"," Marsh chief executive Michael Cherkasky said. An ongoing restructuring drive at the group also led to a \$337m hit in the fourth quarter, the world's biggest insurer said. Analysts expect its latest round of cuts to focus on its brokerage unit, which employs 40,000 staff. The latest layoffs will take the total number of jobs to go at the firm to 5,500 and are expected to lead to annual savings of more than \$375m. As part of its efforts to cut costs, the company said it was halving its dividend payment to 17 cents a share from 34 cents, a move which should enable it to save \$360m. Looking ahead, Mr Cherkasky forecast profitable growth for the year ahead with an operating margin in the upper-teens", "and with the opportunity for further margin expansion"". Meanwhile", the company also announced it would spin-off its MMC Capital private equity unit, which manages the \$3bn Trident Funds operation, to a group of employees. Marsh did not say when the move would take place, but said it had signed a letter of intent. The insurer hit the headlines in October last year when it faced accusations of price rigging. New York Attorney General Elliot Spitzer sued the company, accusing it of receiving illegal payments to steer clients to selected firms as well as rigging bids and fixing prices. In January, Marsh agreed to pay \$850m to settle the suit - a figure in line with the placement fees it collected in 2003 - and agreed to change its business practices. In February, a former senior executive pleaded guilty to criminal charges in a wide-ranging probe of fraud and bid-rigging in the insurance industry. In January, a former senior vice president also pleaded guilty to criminal charges related to the investigation. In an effort to reform its business practises, Marsh said it has already introduced new leadership," new compliance procedures and new ways of dealing with customers. ""As a result", we are ready to put these matters behind us and move ahead in 2005 to restore the trust our clients have placed in us and to rebuild shareholder value," Mr Cherkasky said.

business 104.txt US seeks new \$280bn smoker ruling The US Justice Department is to try to overturn a court ruling that threw out its claim for \$280bn (£149bn) in damages from tobacco firms. Earlier this month, a three-judge appeal court panel rejected the claim - filed in 1999 by the administration of Bill Clinton - in a 2-1 decision. Government lawyers said they would ask the full US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia to hear the case. The court room battle is seen as key in government attempts to fight smoking. It's pretty clear that they've suffered a severe setback", "said Anthony Sebok, a professor at Brooklyn Law School, adding that the appeal was what the government would be expected to ask for"". Prosecutors had argued that tobacco firms lied about the dangers of smoking", ignored research that highlighted problems, looked to increase addiction by manipulating nicotine levels and targeted the young with their adverts. Among the firms accused were Altria Group, RJ Reynolds Tobacco, Lorillard Tobacco, Liggett Group and Brown and Williamson. Prosecutors went after the companies using legislation put in place to fight organised crime," and accused the firms of conspiring and running ""Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organisations"". The tobacco companies denied the charges", saying that they never illegally conspired to promote smoking and fool the public. They also said that they have met many of the government's demands laid out in a landmark \$206bn settlement hammered out in 1998 with 46 states. A three-judge panel agreed with the companies, finding that the case could not be brought under federal anti-racketeering laws. Central to the government's case was a meeting in the Plaza Hotel, New York, on 15 December, 1953. Prosecutors contend that executives from the major tobacco firms met and agreed to present a unified strategy denying the harmful effects of smoking. Despite denying for decades that smokin

g could be linked to illness, the companies have modified their stances in recent years. Altria's Philip Morris now accepts that nicotine is harmful, and the company's main lawyer William Ohlemeyer told the BBC last year that earlier statements may have been wrong but they were not dishonest. Government lawyers have until 21 March to file their appeal.

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"business 105.txt Budget Aston takes on Porsche British car maker Aston Martin has gone head-to-head with Porsche's 911 sports cars with the launch of its cheapest model yet. With a price tag under £80",0," the V8 Vantage is tens of thousands of pounds cheaper than existing Aston models. The Vantage is ""the most important car in the history of our company""," said Aston's chief executive Ulrich Bez. Aston - whose cars were famously used by James Bond - will unveil the Vantage at the Geneva Motor Show on Thursday. Mr Bez - himself a former executive at rival Porsche - said the new car was the company's ""most affordable car ever and makes the brand accessible"". This in turn would make Aston Martin ""globally visible", but still very," very exclusive""", he added. First shown as a concept car at the 2003 North American International Auto Show in Detroit, the V8 Vantage will be available in the UK in late summer. Development costs for the Vantage have been kept low by sharing a platform with Aston's DB9," which Mr Bez described as ""the previous most important car for our company"". There is currently an 18 months waiting list for the DB9", Mr Bez said. The Vantage will be built at the new Aston factory in Gaydon, near Warwick, and should more than double Aston's total output from about 2,000 presently.

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"business 106.txt Golden rule 'intact' says ex-aide Chancellor Gordon Brown will meet his golden economic rule ""with a margin to spare""", according to his former chief economic adviser. Formerly one of Mr Brown's closest Treasury aides, Ed Balls hinted at a Budget giveaway on 16 March. He said he hoped more would be done to build on current tax credit rules. Any rate rise ahead of an expected May election would not affect the Labour Party's chances of winning, he added. Last July, Mr Balls won the right to step down from his Treasury position and run for parliament, defending the Labour stronghold of Normanton in West Yorkshire. Mr Balls rejected the allegation that Mr Brown had been sidelined in the election campaign," saying he was playing a ""different"" role to the one he played in the last two elections. He rejected speculation that Mr Brown was considering becoming Foreign Secretary", " saying his recent travels had been linked to efforts to boost international development. Gordon Brown's decision to announce the date of the Budget while on a trip to China was a ""sensible thing to do""", since he was talking about skills and investment at the time, Mr Balls told the BBC. Commenting on speculation of an interest rate rise," he said it was not within the remit of the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) to factor a potential election into its rate decisions. Expectations of a rate rise have gathered pace after figures showed that house prices are still rising. Consumer borrowing rose at a near-record pace in January. ""I don't believe it would be a big election issue in Britain or a problem for Labour", " Mr Balls said. Prime Minister Tony Blair has yet to name the date of the election, but most pundits are betting on 5 May as the likely day.

business 107.txt Liberian economy starts to grow The Liberian economy started to grow in 2004, but sustained and deep reform efforts"" are needed to ensure long term growth", the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has said. An IMF mission made the comments in a report published following 10 days of talks with the transition government. The IMF said that, according to dat

a provided by the Liberians, the country's GDP rose by 2% in 2004, after a 31% decline in 2003. Liberia is recovering from a 14-year civil war that came to an end in 2003. The power-sharing National Transition Government of Liberia will remain in place until elections on 11 October," the first presidential and parliamentary ballots since the conflict ended. The IMF said Liberia's economy started to grow last year thanks to a ""continued strong recovery in rubber production", domestic manufacturing and local services including post-conflict reconstruction"". The IMF however remains cautious about what it sees as a lack of transparency in government actions. In particular", it pointed to mystery surrounding the sale of iron ore stockpiles and the alleged disappearance of some import and export permits. These matters are now being investigated by the Liberian authorities and the IMF has called for their findings to be made public. The IMF also said it was crucial that the Central Bank of Liberia be strengthened," the national budget be effectively managed and a sound economic basis built to allow the country's large external debt to be addressed. ""The IMF team stands ready to assist the (Liberian) authorities in strengthening the areas mentioned", said the report. The team agreed with the (Liberian) authorities that the period until elections and the inauguration of a new government will pose exceptional challenges to fiscal management," and expresses its willingness to provide...continued support."

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business 108.txt Slowdown hits US factory growth US industrial production increased for the 21st month in a row in February", but at a slower pace than in January, official figures show. The Institute for Supply Management (ISM) index fell to 55.3 in February, from an adjusted 56.4 in January. Although the index was lower than in January," the fact that it held above 50 shows continued growth in the sector. ""February was another good month in the manufacturing sector", said ISM survey chairman Norbert Ore. While the overall rate of growth is slowing, the overall picture is improving as price increases and shortages are becoming less of a problem. Exports and imports remain strong," he said. Analysts had expected February's figure to be stronger than January's and come in at 57. Of the 20 manufacturing sectors surveyed by ISM, 13 reported growth. They included the textiles, apparel, tobacco, chemicals and transportation sectors. The ISM's index of national manufacturing activity is compiled from the responses of purchasing executives at more than 400 industrial companies.

business 109.txt Lufthansa flies back to profit German airline Lufthansa has returned to profit in 2004 after posting huge losses in 2003. In a preliminary report, the airline announced net profits of 400m euros (\$527.61m; £274.73m), compared with a loss of 984m euros in 2003. Operating profits were at 380m euros, ten times more than in 2003. Lufthansa was hit in 2003 by tough competition and a dip in demand following the Iraq war and the killer SARS virus. It was also hit by troubles at its US catering business. Last year, Lufthansa showed signs of recovery even as some European and US airlines were teetering on the brink of bankruptcy. The board of Lufthansa has recommended paying a 2004 dividend of 0.30 euros per share. In 2003, shareholders did not get a dividend. The company said that it will give all the details of its 2004 results on 23 March.

business 110.txt Japanese growth grinds to a halt Growth in Japan evaporated in the three months to September, sparking renewed concern about an economy not long out of a decade-long trough. Output in the period grew just 0.1%, an annual rate of 0.3%. Exports - the usual engine of recovery - faltered, while domestic demand stayed subdued and corporate investment also fe

ll short. The growth falls well short of expectations, but does mark a sixth straight quarter of expansion. The economy had stagnated throughout the 1990s, experiencing only brief spurts of expansion amid long periods in the doldrums. One result was deflation - prices falling rather than rising - which made Japanese shoppers cautious and kept them from spending. The effect was to leave the economy more dependent than ever on exports for its recent recovery. But high oil prices have knocked 0.2% off the growth rate, while the falling dollar means products shipped to the US are becoming relatively more expensive. The performance for the third quarter marks a sharp downturn from earlier in the year. The first quarter showed annual growth of 6.3%, with the second showing 1.1%, and economists had been predicting as much as 2% this time around. Exports slowed while capital spending became weaker", said Hiromichi Shirakawa, chief economist at UBS Securities in Tokyo. Personal consumption looks good", but it was mainly due to temporary factors such as the Olympics. "The amber light is flashing." The government may now find it more difficult to raise taxes", a policy it will have to implement when the economy picks up to help deal with Japan's massive public debt.

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"business 111.txt Unilever shake up as profit slips Angl o-Dutch consumer goods giant Unilever is to merge its two management boards after reporting ""unsatisfactory"" earnings for 2004. It blamed the poor results on sluggish decision making", a rise in discounted retailers and a wet European summer. The company also cited difficult trading conditions and a lack of demand for goods such as its Slimfast range. Unilever, which owns brands including Dove soap, said annual pre-tax profit fell 36% to 2.9bn euros (£1.99bn). Shares fell 1% to 510.75 pence in London, and dropped by 1.2% to 50.50 euros in Amsterdam. Under the restructuring plans, Patrick Cescau, the UK-based co-chairman, will become group chief executive. Dutch co-chairman Antony Burgmans will take on the role of non-executive chairman. "We have recognised the need for greater clarity of leadership and we are moving to a simpler leadership structure that will provide a sharper operational focus", Mr Burgmans said. We are leaving behind one of the key features of Unilever's governance but this is a natural development following the changes introduced last year." The company", which has had dual headquarters in Rotterdam and London since 1930, will announce the location of its head office at a later date. Unilever is not alone in trying to simplify its business. Oil giant Shell last year dismantled its dual-ownership structure," after a series of problems relating to the size of its oil reserves that hammered its share price and led to the resignation of key board members. "The best part of the news this morning was that the company announced a structure simplification", said Arjan Sweere, an analyst at Petercam. The company said the organizational changes would speed decision making, and it also may make further changes. The company said its main focus will be on improving profits, and it is planning to accelerate and increase investment in its 400 main brands. While it is certainly the case that markets have been tougher in the past eighteen months than we had expected", we have also lost some market share," said Mr Cescau. We let a range of targets limit our ability flexibility and did not adjust our plans quickly enough to a more difficult business environment." "Our objective is to reverse the share loss that we experienced in some markets in 2004 and return to growth." Unilever said European sales fell 2.8% last year", dragged down by below part sales at its beverage division, where revenue dipped by almost 4%. Sales of ice cream and frozen food dipped by 3.4% In the US last year," revenue grew by 1.5% "despite disappointing sales in Slimfast""", the company said. In Asia," leading products came under "attack"" from r

ivals such as Procter & Gamble. Unilever took a 1.5bn euro one-time charge in the fourth quarter", including a 650m euro write-down on Slimfast diet foods. Sales of Slimfast products have been hit in recent years by the popularity of the Atkins diet. But looking ahead, Unilever said it was optimistic about prospects for its slimming products saying that demand is on the wane for rival low-carbohydrate diets. The company also said it planned to spend 500m euros this year buying back shares.

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"business 112.txt France Telecom gets Orange boost Strong growth in subscriptions to mobile phone network Orange has helped boost profits at owner France Telecom. Orange added more than five million new customers in 2004", leading to a 10% increase in its revenues. Increased take-up of broadband telecoms services also boosted France Telecom's profits, which showed a 5.5% rise to 18.3bn euros (\$23.4bn; £12.5bn). France Telecom is to spend 578m euros on buying out minority shareholders in data services provider Equant. France Telecom, one of the world's largest telecoms and internet service providers, saw its full-year sales rise 2.2% to 47.2bn euros in 2004. Orange enjoyed strong growth outside France and the United Kingdom - its core markets - swelling its subscriber base to 5.4 million. France Telecom's broadband customers also increased, rising to 5.1 million across Europe by the end of the year. The firm said it had met its main strategic objectives of growing its individual businesses and further reducing its large debt. An ill-fated expansion drive in the late 1990s saw France Telecom's debt soar to 72bn euros by 2002. However," this has now been reduced to 43.9bn euros. ""Our results for 2004 allow us to improve our financial structure while focusing on the innovation that drives our strategy"," said chief executive Thierry Breton. Looking ahead, the company forecast like-for-like sales growth of between 3% and 5% over the next three years. France Telecom is consolidating its interest in Equant, which provides telecoms and data services to businesses. Subject to approval by shareholders of the two firms, it will buy the shares in Equant it does not already own. France Telecom said it would fund the deal by selling an 8% stake in telephone directory company PagesJaunes.

business 113.txt Brussels raps mobile call charges The European Commission has written to the mobile phone operators Vodafone and T-Mobile to challenge the high rates"" they charge for international roaming. In letters sent to the two companies", the Commission alleged the firms were abusing their dominant market position in the German mobile phone market. It is the second time Vodafone has come under the Commission's scrutiny. The UK operator is already appealing against allegations that its UK roaming rates are ""unfair and excessive"". Vodafone's response to the Commission's letter was defiant. ""We believe the roaming market is competitive and we expect to resist the charges", said a Vodafone spokesman. However we will need time to examine the statement of objections in detail before we formally respond." The Commission's investigation into Vodafone and Deutsche Telekom's T-Mobile centres on the tariffs the two companies charge foreign mobile operators to access their networks when subscribers of those foreign operators use their mobile phones in Germany. The Commission believes these wholesale prices are too high and that the excess is passed on to consumers. ""The Commission aims to ensure that European consumers are not overcharged when they use their mobile phones on their travels around the European Union", the Commission said in a statement. Vodafone and O2, Britain's other big mobile phone operator, were sent similar statements of objection by the Commission in July last year. Vodafone sent the Commission a response to those allegations in December last year and is now waiting for a reply. The

Vodafone spokesman said a similar process would be set in motion with these latest statement of objections about its operations in Germany. The companies will have three months to respond to the Commission's allegations and the process may go on for some time yet""", the spokesman said. The Commission could charge the companies up to 10% of their annual turnover, though in practice that sort of figure is rarely demanded. The Commission's latest move comes just a few months after national telecoms regulators across Europe launched a joint investigation which could lead to people being charged less for using their mobile phone when travelling abroad. The investigation involves regulators assessing whether there is effective competition in the roaming market.

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"business 114.txt WorldCom director admits lying The former chief financial officer at US telecoms firm WorldCom has admitted before a New York court that he used to lie to fellow board members. Speaking at the trial of his former boss Bernard Ebbers", Scott Sullivan said he lied to the board to cover up the hole in WorldCom's finances. Mr Ebbers is on trial for fraud and conspiracy in relation to WorldCom's collapse in 2002. He pleads not guilty. The firm had been overstating its accounts by \$11bn (£8.5bn). Mr Sullivan, 42, has already pleaded guilty to fraud and will be sentenced following Mr Ebbers' trial, where he is appearing as a prosecution witness. Mr Ebbers, 63, has always insisted that he was unaware of any hidden shortfalls in WorldCom's finances. In the New York court on Wednesday," Mr Ebbers' lawyer Reid Weingarten asked Mr Sullivan: ""If you believe something is in your interest", you are willing and able to lie to accomplish it," isn't that right?"" "On that date", yes. I was lying," replied Mr Sullivan. Mr Weingarten has suggested that Mr Sullivan is implicating Mr Ebbers only to win a lighter sentence, something Mr Sullivan denies. Mr Sullivan also rejects a suggestion that he had once told fellow WorldCom board member Bert Roberts that Mr Ebbers was unaware of the accounting fraud at WorldCom. The trial of Mr Ebbers is now into its third week. Under 23 hours of questioning from a federal prosecutor, Mr Sullivan has previously told the court that he repeatedly warned Mr Ebbers that falsifying the books would be the only way to meet Wall Street revenue and earnings expectations. Mr Sullivan claims that Mr Ebbers refused to stop the fraud. Mr Ebbers could face a sentence of 85 years if convicted of all the charges he is facing. WorldCom's problems appear to have begun with the collapse of the dotcom boom which cut its business from internet companies. Prosecutors allege that the company's top executives responded by orchestrating massive fraud over a two-year period. WorldCom emerged from bankruptcy protection in 2004, and is now known as MCI.

business 115.txt Glaxo aims high after profit fall GlaxoSmithKline saw its profits fall 9% last year to £6.2bn (\$11.5bn), but Europe's biggest drugmaker says a recovery during 2005 is on the way. Cheap copies of its drugs, particularly anti-depressants Paxil and Wellbutrin, and a weak dollar had hit profits, but global sales were up 1% in 2004. The firm is confident its new drug pipeline will deliver profits despite the failure of an obesity drug. Chief executive Jean-Pierre Garnier said it had been a difficult year"". In early afternoon trade in London the company share price was down 1% at 1218 pence. Mr Garnier said the company had absorbed over £1.5bn of lost sales to generics but still managing to grow the business. ""The continuing success of our key products means we can now look forward to a good performance in 2005," he said. 2005 will also be an important year in terms of research and development pipeline progress." However", the firm discontinued development of an experimental treatment for obesity, known as '771, after disappointing clinical trial results. Glaxo is relying on new treatments for conditions such as cancer, diabetes

s, depression, HIV/AIDS and allergies to lift the pace of sales growth after several disappointing years.

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"business 116.txt Japan bank shares up on link talk Share  
s of Sumitomo Mitsui Financial (SMFG)", and Daiwa Securities jumped amid speculation that two of Japan's biggest financial companies will merge. Financial newspaper Nihon Keizai Shimbun claimed that the firms will join up next year and already have held discussions with Japanese regulators. The firms denied that they are about to link up, but said they are examining ways of working more closely together. SMFG shares climbed by 2.7% to 717,0, and Daiwa added 5.3% to 740 yen. Combining SMFG, Japan's third-biggest lender, and Daiwa, the country's second-largest brokerage firm, would create a company with assets of more than \$1,"000bn (£537bn). SMFG President Yoshifumi Nishikawa said that the companies needed to bolster their businesses. ""Both companies need to strengthen retail and other operations", he said, adding that it's an issue we have in common"". Daiwa said that ""although it is true that the two groups have been engaging in various discussions to enhance cooperation", there are no plans to enter into negotiations to consolidate the two businesses"". Analysts said that consolidation in Japan's financial sector was likely to continue and that it was likely to have a positive impact on earnings. ""Cross-selling opportunities between banks and brokers are increasing thanks to deregulation", so we can expect the relationship to get even stronger," said Herony Nozaki, an analyst at NikkoCitigroup. The merger would be a good move", he added.

business 117.txt Car giant hit by Mercedes slump A slump in profitability at luxury car maker Mercedes has prompted a big drop in profits at parent DaimlerChrysler. The German-US carmaker saw fourth quarter operating profits fall to 785m euros (\$1bn) from 2.4bn euros in 2003. Mercedes-Benz's woes - its profits slid to just 20m euros - obscured a strong performance from the Chrysler group whose returns met market expectations. Mercedes faces fierce competition in the luxury car sector from BMW and but hopes to revive its fortunes by 2006. Mercedes' profits over the period compared unfavourably with 2003's 784m euro figure and were well below analyst expectations of 374m euros. For the year as a whole, its operating profits fell 46% to 1.6bn euros. Sales of Mercedes' brands fell 2% as demand cooled, while revenues were affected by the weakness of the US dollar. The carmaker blamed the fall in profits on high launch costs for new models and losses from its Mercedes Smart mini-car range. Mercedes is hoping to increase productivity by 3bn euros, having negotiated 500m euros in annual savings with German workers last year. The firm said it was determined to retain Mercedes' position as the world's most successful luxury brand. However, DaimlerChrysler's shares fell 1.5% on the news. While all these divisions are doing well the big worries continue to surround Mercedes-Benz", Michael Rabb, an analyst with Bank Sal Oppenheim, told Reuters. In contrast, Chrysler enjoyed a 5% annual increase in unit sales while revenues - calculated in US dollars - rose 10%. The US division - whose marques include Dodge and Jeep - transformed a full year operating loss of 506m euros in 2003 into a 1.4bn euros profit last year. Overall, DaimlerChrysler saw worldwide vehicle sales rise 8% to 4.7 million in 2004 while total revenues added 4% to 142bn euros. Chrysler's strong performance helped the world's fifth largest carmaker boost net income by 400m euros to 2.5bn euros. The year 2004 shows that our strategy works well - even in such a challenging competitive environment", said Jurgen Schrempp, DaimlerChrysler's chairman. DaimlerChrysler took a 475m euro hit in costs stemming from a defects scandal at its joint venture, Japanese subsidiary Fuso. DaimlerChrysler last week agreed a compensation package with partner Mitsubishi Moto

rs which will see it buy out its stake in Fuso. Looking forward, DaimerChrysler's profits are expected to be slightly higher in 2005. However, it is expecting significant improvements"" in profitability in 2006 as a result of a major investment in the Mercedes product range.

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"business 118.txt Ericsson sees earnings improve Telecoms equipment supplier Ericsson has posted a rise in fourth quarter profits thanks to clients like Deutsche Telekom upgrade their networks. Operating profit in the three months to 31 December was 9.5bn kronor (£722m; \$1.3bn) against 6.3bn kronor last year. Shares tumbled", however, as the company reported a profit margin of 45.6%, less than the 47.3% forecast by analysts and down from 47.1% in the third quarter. Ericsson shares dropped 5.9% to 20.7 kronor in early trading on Thursday. However," the company remained optimistic about its earnings outlook after sales in the fourth quarter rose 9% to 39.4bn kronor. ""Long-term growth drivers of the industry remain solid", Ericsson said in a statement. Chief executive Carl-Henric Svanberg explained that about 27% of the world's population now has access to mobile communications"". ""This is exciting for a company with a vision of an all-communicating world", he added. Mr Svanberg, however, warned that the extra demand that had driven 2004 sales had already dissipated and it was business as usual"". He added that sales in the first three months of 2005 would be subject to ""normal seasonality"". For the whole of 2004", Ericsson returned a net profit of 19bn kronor, compared with a loss of 10.8bn kronor in 2003. Sales climbed to 131.9 billion kronor from 117.7bn kronor in 2003.

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"business 119.txt Bank opts to leave rates on hold The Bank of England has left interest rates on hold at 4.75% for a sixth month in a row. The Bank's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) decided to take no action amid mixed signals from the economy. But some economists predict a further rise in the cost of borrowing will come later this year. Interest rates rose five times between November 2003 and August 2004 as soaring house prices and buoyant consumer data sparked inflation fears. Bank of England governor Mervyn King has recently warned against placing too much weight on one month's economic data", suggesting the MPC is waiting for a clearer picture to emerge. Economists see next week's inflation report from the MPC as key in assessing whether a further interest rate rise is necessary to keep the economy in check. Slower consumer spending and a quieter housing market are likely to have convinced the MPC that rates should be left unchanged in recent months. Inflation, however, has been rising faster than expected, hitting an annual rate of 1.6% in December - its highest level in six months. Data on Wednesday also showed manufacturing output rose at its fastest rate since May last month, reinforcing a view that economic growth was stronger than forecasts. And recent house surveys from the Halifax and Nationwide have indicated prices are still rising, albeit at a slower pace than in recent years. Philip Shaw, chief economist at Investec Securities," said he believed rates would remain at 4.75% for the rest of the year although strong economic data could lead to a further hike. ""The economic landscape has changed quite considerably over the last couple of months", "" he said. ""Growth appears stronger and the MPC may become more concerned about inflation trends."" Howard Archer", economist at Global Insight said the MPC ""may well consider that the balance of risks to the growth and inflation outlook have moved from the downside to the upside"". Business groups welcomed the MPC's widely-expected move to leave rates on hold and cautioned against further rises. The British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) said it was ""concerned by the clamour in some quarters""

for early interest rate increases. "We believe that these demands should be firmly resisted", said David Frost, BCC director general. Manufacturing still faces extremely serious problems and is performing poorly", in spite of the recent revised figures." Ian McCafferty", chief economist at the CBI," said the MP C faced an "interesting" challenge. "Consumers appear to have pulled in their horns over the holiday period", and exporters are struggling with the strength of sterling, he said. However, the broader economy continues to show healthy growth," and the tight labour market and buoyant commodity prices are nudging inflation higher."

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business 120.txt Nigeria to boost cocoa production The government of Nigeria is hoping to triple cocoa production over the next three years with the launch of an ambitious development programme. Agriculture Minister Adamu Bello said the scheme aimed to boost production from an expected 180",000 tonnes this year to 600,000 tonnes by 2008. The government will pump 154m naira (\$1.1m; £591,000) into subsidies for farming chemicals and seedlings. Nigeria is currently the world's fourth-largest cocoa producer. Cocoa was the main export product in Nigeria during the 1960s. But with the coming of oil, the government began to pay less attention to the cocoa sector and production began to fall from a peak of about 400,000 tonnes a year in 1970. At the launch of the programme in the south-western city of Ibadan, Mr Bello explained that an additional aim of the project is to encourage the processing of cocoa in the country and lift local consumption. He also announced that 91m naira of the funding available had been earmarked for establishing cocoa plant nurseries. The country could be looking to emulate rival Ghana, which produced a bumper crop last year. However," some farmers are sceptical about the proposals. "People who are not farming will hijack the subsidy", said Joshua Osagie, a cocoa farmer from Edo state told Reuters. The farmers in the village never see any assistance", he added. At the same time as Nigeria announced its new initiative, Ghana - the world's second largest cocoa exporter - announced revenues from the industry had broken new records. The country saw more than \$1.2bn-worth of the beans exported during 2003-04. Analysts said high tech-production techniques and crop spraying introduced by the government led to the huge crop, pushing production closer to levels seen in the 1960s when the country was the world's leading cocoa grower.

business 121.txt US interest rates increased to 2% US interest rates are to rise for the fourth time in five months, in a widely anticipated move. The Federal Reserve has raised its key federal funds rate by a quarter percentage point to 2% in light of mounting evidence that the US economy is regaining steam. US companies created twice as many jobs as expected in October while exports hit record levels in September. Analysts said a clear-cut victory for President Bush in last week's election paved the way for a rise. Another rise could be in store for December, some economists warned. The Fed's Open Market Committee - which sets interest rate policy in the US - voted unanimously in favour of a quarter point rise. The Fed has been gradually easing rates up since the summer, with quarter percentage point rises in June, August and September. The Central Bank has been acting to restrain inflationary pressures while being careful not to obstruct economic growth. The Fed did not rule out raising rates once again in December but noted that any future increases would take place at a measured" pace. In a statement", the Fed said that long-term inflation pressures remained "well contained" while the US economy appeared to be "growing at a moderate pace despite the rise in energy prices". Financial analysts broadly welcomed the Fed's move and shares traded largely flat. The Dow Jone

s Industrial average closed down 0.89 points", or 0.01%, at 10,385.48. Recent evidence has pointed to an upturn in the US economy. US firms created 337,000 jobs last month, twice the amount expected, while exports reached record levels in September. The economy grew 3.7% in the third quarter, slower than forecast, but an improvement on the 3.3% growth seen in the second quarter. Analysts claimed the Fed's assessment of future economic growth was a positive one but stressed that the jury was still out on the prospect of a further rise in December. ""Let's wait until we see how growth and employment bear up under the fourth quarter's energy price drag before concluding that the Fed has more work to do in 2005", said Avery Shenfeld, senior economist at CIBC World Markets. I think the Federal Reserve does not want to rock the boat and is using a gradual approach in raising the interest rate", said Sung Won Sohn, chief US economist for Wells Fargo Bank. The economy is doing a bit better right now but there are still some concerns about geopolitics", employment and the price of oil," he added. The further rise in US rates is unlikely to have a direct bearing on UK monetary policy. The Bank of England (BoE) has kept interest rates on hold at 4.75% for the past three months, leading some commentators to argue that rates may have peaked. In a report published on Wednesday, the Bank said that with rates at their current level, inflation would rise to its 2% target within two years. However, BoE governor Mervyn King warned only last month that the era of consistently low inflation and low unemployment may be coming to an end.

business 122.txt US bank in \$515m SEC settlement Five Banks of America subsidiaries have agreed to pay a total of \$515m (£277m) to settle an investigation into fraudulent trading share practices. The US Securities and Exchange Commission announced the settlements, the latest in an industry-wide clean-up of US mutual funds. The SEC also said it had brought fraud charges against two ex-senior executives of Columbia Distributor. Columbia Distributor was part of FleetBoston, bought by B0A last year. Three other ex-Columbia executives agreed settlements with the SEC. The SEC has set itself the task of stamping out the mutual funds' use of market-timing, a form of quick-fire, short-term share trading that harms the interests of small investors, with whom mutual funds are particularly popular. In the last two years, it has imposed penalties totalling nearly \$2bn on 15 funds. The SEC unveiled two separate settlements, one covering B0A's direct subsidiaries, and another for businesses that were part of FleetBoston at the time. In both cases, it said there had been secret deals to engage in market timing in mutual fund shares. The SEC agreed a deal totalling \$375m with Banc of America Capital Management, BACAP Distributors and Banc of America Securities. It was made up of \$250m to pay back gains from market timing, and \$125m in penalties. It is to be paid to the damaged funds and their shareholders. Separately, the SEC said it had reached a \$140m deal - equally split between penalties and compensation - in its probe into Columbia Management Advisors (CAM) and Columbia Funds Distributor (CFD) and three ex-Columbia executives. These businesses became part of B0A when it snapped up rival bank FleetBoston in a \$47bn merger last March. The SEC filed civil fraud charges in a Boston Federal court against James Tambone, who it says headed CFD's sales operations, and his alleged second in command Robert Hussey. The SEC is pressing for the highest tier of financial penalties against the pair for multiple violations "", repayment of any personal gains, and an injunction to prevent future breaches, a spokeswoman for the SEC's Boston office told the BBC. There was no immediate comment from the men's' lawyers. The SEC's settlement with CAM and CFD included agreements with three other ex-managers, Peter Martin, Erik Gustafson and Joseph Palombo, who paid personal financial penalties of between \$50-10

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"business 123.txt Train strike grips Buenos Aires A strike on the Buenos Aires underground has caused traffic chaos and large queues at bus stops in the Argentine capital. Tube workers walked out last week demanding a 53% pay rise and in protest against the installation of automatic ticket machines. Metrovias", the private firm which runs the five tube lines in the city," has offered an 8% increase in wages. The firm promised no jobs would be lost as a result of new ticket machines. It said it would put this commitment on paper. Underground staff have warned they will continue with the protests until the management put an acceptable offer on the table. The Argentine Work Ministry has been mediating in the conflict and it could call an ""obligatory conciliation""", which would force both sides to find a solution and put an end to the conflict. Some tube commuters have not hidden their frustration at the ongoing strike and have broken the windows of the underground trains," according to the local press. ""We are taken as hostages. I don't know who is right", but the harm ones are us," said accountant Jose Lopez.

business 124.txt Bargain calls widen Softbank loss Japanese communications firm Softbank has widened losses after heavy spending on a new cut-rate phone service. The service, launched in December and dubbed Otoku"" or ""bargain""", has had almost 900,000 orders, Softbank said. The firm, a market leader in high-speed internet, had an operating loss for the three months to December of 7.5bn yen (\$71.5m; £38.4m). But without the Otoku marketing spend it would have made a profit - and expects to move into the black in 2006. The firm did not give a figure for the extent of profits it expected to make next year. It was born in the 1990s tech boom, investing widely and becoming a fast-rising star, till the end of the tech bubble hit it hard. Its recent return to a high profile came with the purchase of Japan Telecom, the country's third-biggest fixed-line telecoms firm. The acquisition spurred its broadband internet division to pole position in the Japanese market, with more than 5.1 million subscribers at the end of December.

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"business 125.txt WMC profits up amid bid criticism Australian mining firm WMC Resources has seen a fivefold rise in profits while continuing to be the target of a hostile takeover bid. WMC said it made net profits of 1.33bn Australian dollars (\$1bn; £550m) in 2004", up from A\$246bn the year before. It is currently arguing against an offer from Swiss Xstrata," which the firm raised to A\$8.4bn last week after WMC said it was an undervaluation. Now reports say that the Australian government is against the deal. Trade Minister Mark Vaile has said that the bid may be ""against the national interest"". Mr Vaile", who was quoted in the Australian Financial Review, compared Xstrata's attempt to take over WMC to a similar bid by oil giant Shell for Australia's Woodside Petroleum in 2001. The bid was thrown out by Treasurer Peter Costello on national interest grounds. WMC's interests in uranium deposits were a contributing factor, Mr Vaile said. WMC itself, however, has no objection in principle to being bought out, having spun off its aluminium operations in 2002 to make itself a more tempting target - as long as the price is right. Its stellar performance in 2004 has been built on sky-high prices for metals. Copper and nickel in particular have been in high demand thanks to China's booming economy, which expanded more than 9% in each of the past two years. Nickel prices rose 43% during the year, with copper up 36%.

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"business 126.txt Barclays profits hit record level Barclays", the UK's third-biggest bank," has seen annual pre-tax profits climb to re

cord levels boosted by a sharp rise in business at its investment arm. Profits for the year to 31 December rose 20% to £4.6bn (\$8.6bn). Barclays' chief John Varley said the bank had ""caught the winds"" of a very strong world economy. Earnings at Barclays Capital investment bank rose 25% to £1.04bn", but investment in branch operations held back growth in its UK retail business. The group is the first of Britain's five big banks to report 2004 results. According to analysts' forecasts, HSBC, the biggest UK bank by stock market valuation, will report profits of £9.4bn later this month. Barclays results were in line with market expectations. Its Global Investors wing made £347m," an 82% jump on 2003 figures. Profits at Barclaycard rose by 5% to £801m but were said to have been affected by a series of interest rate rises and investment to grow its customer base. The bank also blamed margins pressure on its mortgage business and spending on its branches over the past year for a 1% fall in profits in its UK retail division to £1.13bn. ""The outlook for 2005 is good as a result of balance sheet growth and investments made in 2004", Mr Varley said. Barclays cautioned that growth this year may be slower than in 2004 on the back of softer US and Chinese economies and the impact of interest rate rises on household spending in the UK. It added its bid to acquire a controlling stake in South Africa's leading retail bank Absa, was being considered by regulatory authorities. Speaking on BBC Radio 4, Mr Varley declined to be drawn on reports that Barclays had held merger talks with US bank Wells Fargo. A tie-up between Barclays and California-based Wells Fargo would create the world's fourth biggest bank, valued at \$180bn. At 1405 GMT, shares in Barclays were trading down 0.67% at 590 pence. The headline numbers are in line", but the story is costs," said analyst Alex Potter at Lehman Brothers. They are a bit more aggressive than we had expected. The cost overshoot is not in Barclays Capital but in the UK bank.""

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"business 127.txt Yukos owner sues Russia for \$28bn The majority owner of embattled Russian oil firm Yukos has sued the Russian government for \$28.3bn (£15.2bn). The Kremlin last year seized and sold Yukos' main production arm", Yugansk, to state-run oil group Rosneft for \$9.3bn to offset a massive back tax bill. Group Menatep, the Gibraltar-based holding company which controls 51% of Yukos, says this was illegal. Menatep has already asked Rosneft to repay a \$900m loan that Yugansk had secured on its assets. The Russian government's argument for selling Yuganskneftegaz - the unit's full name - was that Yukos owed more than \$27bn in back taxes for the years from 2000 onwards. It accused the firm of using a web of offshore firms to avoid its tax liabilities, and the courts sent in bailiffs to freeze Yukos accounts and seize Yugansk. But critics say the sell-off, and the assault on Yukos' finances, are part of an attempt to bring the energy industry back under state control. According to Menatep, the government's actions were contrary to the 1994 Energy Charter Treaty," which was designed to regulate disagreements over energy investments. ""We have warned the Russian government about their continuing attacks against Yukos", its personnel and its shareholders and we have warned any buyer of Yuganskneftegaz that they would face a lifetime of litigation," said Tim Osborne, a director of Group Menatep. The time for warning is over and actions to recover the value of our losses begin in earnest today." Menatep said the value of its Yukos shareholding had gone from \$17.8bn to "virtually nothing" since 2003 as a result of the Russian government's action", as its shares have fallen 97%. According to its Paris lawyer, Emmanuel Gaillard of Shearman and Sterling, the overall claim is based on that figure, with a 60% addition for the share gains that could have accrued since then. Arbitration of the lawsuit could take place in Stockholm or The Hague, Mr Gaillard said. While Russia has signed the Charter, it has

never ratified it - which some experts say could make it difficult for Menatep to press its case. But Mr Gaillard told BBC News that the Charter came into effect on signature," not ratification. ""Russia has said in the past that it is bound by it", so as to attract foreign investors," he said. Yukos is still waiting to see what will happen to its filing in a US court for bankruptcy protection. It took the action to try to prevent the forced sale of Yugansk - first to a little-known shell company, which in turn was bought by Rosneft. Yukos claims its downfall was punishment for the political ambitions of its founder Mikhail Khodorkovsky. Mr Khodorkovsky, currently facing fraud and tax evasion charges of his own, was one of the founders of Menatep. He has since signed over his shareholding to one of his fellow investors.

business 128.txt Qantas sees profits fly to record Australian airline Qantas has posted a record fiscal first-half profit thanks to cost-cutting measures. Net profit in the six months ending 31 December rose 28% to A\$458.4m (\$357.6m; £191m) from a year earlier. Analysts expected a figure closer to A\$431m. Qantas shares fell almost 3%, however, after it warned that earnings growth would slow in the second half. Sales will dip by at least A\$30m after the Indian ocean tsunami devastated many holiday destinations, Qantas said. The tsunami affected travel patterns in ways that we were a bit surprised about", chief executive Geoff Dixon explained. It certainly affected Japanese travel into Australia. As soon as the tsunami hit we saw ... a lessening with bookings for Australia." Higher fuel costs also are expected to eat into earnings in coming months. "We don't have as much hedging benefit in the second half as we had in the first", said chief financial officer Peter Gregg. Qantas is facing increased pressure from rivals such as low-cost carrier Virgin Blue and the Australian government is in talks about whether to allow Singapore Airlines to fly between the Australia and the US - one of Qantas' key routes. Even so, the firm is predicting that full-year earnings will increase from the previous 12 months. Analysts have forecast full-year profit will rise about 11% to around A\$720 million (\$563 million). Qantas boss Mr Dixon also said he would be reviewing the group's cost-cutting measures. During the first six months of the fiscal year, Qantas made savings of A\$245m, and is on track to top its target of A\$500m for the full year. Last month, the company warned it may transfer as many as 7,000 jobs out Australia, with Mr Dixon quoted as saying that the carrier could no longer afford to remain all-Australian".

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"business 129.txt Iraq to invite phone licence bids Iraq is to invite bids for two telephone licences", saying it wants to significantly boost nationwide coverage over the next decade. Bids have been invited from local, Arab and foreign companies, Iraq's Ministry of Communications said. The winner will work in partnership with the Iraqi Telecommunications and Post Company (ITPC). The firms will install and operate a fixed phone network, providing voice, fax and internet services. The ministry said that it wanted to increase Iraq's "very low telephone service penetration rate from about 4.5% today to about 25% within 10 years." It also hopes to develop a "highly visible and changeable telecommunication sector". Details of the bidding and tender process will be published on the ministry's website on 9 February. It also is planning a road-show for investors in Amman", Jordan. The ministry said it would base its selection on criteria including the speed of implementation, tariff rates, coverage, and the firm's experience and financial strength.

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"business 130.txt Aviation firms eye booming India India

a's defence minister has opened the country's Aero India 2005 air show with an invitation for global aerospace firms to outsource jobs to the nation. Pranab Mukherjee said such companies could take advantage of India's highly skilled workers and low wages. More than 240 civil and military aerospace firms from 31 countries are attending the show. Analysts said India could spend up to \$35bn (£18.8bn) in the aviation market over the next 20 years. Giants such Boeing and Airbus - on the civil aviation front - as well as Lockheed Martin and France's Snecma - on the military side - are some of the firms attending the show. ""There is tremendous scope for outsourcing from India in areas where the companies are competitive", " said Mr Mukherjee. We are keen to welcome international collaborations that are in conformity with our national goals." Lockheed said it had signed an agreement with state-owned Hindustan Aeronautics (HAL) to share information on the P-3 Orion maritime surveillance aircraft. In fact", the Indian Armed Force is considering the buying of used P-3 Orion as well as F-16 fighter jets from Lockheed. The US military industry has shown a strong interest to open a link with India, now that relations between the two countries have improved a lot. In fact, it is the first time the US Air Force will attend the air show since sanctions imposed in 1998 after India's nuclear tests were lifted. But the Indian Air Force is also considering proposals from other foreign firms such as France's Dassault Aviation, Sweden's Saab and Russia's Mikoyan-Gurevich. Meanwhile, France's Snecma has also said it plans a joint venture with HAL to make engine parts, with an initial investment of \$6.5m. On the civilian front, Boeing announced a deal with India's HCL Technologies to develop a platform for the flight test system of its 787 Dreamliner aircraft. The US company also said it had agreed with a new Indian budget airline the sale of 10 737-800 planes for \$630m. The airline, SpiceJet, will also have the option to acquire 10 more aircraft. Airbus has also recently signed fresh deals with two Indian airlines - Air Deccan and Kingfisher. In addition, the European company has plans to open a training centre in India. Meanwhile," flag carrier Air India is considering to buy 50 new aircraft from either Boeing or Airbus. ""No other market is going to see the growth that will be seen here in the coming years", " said Dinesh Keskar, senior vice president Boeing.

business 131.txt Russian oil merger excludes Yukos The merger of Russian gas giant Gazprom and oil firm Rosneft is to go ahead, but will not include Yugansk, which was controversially bought last year. The merger, backed by Russian authorities, will allow foreigners to trade in Gazprom shares. Gazprom chief Alexei Miller confirmed Rosneft-owned Yugansk was not part of the deal and will instead be spun off. Under the agreement, the state will get a controlling share of Gazprom in exchange for Rosneft. The state wanted to control Gazprom before allowing foreigners to trade. Speaking on NTV television, which is controlled by Gazprom, Mr Miller added that Yugansk, which was swallowed up by Rosneft late last year, will operate as a separate, state-owned oil firm headed by current Rosneft chief Sergei Bogdanchikov. According to reports from Russian News Agency Interfax, the deal should go through in the next two to three months. Obtaining majority control over Gazprom is the beginning of the liberalisation of the market in Gazprom shares", " Mr Miller added. By opening up trading in Gazprom to foreigners, the firm will become a top emerging market play for traders. Currently, foreigners can only trade in Gazprom via a small issue of London-listed proxy shares. This is positive news for the international investment community", Global Asset Management investment chief David Smith said. The majority of investors are going to be happy," he added. However, analysts were disappointed that Yugansk would not be included in the deal. Yugansk is a heavy cashflow generator and would have been a much better asset for Gazprom", Renaissance Capital energy analyst Adam Landes told Reuters news agency. But he s

aid the latest development was simply an interim step to allow foreigners to trade in Gazprom. Ultimately and industrially, Gazprom needs Yugansk," he added. Analysts said the deal would give Gazprom control of 8% of Russia's total oil production, an improvement on its current 2.5%, but still far less than the 20% share it would have gained had it also taken over Yugansk. However, the merged group will still remain outside Russia's top five oil producers - led by Lukoil with 11% of the market , followed by TNK-BP which is half owned by BP, and Surgutneftegaz. Instead, the merged Gazprom-Rosneft group will rank alongside Sibneft with 7% of the market. Yugansk was sold to a little-known shell company in a disputed auction in December, following what many thought was a politically-motivated attack on Yukos. The shell company was then snapped up by Rosneft. Yukos unsuccessfully sought to halt the auction by applying for bankruptcy through the US courts. The unit was auctioned by Russian authorities to help pay off a \$2 7.5bn back-tax bill.

business 132.txt Brazil buy boosts Belgium's Inbev Belgium  
n brewing giant Inbev has seen its profits soar thanks to its acquisition of Brazil's biggest beer firm Ambev last year. Inbev, which makes Stella Artois, said pre-tax profits for 2004 rose 56% to 1.16bn euros (\$1.5bn; £800m), and said it expected solid growth in 2005. The performance comes on sales up 21% at 8.6bn euros. The firm, formerly Interbrew, became the world's biggest brewer by volume when it bought Ambev in August 2004. The acquisition meant its sales by volume grew 57% in 2004, with four months of Ambev sales accounting for almost all of the increase. US beermaker Anheuser-Busch sells less beer by volume than Inbev but is bigger in terms of the value of its sales. Continuing demand for Inbev's products in the South American markets where its Brazilian arm is most popular means it expects to keep boosting its turnover. It's the Brazil business that's doing it", said ING analyst Gerard Rijk of Inbev's strong performance. Ambev boosted its share of Brazil's beer market from 62% at the end of 2003 to more than 68% by December 2004, Inbev reported. In contrast, Inbev's European business saw volume sales fall 2.5%, although Central and Eastern European sales rose 12%. Overall, net profits were up 42% to 719m euros.

business 133.txt Salary scandal in Cameroon Cameroon says widespread corruption in its finance ministry has cost it 1bn CFA francs (\$2m; £1m) a month. About 500 officials are accused of either awarding themselves extra money or claiming salaries for non-existent" workers. Prime Minister Ephraim Inoni", who vowed to tackle corruption when he came to office last year, said those found guilty would face tough punishments. The scam is believed to have begun in 1994. The prime minister's office said the alleged fraud was uncovered during an investigation into the payroll at the ministry. In certain cases," staff are said to have lied about their rank and delayed their retirement in order to boost their earnings. The prime minister's office said auditors had found "irregularities in the career structure of certain civil servants"". It added that the staff in question ""appear to have received unearned salaries"," boosting the payroll"". Fidelis Nanga", a journalist based in the Cameroon capital Yaounde," said the government was considering taking criminal action against those found guilty and forcing them to repay any money owed. ""The prime minister has given instructions for exemplary penalties to be meted out against the accused and their accomplices if found guilty", he told the BBC's Network Africa programme. Mr Inoni launched an anti-corruption drive in December after foreign investors criticised a lack of transparency in the country's public finances. In one initiative designed to improve efficiency, civil servants who arrived late for work were locked out of their offices. The government now intends to carry out an audit of payrolls at all other government ministries. In a report compiled by anti-corruption body Transparency International in 2003, graft was s

aid to be pervasive"" in Cameroon.

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"business 134.txt US adds more jobs than expected The US economy added 337",000 jobs in October - a seven-month high and far more than Wall Street expectations. In a welcome economic boost for newly re-elected President George W Bush, the Labor Department figures come after a slow summer of weak jobs gains. Jobs were created in every sector of the US economy except manufacturing. While the separate unemployment rate went up to 5.5% from 5.4% in September, this was because more people were now actively seeking work. The 337,000 new jobs added to US payrolls in October was twice the 169,000 figure that Wall Street economists had forecast. In addition, the Labor Department revised up the number of jobs created in the two previous months - to 139,000 in September instead of 96,000, and to 198,000 in August instead of 128,000. The better than expected jobs data had an immediate upward effect on stocks in New York, with the main Dow Jones index gaining 45.4 points to 10,"360 by late morning trading. ""It looks like the job situation is improving and that this will support consumer spending going into the holidays", and offset some of the drag caused by high oil prices this year, said economist Gary Thayer of AG Edwards & Sons. Other analysts said the upbeat jobs data made it more likely that the US Federal Reserve would increase interest rates by a quarter of a percentage point to 2% when it meets next week. It should empower the Fed to clearly do something," said Robert MacIntosh, chief economist with Eaton Vance Management in Boston. Kathleen Utgoff, commissioner of the Bureau of Labor, said many of the 71,000 new construction jobs added in October were involved in rebuilding and clean-up work in Florida, and neighbouring Deep South states, following four hurricanes in August and September. The dollar rose temporarily on the job creation news before falling back to a new record low against the euro, as investors returned their attention to other economic factors, such as the US's record trade deficit. There is also speculation that President Bush will deliberately try to keep the dollar low in order to assist a growth in exports.

business 135.txt Feta cheese battle reaches court A row over whether only Greece should be allowed to label its cheese feta has reached the European Court of Justice. The Danish and German governments are challenging a European Commission ruling which said Greece should have sole rights to use the name. The Commission's decision gave the same legal protection to feta as to Italian Parma ham and French Champagne. But critics of the judgement say feta is a generic term, with the cheese produced widely outside Greece. The Commission's controversial 2002 ruling gave protected designation of origin"" status to feta cheese made in Greece", effectively restricting the use of the feta name to producers there. From 2007 onwards," Greek firms will have the exclusive use of the feta label and producers elsewhere in Europe must find another name to describe their products. The German and Danish governments argue that feta does not relate to a specific geographical area and that their firms have been producing and exporting the cheese for years. ""In our opinion it is a generic designation and we do not have any other name or term for this type of cheese", Hans Arne Kristiansen, a spokesman for the Danish Dairy Board, told the BBC. Denmark is Europe's second largest producer of feta after Greece - producing about 30,000 tonnes a year - and exports its products to Greece. It is concerned that the ruling could threaten the production of other cheeses in Denmark such as brie. It would cost millions if we wanted to introduce a new designation", Mr Kristiansen said. That is just one of the costs." The case will also have a major impact on Britain's sole feta producer", Yorkshire company Shepherds Purse Cheeses. Judy Bell, the company's founder," said it would cost a huge amount t

o rebrand its product. ""If we lose we will have to go through a massive re-branding process and reorganisation", she said. We have never tried to pull the wool over anyone's eyes - it's very clear from the label that it's Yorkshire feta." "The original decision was a victory for Greece", where feta cheese is believed to have been produced for about 6,000 years. Feta is a soft white cheese made from sheep or goat's milk, and is an essential ingredient in Greek cuisine. Greece makes 115,000 tonnes, mainly for domestic consumption. The Court is expected to reach a verdict in the case in the autumn.

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"business 136.txt Ukraine revisits state sell-offs Ukraine is preparing what could be a wholesale review of the privatisation of thousands of businesses by the previous administration. The new President", Viktor Yushchenko," has said a ""limited"" list of companies is being drawn up. But on Wednesday Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko said the government was planning to renationalise 3",000 firms. The government says many privatised firms were sold to allies of the last administration at rock-bottom prices. More than 90,000 businesses in all, from massive corporations to tiny shopfronts, have been sold off since 1992, as the command economy built up when Ukraine was part of the Soviet Union was dismantled. Ms Tymoshenko said prosecutors had drawn up a list of more than 3,"000 businesses which were to be reviewed. ""We will return to the state that which was illegally put into private hands." "A day earlier", Mr Yushchenko - keen to reassure potential investors - had said only 30 to 40 top firms would be targeted. The list ""will be limited and final," and will not be extended after its completion""", he said. An open-ended list could further damage outside investors' fragile faith in Ukraine, said Stuart Hensel of the Economist Intelligence Unit. But the government seemed keen not to make the review look like the kind of wholesale renationalisation which many fear in Russia, Mr Hensel said. As a result," it was planning to resell rather than keep firms in state hands. ""They're aware of the need not to scare investors", and to be careful of internal divides within Ukraine," he said. They don't want to be seen to be transferring assets from one set of oligarchs to a new set." "Foreign investment in Ukraine", at about \$40 a head in 2004, is one of the lowest among ex-Soviet states. Mr Yushchenko became president after two elections in December, the first of which was annulled amid allegations of voting irregularities and massive street protests. His opponent, Viktor Yanukovich, still has huge support in the country's eastern industrial heartland. Mr Yushchenko's administration has accused its predecessor, led by ex-President Leonid Kuchma, of corruption. The privatisation review's number one target is a steel mill sold to a consortium which included Viktor Pinchuk, Mr Kuchma's son-in-law, for \$800m (£424m) despite higher bids from several foreign groups. The mill, Krivorizhstal," is one of the world's most profitable. ""We say Krivorizhstal was stolen", and at any cost we will return it to the state," Mr Yushchenko told an investors' conference in Kiev. One of the jilted bidders, Netherlands-based group LNM, said it welcomed the possibility that the mill might be back on the market. If the original privatisation is annulled and a new tender issued", then we would look at it with great interest," a spokesman told BBC News. A resale of Krivorizhstal could potentially triple the price, according to the Economist Intelligence Unit's Mr Hensel. But he warned that the government could decide to take the easy route of revaluing the company and charging the existing owners the revised price rather than undertaking a fresh sale. That way", Mr Yushchenko can go to the public and say he has forced the oligarchs to play by the rules," he told BBC News.

business 137.txt Bank set to leave rates on hold UK inter

est rates are set to remain on hold at 4.75% following the latest meeting of the Bank of England. The Bank's rate-setting committee has put up rates five times in the past year but rates have been on hold since September amid signs of a slowdown. Economic growth slowed in the previous quarter, as manufacturing output fell, while consumer confidence has slipped. There is also growing evidence that the previously booming UK housing market is now cooling. House prices fell 0.4% in October, according to the Nationwide, their biggest monthly fall since February 2001. Last month, Bank of England governor Mervyn King said that the economy had hit a softer patch"" after rapid economic growth in the first half of 2004. Richard Jeffrey", chief economist at Bridgewater Securities," said it was very unlikely that the Bank of England would put rates up again this time around. ""There have been sufficient signs in the economy of a slowdown to stay the Bank of England's hand", he told BBC Radio 4's Today programme. However, Mr Jeffrey said he believed the slowdown in economic activity was temporary and it was dangerous to assume that rates had peaked. I still think interest rates are going up", he said. We are not out of the woods.""

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"business 138.txt Winter freeze keeps oil above \$50 Oil prices carried on rising on Wednesday after cold weather on both sides of the North Atlantic pushed US crude prices to four-month highs. Freezing temperatures and heavy snowfalls took crude oil prices past \$50 a barrel on Tuesday for the first time since November. Declines in the dollar have also contributed to the rising oil price. US crude was trading at \$51.39 at 0710 GMT in Asian electronic trade on Wednesday. A barrel of US crude oil closed up \$2.80 at \$51.15 in New York on Tuesday. Opec members said on Tuesday that", given such high prices, the cartel saw no reason to cut its output. Although below last year's peak of \$55.67 a barrel, which was reached in October, prices are now well above 2004's average of \$41.48. Brent crude also rose in London trading," adding \$1.89 to \$48.62 at the close. Much of western Europe and the north east of America has been shivering under unseasonably low temperatures in recent days. The decline in the US dollar to a five-week low against the euro has also served to inflate prices. ""The primary factor is the weak dollar", said Victor Shum, a Singapore-based analyst with Purvin and Gertz. Expectations that a rebound in the dollar would halt the oil price rise were not immediately borne out on Wednesday morning, as oil prices carried on upwards as the dollar strengthened against the euro, the pound and the yen. Several Opec members said on Tuesday that a cut in production was unlikely, citing rising prices and strong demand for oil from Asia. I agree that we do not need to cut supply if the prices are as much as this", Fathi Bin Shatwan, Libya's oil minister, told Reuters. I do not think we need to cut unless the prices are falling below \$35 a barrel", he added.

business 139.txt German jobless rate at new record More than 5.2 million Germans were out of work in February, new figures show. The figure of 5.216 million people, or 12.6% of the working-age population, is the highest jobless rate in Europe's biggest economy since the 1930s. The news comes as the head of Germany's panel of government economic advisers predicted growth would again stagnate. Speaking on German TV, Bert Ruerup said the panel's earlier forecast of 1.4% was too optimistic and warned growth would be just 1% in 2005. The German government is trying to tackle the stubbornly-high levels of joblessness with a range of labour market reforms. At their centre is the Hartz-I V"" programme introduced in January to shake up welfare benefits and push people back into work - even if some of the jobs are heavily subsidised. The latest unemployment figures look set to increase the pressure on the government. Widely leaked to the German newspapers a day in advance", they produced screaming he

adlines criticising Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder's Social Democrat-Green Party administration. Mr Schroeder had originally come into office promising to halve unemployment. Still, some measures suggest the picture is not quite so bleak. The soaring official unemployment figure follows a change in the methodology which pushed up the jobless rate by more than 500,000 in January. Adjusted for seasonal changes, the overall unemployment rate is 4.875 million people or 11.7%, up 0.3 percentage points from the previous month. Using the most internationally-accepted methodology of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), Germany had 3.97 million people out of work in January. And ILO-based figures also suggest that 14,000 new net jobs were created that month, taking the number of people employed to 38.9 million. The ILO defines an unemployed person as someone who in the previous four weeks had actively looked for work they could take up immediately.

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"business 140.txt Ore costs hit global steel firms Shares in steel firms have dropped worldwide amid concerns that higher iron ore costs will hit profit growth. Shares in Germany's ThyssenKrupp", the UK's Corus and France's Arcelor fell while Japan's Nippon Steel slid after it agreed to pay 7% more for iron ore. China's Baoshan Iron and Steel Co. said it was delaying a share sale because of weak market conditions, adding it would raise steel prices to offset ore costs. The threat of higher raw material costs also hit industries such as carmakers. France's Peugeot warned that its profits may decline this year as a result of the higher steel, plastic and commodity prices. Steelmakers have been enjoying record profits as demand for steel has risen, driven by the booming economies of countries such as China and India. Steel prices rose by 8% globally in January alone and by 24% in China. The boom times are far from over, but analysts say that earnings growth may slow. The share price fall was initially triggered by news that two of the world's biggest iron ore suppliers had negotiated contracts at much-higher prices. Miners Rio Tinto and Cia. Vale Do Rio Dolce (CVRD) this week managed to boost by 72% the price of their iron ore, a key component of steel. Analysts had expected Japan's Nippon to agree to a price rise of between 40% and 50%. Steel analyst Peter Fish, director of Sheffield-based consulting group MEPS," said the extent of CVRD's price rise was ""uncharted territory""", adding that the steel industry ""hasn't seen an increase of this magnitude probably in 50 years""". Analysts now expect other iron ore producers", such as Australia's BHP Billiton," to seek annual price rises of up to 70%. The news triggered the share price weakness. ""It sparked worries that steel makers might not be able to increase product prices further [ to cover rising ore costs]"" explained Kazuhiro Takahashi of Daiwa Securities SMBC. In Europe", Arcelor shed 2.1% to 17.58 euros in Paris, with ThyssenKrupp dropping 1.7% to 16.87 euros. In London, Corus fell 2.2% to 55.57 pence. Japan's biggest steel company Nippon Steel lost 2.5% to 270 yen, with closest rival JFE Holdings down 3.4%. China's Baoshan, the country's largest steel producer, said that the uncertainty surrounding the industry has prompted it to pull its planned share sale. The firm had been expected to offer 22.5bn yuan (\$2.7bn) worth of shares to investors. No date has been given for when the 5 billion shares will come to the market. Baoshan stock climbed on news of the delay and its decision to increase the price of its steel by 10%.

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"business 141.txt BMW reveals new models pipeline BMW is preparing to enter the market for car-style people carriers", the firm's chief has told BBC News. Speaking at a BMW event ahead of the Geneva motor show, Hel

mut Panke predicted demand for such crossover vehicles would soar in Europe. In contrast, he said, "the popularity of van-style seven-seat vehicles and traditional saloon cars would fade. ""Customers are moving out of the mini-van (and) traditional concepts are not as attractive anymore", he said. We have decided that BMW will enter the [crossover] segment," he said in the clearest indication yet about the car maker's intentions. Mr Panke praised the Honda Accra as the best execution"" yet of a crossover vehicle. ""We have decided that the BMW brand will enter the segment", he said. A decision on just how BMW will manage its entry into the new market is due in the first half of 2005. Typically it takes about three years from when a decision is taken before a new model hits the streets, Mr Panke said, implying that a BMW crossover could be on the market by 2008. The coming switch is driven in part by the need for successful carmakers to stay aware of trans-Atlantic differences in the car market, Mr Panke insisted. While in the US drivers tend to prefer sports utility vehicles (SUVs), such as the BMW X5 and its sibling X3, in Europe demand for crossover vehicles is likely to be considerable, Mr Panke said. There's a growing market here", he said. We are going to go that way.""

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"business 142.txt Asian banks halt dollar's slide The dollar regained some lost ground against most major currencies on Wednesday after South Korea and Japan denied they were planning a sell-off. The dollar suffered its biggest one-day fall in four months on Tuesday on fears that Asian central banks were about to lower their reserves of dollars. Japan is the biggest holder of dollar reserves in the world", with South Korea the fourth largest. The dollar was buying 104.76 yen at 0950 GMT, 0.5% stronger on the day. It also edged higher against both the euro and the pound, with one euro worth \$1.3218, and one pound buying \$1.9094. Concerns over rising oil prices and the outlook for the dollar pushed down US stock markets on Tuesday; the Dow Jones industrial average closed down 1.6%, while the Nasdaq lost 1.3%. The dollar's latest slide began after a South Korean parliamentary report suggested the country, which has about \$200bn in foreign reserves, had plans to boost holdings of currencies such as the Australian and Canadian dollar. On Wednesday, however," South Korea moved to steady the financial markets. It issued a statement that ""The Bank of Korea will not change the portfolio of currencies in its reserves due to short term market factors"". Japan", too," steadied nerves. A senior Japanese Finance Ministry official told Reuters ""we have no plans to change the composition of currency holdings in the foreign reserves", and we are not thinking about expanding our euro holdings"". Japan has \$850bn in foreign exchange reserves. At the start of the year", the US currency, which had lost 7% against the euro in the final three months of 2004 and had fallen to record lows, staged something of a recovery. Analysts, however, pointed to the dollar's inability recently to extend that rally despite positive economic and corporate data, and highlighted the fact that many of the US's economic problems had not disappeared. The focus has been on the country's massive trade and budget deficits, and analysts have predicted more dollar weakness to come.

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"business 143.txt Weak dollar trims Cadbury profits The world's biggest confectionery firm", Cadbury Schweppes, has reported a modest rise in profits after the weak dollar took a bite out of its results. Underlying pre-tax profits rose 1% to £933m (\$1.78bn) in 2004, but would have been 8% higher if currency movements were stripped out. The owner of brands such as Dairy Milk," Dr Pepper and Snapple generates more than 80% of its sales outside the U

K. Cadbury said it was confident it would hit its targets for 2005. ""While the external commercial environment remains competitive", we are confident that we have the strategy, brands and people to deliver within our goal ranges in 2005," said chief executive Todd Stitzer. The modest profit rise had been expected by analysts after the company said in December that the poor summer weather had hit soft drink sales in Europe. Cadbury said its underlying sales were up by 4% in 2004. Growth was helped by its confectionery brands - including Cadbury, Trident and Halls - which enjoyed a successful"" year", with like-for-like sales up 6%. Drinks sales were up 2% with strong growth in US carbonated soft drinks, led by Dr Pepper and diet drinks, offset by the weaker sales in Europe. Cadbury added that its Fuel for Growth cost-cutting programme had saved £75m in 2004, bringing total cost savings to £100m since the scheme began in mid-2003. The programme is set to close 20% of the group's factories and shed 10% of the workforce. Cadbury Schweppes employs more than 50,000 people worldwide, with about 7,000 in the UK.

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"business 144.txt Oil prices fall back from highs Oil prices retreated from four-month highs in early trading on Tuesday after producer's cartel Opec said it was now unlikely to cut production. Following the comments by acting Opec secretary general Adnan Shihab-Eldin", US light crude fell 32 cents to \$51.43 a barrel. He said that high oil prices meant Opec was unlikely to stick to its plan to cut output in the second quarter. In London, Brent crude fell 32 cents to \$49.74 a barrel. Opec members are next meeting to discuss production levels on 16 March. On Monday, oil prices rose for a sixth straight session, reaching a four-month high as cold weather in the US threatened stocks of heating oil. US demand for heating oil was predicted to be about 14% above normal this week, while stocks were currently about 7.5% below the levels of a year ago. Cold weather across Europe has also put upward pressure on crude prices.

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"business 145.txt Winn-Dixie files for bankruptcy US supermarket group Winn-Dixie has filed for bankruptcy protection after succumbing to stiff competition in a market dominated by Wal-Mart. Winn-Dixie", once among the most profitable of US grocers, said Chapter 11 protection would enable it to successfully restructure. It said its 920 stores would remain open, but analysts said it would most likely off-load a number of sites. The Jacksonville, Florida-based firm has total debts of \$1.87bn (£980m). In its bankruptcy petition it listed its biggest creditor as US foods giant Kraft Foods, which it owes \$1 5.1m. Analysts say Winn-Dixie had not kept up with consumers' demands and had also been burdened by a number of stores in need of upgrading. A 10-month restructuring plan was deemed a failure, and following a larger-than-expected quarterly loss earlier this month," Winn-Dixie's slide into bankruptcy was widely expected. The company's new chief executive Peter Lynch said Winn-Dixie would use the Chapter 11 breathing space to take the necessary action to turn itself around. ""This includes achieving significant cost reductions", improving the merchandising and customer service in all locations and generating a sense of excitement in the stores," he said. Yet Evan Mann, a senior bond analyst at Gimme Credit, said Mr Lynch's job would not be easy, as the bankruptcy would inevitably put off some customers. The real big issue is what's going to happen over the next one or two quarters now that they are in bankruptcy and all their customers see this in their local newspapers", " he said.

business 146.txt Why few targets are better than many The

economic targets set out at the Lisbon summit of European Union leaders in 2000 were meant to help Europe leapfrog its way past the United States to become the world's leading economy by 2010. But the Lisbon targets are about much more than just economic prestige. For many economists and analysts they are about ensuring Europe doesn't become a global economic laggard. They are also about ensuring Europe can continue to compete as an equal with the growing economic giants of Asia, India and China, as well as with the economic might of the United States. That's why there was a tone of urgency in the report, out on Wednesday, by the former Dutch prime minister Wim Kok. Mr Kok was commissioned by the European Commission in March this year to assess how far the EU has come towards meeting the Lisbon targets, five years on from their inception. His conclusion was simple: too many of the targets will be seriously missed. Lisbon risks becoming a synonym for missed objectives and failed promises""", his report said. ""The status quo is not an option." At risk in the medium to long run is nothing less than the sustainability of the society Europe has built", it said. The report comes at a time when Europe's competitive position is waning. The EU's economic growth rate is projected to be 2% this year and 2.4% next. While there has been growth in overall employment rates in Europe," productivity lags behind that of the US. But meeting the Lisbon targets requires a political commitment that no EU member state has volunteered so far. That has in part been due to the state of the global economy in the past few years. As Mr Kok's report noted: ""The ink had scarcely dried on the [Lisbon] agreement before the worldwide stock market bubble imploded." "The US suffered two years of economic slowdown and recession and the European economy followed suit." The circumstances weren't conducive to creating the 20 million new jobs promised by EU leaders in Lisbon in 2000. Neither were they conducive to getting governments to spend more on research and development", money needed if the EU was to meet its target of becoming a so-called "knowledge-based economy". ""The [Lisbon] vision is a compelling one", but in order to do it society has to change," said Paul Hofheinz of the Lisbon Council, a Brussels-based citizen action group. What you find is that a lot of people have been fighting change. You find trade unions fighting change. But also the employers' associations. ""Even though they tell you they're in favour of change", many are actually pushing for less competition," more subsidy and less free market activity." But part of the problem was also linked to the original targets set out in Lisbon five years ago. Targets have a habit of coming back to haunt you and in the Lisbon case", they covered too much, according to the Wim report. Economic growth and job creation were linked to issues ranging from environmental protection to social inclusion," and even safety at sea. The agenda was just too broad and as a result nothing was prioritised. ""Lisbon is about everything and thus about nothing", the Kok report said. Everybody is responsible and thus no one." That's why the Kok report recommends that the Lisbon targets be narrowed down to 14 key indicators", with an emphasis on creating jobs and economic growth. It also recommends that the European Commission draw up a league table which ranks countries according to the steps they're taking towards meeting the targets," effectively ""naming", shaming and naming"". ""Rhetoric and delivery don't necessarily go hand in hand", Mr Kok said in a press conference alongside the publication of his report. We don't have the luxury anymore just to exchange politeness with one another." On one point Mr Kok was very clear: The European Union should not try to emulate the US economy. The European economic and social model needs to change", but not so much so that social and environmental issues take a backseat to economic growth. In that sense," the Lisbon agenda is sailing into uncharted waters. The Kok report tries to do away with a belief that jobs need to be sacrificed at the altar of economic growth. ""It's very ambitious", said John Palmer, political

director at the European Policy Centre, a Brussels-based think-tank. This is something that no advanced economy in the world has tried to do. It's going to require quite new and innovative policies." But some analysts believe that the Kok report doesn't come up with the sort of innovative policies and thinking needed to make the Lisbon targets a reality. For example", it recommends putting in place policies which encourage women and older people to remain in the workforce. But it doesn't say how companies should be convinced to do this. It will be up to the incoming president of the European Commission, Jose Manuel Barroso, to adopt Mr Kok's recommendations and press them on EU governments. Mr Barroso has said that the EU's competitiveness will be his top priority. He expects his five-year term in office to be judged on Europe's success in meeting the Lisbon agenda.

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"business 147.txt Malaysia lifts Islamic bank limit Malaysia's central bank is to relax restrictions on foreign ownership to encourage Islamic banking. Banks in Malaysia will now be able to sell up to 49% of their Islamic banking units", while the limit on other kinds of bank remains at 30%. RHB, Malaysia's third-biggest lender, is already scouting for a foreign partner for its new Islamic banking unit, the firm told Reuters. The moves put Malaysia ahead of a 2007 deadline to open up the sector. The country's deal to join the World Trade Organisation set that year as a deadline for liberalisation of Islamic banking. Also on Tuesday, the central bank released growth figures showing Malaysia's economy expanded 7.1% in 2004. But growth slowed sharply in the fourth quarter to 5.6%, and the central bank said it expected 6% expansion in 2005. Malaysia changed the law to allow Islamic banking in 1983. It has granted licences to three Middle Eastern groups, which - along with local players - mean there are eight fully-operational Islamic banking groups in the country. Islamic banks offer services which permit modern banking principles while sticking to Islamic law's ban on the payment of interest. Most of the Malays which make up half the country's population are Muslims.

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"business 148.txt Alfa Romeo's 'to get GM engines' Fiat is to stop making six-cylinder petrol engines for its sporty Alfa Romeo subsidiary", unions at the Italian carmaker have said. The unions claim Fiat is to close the Fiat Powertrain plant at Arese near Milan and instead source six-cylinder engines from General Motors. Fiat has yet to comment on the matter, but the unions say the new engines will be made by GM in Australia. The news comes a week after GM pulled out of an agreement to buy Fiat. GM had to pay former partner Fiat 1.55bn euros (\$2bn; £1.1bn) to get out of a deal which could have forced it to buy the Italian carmaker outright. Fiat and GM also ended their five-year alliance and two joint ventures in engines and purchasing," but did agree to continue buying each other's engines. "Powertrain told us today that Alfa Romeo engines will no longer be made in Arese", said union leader Vincenzo Lilliu, as reported by the Reuters news agency. The assembly line will be dismantled and the six-cylinder Alfa Romeo motor will be replaced with an engine GM produces in Australia." Reuters also said that Mr Lilliu and other union bosses shouted insults at Fiat chairman Luca di Montezemolo", following a meeting on Tuesday regarding the future of the Arese plant. The unions said the end of engine production at the facility would mean the loss of 800 jobs. All Alfa Romeo models can be bought with a six-cylinder engine - the 147, 156, 156 Sportwagon, 166, GTV, GT and Spider.

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"/"business 149.txt Saab to build Cadillacs in Sweden General Motors", the world's largest car maker, has confirmed that it will build a new medium-sized Cadillac BLS at its loss-making Saab factory in Sweden. The car, unveiled at the Geneva motor show, is intended to compete in the medium-sized luxury car market. It will not be sold in the US, said GM Europe president Carl-Peter Forster. As part of its efforts to make the US marque appeal to European drivers, the car will be the first Cadillac with a diesel engine. GM's announcement should go some way to allay fears of the Saab factory's closure. The factory in Trollhaettan has been at the centre of rumours about GM's planned severe cutbacks in its troubled European operations. But the group's new commitment to the Swedish factory may not be welcomed by the group's Opel workers in Russelsheim, Germany. They may now have to face a larger proportion of GM's cuts. Neither will the announcement be seen as unalloyed good news in Sweden, since it reflects Saab's failure to make significant inroads into the lucrative European luxury car market. For years, Saab has consistently said it is competing head-on with BMW, Mercedes and Jaguar. The segment's leaders do not agree. GM's plans to build the American marque in Sweden is part of its efforts to push it as an alternative luxury brand for European drivers. In the US, it has long been established as an upmarket brand - even the presidential limousine carries the badge. Yet it could prove tough for Cadillac to steal market share from the majors in Europe. Other luxury car makers, most notably the Toyota subsidiary Lexus, have enjoyed tremendous success in the US without managing to make significant inroads in Europe. There, German marques Mercedes Benz and BMW have retained their stranglehold on the luxury market. Bringing Cadillac production to Sweden should help introduce desperately-needed scale to the Saab factory, which currently produces fewer than 130,000 cars per year. That is about half of what major car makers consider sufficient numbers for profitable operations, and Saab is losing money fast - albeit with losses halved in 2004 to \$200m (£104m; 151m euros) from \$500m the previous year. Beyond the 12,000 job cuts announced last year at its European operations, GM is reducing expenditure by building Saabs, Opels - badged as Vauxhalls in the UK - and now Cadillacs on the same framework, and by allowing the different brands to share parts. Another way to further reduce Saab's losses could be to shift some of the production of Saabs to the US, a market where drivers have adopted it as an upmarket European car. Doing so would remove the exposure to the weak US dollar," which is making Saabs more expensive to US consumers. But not everyone in the industry agree that it would be the best way forward. ""We know that in five years the US dollar will be stronger than it is today"," the chief executive of a leading European car maker told BBC News. The current trend towards US production was stupid""", he said. In a separate announcement, GM unveiled a new scheme to allow European consumers the chance to test drive its Opel and Vauxhall models. It is to deploy a fleet of 35,000 test cars across 40 countries," inviting potential buyers to try out a vehicle for 24-hours. It follows a similar initiative by GM in the US. GM said it wanted to change ""customers' perceptions"" about Opel and Vauxhall cars", showing them that the quality had improved in recent years.

"/"business 150.txt Shares hit by MS drug suspension Shares in Elan and Biogen Idec plunged on Monday as the firms suspended sales of new multiple sclerosis drug Tysabri after a patient's death in the US. On the New York Stock Exchange", shares in Ireland-based Elan lost 70% while US partner Biogen Idec shed 43%. The firms took action after the death from a central nervous system disease and a suspected case of the condition. The cases cited involved

the use of both Tysabri and Avonex," Biogen Idec's existing multiple sclerosis drug. The companies said they have no reports of the rare condition - progressive multifocal leukoencephalopathy (PML) - in patients taking either Tysabri or Avonex alone. Tysabri was approved for use in the US last November and was widely tipped to become the world's leading multiple sclerosis treatment. ""The companies will work with clinical investigators to evaluate Tysabri-treated patients and will consult with leading experts to better understand the possible risk of PML", " the two firms said in a statement. The outcome of these evaluations will be used to determine possible re-initiation of dosing in clinical trials and future commercial availability." " Analysts had believed the product would provide a new growth opportunity for Biogen Idec", which had faced increased competition from rivals to Avonex. Elan, once the biggest firm on the Irish stock exchange, was also expected to receive a boost, from the new product. An inquiry into Elan's accounts in 2002 brought the group close to bankruptcy but the firm has been rebuilding itself since," with its share price increasing by almost four-fold last year. ""Most of the value in the company was in Tysabri", " said Ian Hunter at Goodbody Stockbrokers in Dublin. Now there's a question mark over it." " Elan finished down \$18.90 at \$8", while Biogen fell \$28.63 to \$38.65. - Shares in UK pharmaceutical firm Phytopharm closed down 19.84% at 151.5 pence on the London Stock Exchange on Monday, after it said a partner was set to pull out of a deal on an experimental Alzheimer's disease treatment. Phytopharm said Japan's Yamanouchi Pharmaceutical was likely to end a licensing agreement, prompting analysts to raise questions over the level of its future cash reserves.

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"business 151.txt Bank voted 8-1 for no rate change The decision to keep interest rates on hold at 4.75% earlier this month was passed 8-1 by the Bank of England's rate-setting body", minutes have shown. One member of the Bank's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) - Paul Tucker - voted to raise rates to 5%. The news surprised some analysts who had expected the latest minutes to show another unanimous decision. Worries over growth rates and consumer spending were behind the decision to freeze rates, the minutes showed. The Bank's latest inflation report, released last week, had noted that the main reason inflation might fall was weaker consumer spending. However, MPC member Paul Tucker voted for a quarter point rise in interest rates to 5%. He argued that economic growth was picking up, and that the equity," credit and housing markets had been stronger than expected. The Bank's minutes said that risks to the inflation forecast were ""sufficiently to the downside"" to keep rates on hold at its latest meeting. However", " the minutes added: ""Some members noted that an increase might be warranted in due course if the economy evolved in line with the central projection"". Ross Walker", UK economist at Royal Bank of Scotland," said he was surprised that a dissenting vote had been made so soon. He said the minutes appeared to be ""trying to get the market to focus on the possibility of a rise in rates"". ""If the economy pans out as they expect then they are probably going to have to hike rates." " However", he added, any rate increase is not likely to happen until later this year, with MPC members likely to look for a more sustainable pick up in consumer spending before acting.

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"business 152.txt Crude oil prices back above \$50 Cold weather across parts of the United States and much of Europe has pushed US crude oil prices above \$50 a barrel for the first time in almost three months. Freezing temperatures and heavy snowfall have increased demand for heating fuel in the US", where stocks are low. Fresh falls in the value of the dollar helped car

ry prices above the \$50 mark for the first time since November. A barrel of US crude oil closed up \$2.80 to \$51.15 in New York on Tuesday. Opec members said on Tuesday that it saw no reason to cut its output. Although below last year's peak of \$55.67 a barrel, which was reached in October, prices are now well above 2004's average of \$41.48. Brent crude also rose in London trading," adding \$1.89 to \$48.62 at the close. Much of western Europe and the north east of America has been shivering under unseasonably low temperatures in recent days. The decline in the US dollar to a five-week low against the euro has also served to inflate prices. ""The dollar moved sharply overnight and oil is following it"," said Chris Furness, senior market strategist at 4Cast. If the dollar continues to weaken"," oil will be obviously higher." Several Opec members said a cut in production was unlikely"," citing rising prices and strong demand for oil from Asia. ""I agree that we do not need to cut supply if the prices are as much as this"," Fathi Bin Shatwan, Libya's oil minister, told Reuters. I do not think we need to cut unless the prices are falling below \$35 a barrel"," he added. Opec closely watches global stocks to ensure that there is not an excessive supply in the market. The arrival of spring in the northern hemisphere will focus attention on stockpiles of US crude and gasoline, which are up to 9% higher than at this time last year. Heavy stockpiles could help force prices lower when demand eases.

business 153.txt House prices show slight increase Prices of homes in the UK rose a seasonally adjusted 0.5% in February, says the Nationwide building society. The figure means the annual rate of increase in the UK is down to 10.2%, the lowest rate since June 2001. The annual rate has halved since August last year, as interest rates have cooled the housing market. At the same time, the number of mortgage approvals fell in January to a near 10-year low, official Bank of England figures have shown. Nationwide said that in January house prices went up by 0.4% on the month and by 12.6% on a year earlier. We are not seeing the market collapsing in the way some had feared"," said Nationwide economist Alex Bannister. There have been a number of warnings that the UK housing market may be heading for a downturn after four years of strong growth to 2004. In November, Barclays, which owns former building society the Woolwich, forecast an 8% fall in property prices in 2005, followed by further declines in 2006 and 2007. And last summer, economists at PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) warned house prices were overvalued and could fall by between 10% and 15% by 2009. The price of an average UK property now stands at £152,879. Homeowners now expect house prices to rise by 1% over the next six months, Mr Bannister said. He said if the growth continued at this level then the Bank of England may increase interest rates from their current 4.75%. I think the key is what the Bank expects to happen to the housing market. We always thought we would see a small rise"," they thought they would see a small decline." House prices have risen 0.9% this year", Nationwide said, and if this pace of increase persists, prices would rise by just under 6% in the year to December. This is slightly above the 0-5% range Nationwide predicts. Further evidence of a slowdown in the housing market emerged from Bank of England lending figures released on Tuesday. New mortgage loans in January fell to 79,000 from 82,000 in December, the bank said. The past few months have seen approvals fall to levels last seen in 1995. The Bank revealed that 48,000 fewer mortgages were approved in January than for the same month in 2004. Overall, mortgage lending rose by £7.2bn in January, marginally up on the £7.1bn rise in December.

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"business 154.txt Golden rule boost for Chancellor Chancellor Gordon Brown has been given a £2.1bn boost in his attempts to meet his go

den economic rule", which allows him to borrow only for investment. The extra leeway came after the Office for National Statistics said it had been measuring road expenditure data wrongly over the past five years. It comes just weeks ahead of the Budget and an expected general election. Shadow chancellor Oliver Letwin said: ""At best the timing of these changes is very convenient for the government." A review by the ONS found it had made a mistake by "double counting" some spending on roads since 1998/9. Correcting the error would mean reducing current expenditure and increasing net investment", thus helping Mr Brown to meet his ""golden rule"" of borrowing only to invest over the economic cycle. Economists speculated that it might also allow for some vote-catching measures in the Budget. The changes by the ONS increase the current budget measure for the past five years by £2.1bn in total. Mr Letwin said: ""This is a very murky area... There will inevitably be suspicions that the figures are being fiddled." The Conservatives also said Mr Brown would still be forced to raise taxes after the general election to fill an annual £10.5bn ""black hole"" in the nation's coffers. But the Treasury said there would be no relaxation of economic discipline and the golden rule would be met even without the data revisions. In January the independent Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) said Mr Brown would need to raise taxes to get public finances onto the track predicted in last year's Budget. It also said the government might narrowly miss its ""golden rule"" if the current economic cycle ended in 2005/06. After the ONS announcement", economists said there could also be a proportionate boost to the current budget in 2004/05 of about £400m. ""None of this changes the big picture of a dramatic deterioration in the overall fiscal position over the last four or five years," said Jonathan Loynes, chief UK economist at Capital Economics. Accordingly", it seems very likely that some form of fiscal consolidation will be required in due course."

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"business 155.txt Macy's owner buys rival for \$11bn US retail giant Federated Department Stores is to buy rival May Department Stores for \$11bn (£5.7bn). The deal will bring together famous stores like Macy's, Bloomingdale's and Marshall Field's, creating the largest department store chain in the US. The combined firm will operate about 1,000 stores across the US, with combined annual sales of \$30bn. The two companies, facing competition from the likes of Wal-Mart, tried to merge two years ago but talks failed. Sources familiar with the deal said that negotiations between the two companies sped up after May's chairman and chief executive Gene Kahn resigned in January. As part of the deal, Federated - owner of Macy's and Bloomingdale's - will assume \$6bn of May's debt," bringing the deal's total value to \$17bn. Directors at both companies have approved the deal and it is expected to conclude by the third quarter of this year. May has struggled to compete against larger department store groups such as Federated and other retailers such as Wal-Mart. Federated expects the merger to boost earnings from 2007 but the deal will cost it \$1bn in one-off charges. ""We have taken the first step toward combining two of the best department store companies in America", creating a new retail company with truly national scope and presence," said Terry Lundgren, Federated's chairman. Some analysts see the merger as a rescue deal for May. Without this deal May would have been", to put it bluntly, washed up," said Kurt Barnard, president of Barnard's Retail Consulting Group. Federated has annual sales of \$15.6bn, while May's yearly sales are \$14.4bn.

business 156.txt Industrial revival hope for Japan Japanese industry is growing faster than expected, boosting hopes that the country's

retreat back into recession is over. Industrial output rose 2.1% - adjusted for the time of year - in January from a month earlier. At the same time, retail sales picked up faster than at any time since 1997. The news sent Tokyo shares to an eight-month high, as investors hoped for a recovery from the three quarters of contraction seen from April 2004 on. The Nikkei 225 index ended the day up 0.7% at 11,740.60 points, with the yen strengthening 0.7% against the dollar to 104.53 yen. Weaker exports, normally the engine for Japan's economy in the face of weak domestic demand, had helped trigger a 0.1% contraction in the final three months of last year after two previous quarters of shrinking GDP. Only an exceptionally strong performance in the early months of 2004 kept the year as a whole from showing a decline. The output figures brought a cautiously optimistic response from economic officials. Overall I see a low risk of the economy falling into serious recession", said Bank of Japan chief Toshihiko Fukui, despite a warning that other indicators - such as the growth numbers - had been worrying. Within the overall industrial output figure, there were signs of a pullback from the export slowdown. Among the best-performing sectors were key overseas sales areas such as cars, chemicals and electronic goods. With US growth doing better than expected the picture for exports in early 2005 could also be one of sustained demand. Electronics were also one of the keys to the improved domestic market, with products such as flat-screen TVs in high demand during January.

business 157.txt Khodorkovsky ally denies charges A close associate of former Yukos boss Mikhail Khodorkovsky has told a court that fraud charges levelled against him are false". Platon Lebedev has been on trial alongside Mr Khodorkovsky since June in a case centring around the privatisation of a fertiliser firm. The pair claim they are being punished by the authorities for the political ambitions of Mr Khodorkovsky. Mr Lebedev said there were ""absurd contradictions"" in the case. Opening his defence", he said he could not see the legal basis of the charges he faced," which also include allegations of tax evasion. ""To my embarrassment", I could not understand the file of complaints against me," he told a Moscow court. Mr Lebedev headed the Menatep group, the parent company of Yukos. Mr Lebedev and Mr Khodorkovsky, who each face a possible 10 year jail sentence if convicted, will be questioned by a judge over the next few days. Mr Khodorkovsky began his testimony last week, telling the court that he objected to the way that the running of a normal business has been presented as a work of criminal fiction". The charges are seen by supporters as politically motivated and part of a drive by Russian President Vladimir Putin to rein in the country's super-rich business leaders", the so-called oligarchs. Yukos has been presented with a \$27.5bn (£13bn) tax demand by the Russian authorities and its key Yugansk division was auctioned off to part settle the bill. The company's effort to gain bankruptcy protection in the US - in a bid to win damages for the sale - were dismissed by a court in Texas.

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"business 158.txt Qatar and Shell in \$6bn gas deal Shell has signed a \$6bn (£3.12bn) deal with the Middle Eastern sheikhdom of Qatar to supply liquid natural gas (LNG) to North America and Europe. The UK-Dutch group will own 30% of the project", with Qatar's state oil firm owning the rest. The agreement is the latest in a string of deals reached by Qatar, which is trying to make itself a regional leader in natural gas. US oil giant ExxonMobil signed up for a \$12.8bn deal earlier on Sunday. France's Total is expected to join the ExxonMobil scheme, dubbed Qatargas-2, on Monday, taking 5 million tonnes of LNG a year. ExxonMobil will be taking some 15 million tonnes each year for 25 years from the end of 2007 under the deal. Shell's agreement, under the name Qatargas-4, foresees the building of new facilities to handle 1.4 billion cubic fe

et of gas, and 7.8 million tonnes of LNG each year from 2011 onwards.

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"business 159.txt India unveils anti-poverty budget India is to boost spending on primary schools and health in a budget flagged as a boost for the ordinary citizen. India's defence budget has also been raised 7.8% to 830bn rupees (\$19bn). The priority for Finance Minister Palaniappan Chidambaram is to fight poverty and keep the government's Communist allies onside. But his options are limited by a new law which makes him cut the budget deficit", which he said would be 4.5% of GDP in the year to March 2005. The country's overall deficit is thought to be more than 10%, if the spending of India's 35 states and territories is included. Under the fiscal responsibility law, Mr Chidambaram has to trim the deficit by 0.3 percentage points each year, a target he says he has now met for the current year. But the heavy spending on poverty reduction means the 2005-6 target for the deficit will be 4.3%, " Mr Chidambaram said - falling short of the new law's requirement. ""I was left with no option but to press the pause button vis a vis the act", he said. The following year, though, would have to be back on track, he warned. I may add that we are perilously close to the limits of fiscal prudence and there is no more room for spending beyond our means", he said. The coming year's reduction has meant bringing more of the businesses in India's burgeoning services sector into the tax system and restructuring the personal tax system, although there are numerous corporate tax and duty reductions built into the budget. Presenting his budget in the lower house of parliament, Mr Chidambaram said the Indian economy was performing strongly and that inflation has been reined in. He said India's economy grew 6.9% in 2004. In his budget Mr Chidambaram has: - Increased spending on primary education to 71.56bn rupees (\$1.6bn) - Increased spending on health to 102.8bn rupees (\$2.35bn) - Announced that 80bn rupees (\$1.8bn) will be spent on building rural infrastructure - Pledged 102.16bn rupees (\$2.3bn) for tsunami victims - Increased flow of funds to agriculture by 30% - Announced a package for the sugar industry In addition, up to 100bn rupees (\$2.3bn) to be spent on infrastructure will be sourced by borrowing against the country's foreign exchange reserves, keeping budgeted spending under control. Given the resilience of the Indian economy... it is possible to launch a direct assault on poverty", Mr Chidambaram said. The whole purpose of democratic government is to eliminate poverty." The new Indian government", led by the Congress Party," was voted into power last May after it pledged to introduce economic reforms with a ""human face"". The finance minister says he is committed to continue reforming India's tax system while expanding the tax base. As part of his reforms he has announced: - Duty cuts on capital goods and raw materials - Expanded service tax net - Raised the income-tax threshold to 100",000 rupees (\$2,300) - Reduced income tax for those earning less than 250,000 rupees (\$5,700) to 20% - Reduced corporate tax rates to 30% An annual economic survey released on Friday said India needed to ease limit restriction on foreign investment, reform labour laws and cut duties apart from widening the tax base for long-term economic growth. But Mr Chidambaram is under pressure from the Communist parties to focus on increasing social spending. The Communists are also hostile to measures seeking to increase foreign investment and allow companies to hire and fire employees at will. In recent months, they have expressed their displeasure at the government's economic reform plans including increasing foreign direct investment in telecommunication and aviation. In his last budget, Mr Chidambaram had pledged billions of dollars for improving education and health services for the poor as well as special assistance for farmers.

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"/"business 160.txt GM pays \$2bn to evade Fiat buyout General Motors of the US is to pay Fiat 1.55bn euros (\$2bn; £1.1bn) to get out of a deal which could have forced it to buy the Italian car maker outright. Fiat had sold GM a stake in 2000", as part of a partnership agreement. But Fiat's heavy losses have convinced GM - whose own European operations are in the red - to back away. The pay-off means the two firms will unwind joint ventures, but Fiat will keep supplying diesel engines and the money will allow it to reduce its debt. Fiat's shares on the Milan stock exchange rose 4.5% by 0900 GMT to 6.2 euros," having shot up more than 7% in early trading. ""We now have absolute freedom to design our own future"," said Fiat chief executive Sergio Marchionne. Analysts said Fiat seemed to have done well out of the deal, although some predictions had expected a 2bn euro pay-off. Fiat is to get 1bn euros immediately, with another 550m to follow within 90 days. The firm is Italy's largest private employer, and a failure to reach an agreement could have had severe consequences for thousands of workers and for the Italian economy. For its part, GM was keen to ward off any criticism that the deal had been a mistake. We needed scale in Europe to get costs down", and we were able to do that in working with Fiat," said GM chief executive Rick Wagoner. The Fiat-GM alliance came about in 2000 as an alternative to selling Fiat outright. German-US car firm DaimlerChrysler had been willing to buy the firm, but Fiat patriarch Gianni Agnelli did not want to give up control. Instead, GM swapped a 6% stake in itself for 20% of Fiat - and gave Fiat a put option"" to sell GM the rest of the car maker between January 2004 and July 2009. But despite the alliance Fiat failed to put itself back on track", continuing to lose money and market share. As a result, the sell-off looked better and better for the Italians - and much worse for GM, which is struggling with its own loss-making European marques Opel and Saab. The relationship soured further after Fiat sold half its finance arm and recapitalised in 2003, halving GM's stake to 10%.

"/"business 161.txt Ex-Boeing director gets jail term An ex-chief financial officer at Boeing has received a four-month jail sentence and a fine of \$250",000 (£131,961) for illegally hiring a top Air Force aide. Michael Sears admitted his guilt in breaking conflict of interest laws by recruiting Darleen Druyun while she still handled military contracts. Ms Druyun is currently serving a nine month sentence for favouring Boeing when awarding lucrative contracts. Boeing lost a \$23bn government contract after a Pentagon inquiry into the case. The contract, to provide refuelling tankers for the US Air Force, was cancelled last year. The Pentagon revealed earlier this week that it would examine eight other contracts worth \$3bn which it believes may have been tainted by Ms Druyun's role in the procurement process. Boeing sacked Mr Sears and Ms Druyun in November 2003 after allegations that they had violated company recruitment policy. Ms Druyun had talks with Mr Sears in October 2002 about working for Boeing, while she was still a top procurement official within the Pentagon. She subsequently joined the company in January 2003. Ms Druyun admitted that she had steered multi-billion dollar contracts to Boeing and other favoured companies. In documents filed in a Virginia court ahead of Mr Sears' sentencing," prosecutors blamed Boeing's senior management for failing to ask key questions about the ""legal and ethical issues"" surrounding Ms Druyun's appointment. Mr Sears told prosecutors that no other Boeing officials were aware that Ms Druyun was still responsible for major procurement decisions at the time she was discussing a job with Boeing. However", analysts believe Boeing may yet face civil charges arising from the scandal. The Pentagon has investigated 400 contracts, d

ating back to 1993, since the allegations against Ms Druyun came to light. Boeing's corporate ethics have come under scrutiny on several occasions in recent years. Boeing was sued by Lockheed Martin after its rival accused it of industrial espionage during a 1998 contract competition. Boeing apologised publicly for the affair - although it claimed it did not gain any unfair advantage - and pledged to improve its procedures. The Pentagon subsequently revoked \$1bn worth of contracts assigned to Boeing and prohibited the Seattle-based company from future rocket work.

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"business 162.txt Verizon 'seals takeover of MCI' Verizon has won a takeover battle for US phone firm MCI with a bid worth \$6.8bn (£3.6bn)", reports say. The two firms are expected to seal the deal on Monday morning, according to news agency reports, despite what was thought to be a higher bid from Qwest. The US telecoms market is consolidating fast, with former long-distance giant AT&T being bought by former subsidiary SBC earlier this year for \$16bn. MCI exited bankruptcy in April, having gone bust under previous name WorldCom. The bankruptcy followed its admission in 2002 that it illegally booked expenses and inflated profits. Shareholders lost about \$180bn when the company collapsed, while 20,000 workers lost their jobs. Former Worldcom boss Bernie Ebbers is currently on trial, accused of overseeing an \$11bn fraud. Qwest has itself come under suspicion of sub-standard behaviour, paying the Securities and Exchange Commission \$250m in October to settle charges that it manipulated its results to keep Wall Street happy. MCI is the US's second-biggest long distance firm after AT&T. Consolidation in the US telecommunications industry has picked up in the past few months as companies look to cut costs and boost client bases. A merger between MCI and Verizon would be the fifth billion-dollar telecoms deal since October. Last week, SBC Communications agreed to buy its former parent and phone trailblazer AT&T for about \$16bn. Buying MCI would give either Qwest or Verizon access to MCI's global network and business-based subscribers. The rationale is similar to the one underpinning SBC's AT&T deal. Verizon is by far the bigger company and has its own successful mobile arm - factors which may have swung the board in its favour since both suitors are offering a mixture of cash and shares.

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"business 163.txt US data sparks inflation worries Wholesale prices in the US rose at the fastest rate in more than six years in January", according to government data. New figures show the Labor Department producer price index (PPI) rose by 0.3% - in line with forecasts. But core producer prices, which exclude food and energy costs, surged by 0.8%, the biggest rise since December 1998, increasing inflationary concerns. In contrast, the University of Michigan barometer of US retail consumer confidence showed a slight dip. The university's index of consumer spending fell to 94.2 in early February from 95.5 in January, which could indicate a fall in retail spending by the US public. The mixed set of data on Friday led to volatile early Wall Street trade, as the Dow Jones, Standard and Poor's 500, and Nasdaq swung between positive and negative territory. The economic figures come on the back of increased fears that the Federal Reserve chairman may be about to raise interest rates in order to stifle any inflationary pressures. The Fed has been raising interest rates at a gradual pace since June 2004," in an attempt to make sure inflation does not get out of control. Mr Greenspan told Congress this week that the central bank was on guard against the possibility that a rebounding economy could trigger stronger inflation pressures. ""The PPI would argue for Greenspan to continue to

raise rates at a measured pace", " said Joe Quinlan, chief market strategist at Bank of America Capital Management. But this Michigan survey tells you that the consumer might be downshifting a little bit in terms of their confidence and their spending; this could be an indication of that." " Consumer spending accounts for 66% of US economic activity and is viewed as a gauge of the health of the economy", which is why the Michigan data is closely observed. However on Friday, it was overshadowed by the core PPI core figure, which surged 2.7% during the past 12 months," the biggest year-on-year gain in nine years. " "The concern is that traders might interpret this big jump in the core PPI as an impetus for the Fed to be more aggressive than a measured move in moving rates", " said Paul Cherney, chief market analyst at Standard & Poor's. But Ian Shepherdson, chief US economist at High Frequency Economics, said the PPI report was much less alarming" " than at first glance. One-time increases in alcohol and tobacco prices", " which " "are no indication of broad PPI pressure" " " " , were responsible for the increase, he said. Prices for autos and trucks also jumped in January," but Shepherdson said " "it is a good bet these increases won't stick" " .

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"business 164.txt Yukos sues four firms for \$20bn Russian oil firm Yukos has sued four companies for their role in last year's forced state auction of its key oil production unit Yuganskneftegas. Yukos is claiming more than \$20bn (£11bn) in damages after Yugansk was sold in December to settle back taxes. The four companies named in the law suit are gas giant Gazprom", its unit Gazpromneft, investment company Baikal, and state oil firm Rosneft. Yukos submitted the suit in Houston, where it filed for bankruptcy. As well as suing for damages, Yukos has asked the US court to send its tax dispute with the Russian government to an international arbitrator. It also has submitted a reorganisation plan as part of its Chapter 11 bankruptcy filing. The clash between Yukos and the Kremlin came to a head last year when Yukos was hit with a bill of more than \$27bn in back taxes and unpaid fines. To settle the bill, Russia forced Yukos to sell off Yuganskneftegas. Yukos called the sale illegal and has turned to courts in the US in an effort to regain control of the oil production business. It also has vowed to use all legal means at its disposal to go after any firm that tries to buy or take control of its assets. Earlier this month it sued the Russian government for \$28.3bn. Analysts have questioned whether a US court has any jurisdiction over Russian companies, while Moscow officials have dismissed Yukos' legal wrangling as meaningless. In Houston, bankruptcy Judge Letitia Clark will start a two-day hearing on 16 February to hear arguments on whether a US court is the proper forum for the case. The threat of legal action from Yukos and its bankruptcy filing in Houston did have an effect on last year's auction, however. Concerned that it would be caught up in a court battle, Gazprom and Gazpromneft withdrew from the auction, and Yuganskneftegas was sold to little-known investment firm Baikal Finance Group. A few days later, Baikal gave control of the company to state-run oil group Rosneft for \$9.3bn. Rosneft, meanwhile, has agreed to merge with Gazprom, bringing a large chunk of Russia's very profitable oil business back under state control. Yukos claims that the rights of its shareholders have been ignored and that it has been punished for the political ambitions of its founder Mikhail Khodorkovsky. Mr Khodorkovsky, once Russia's richest man, is in prison, having been charged with fraud and tax evasion and repeatedly denied bail.

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"business 165.txt Consumer spending lifts US growth US economic growth accelerated in the third quarter", helped by strong consumer spen

ding, official figures have shown. The economy expanded at an annual rate of 3.7% in the July to September period, the Commerce Department said. The figure marked an increase on the 3.3% growth recorded in the second quarter," but fell short of the 4.2% rate pencilled in by forecasters. The increase reflected the biggest jump in consumer spending in a year. ""It was a little softer than the consensus", but not a real surprise," said Gary Thayer, an economist at AG Edwards & Sons. Friday's growth estimate is one of the last significant pieces of economic data before the 2 November presidential election. Democrat challenger John Kerry has criticised President George W Bush's handling of the economy, pointing to a net loss of over 800,000 jobs since Mr Bush took office. Analysts said the economy was still not growing fast enough to stimulate large-scale job creation. It's a pretty good growth rate", but it may not be good enough to create enough jobs," said Robert Brusca, chief economist at Fact and Opinion Economics in New York. However, President Bush is expected to point to Commerce Department figures showing that consumer spending grew at 4.6% in the third quarter, up from just 1.6% in the second, as evidence that his policies are generating solid growth. Consumer spending accounts for about two thirds of all economic activity in the US. The weaker than expected growth figure makes it less likely that the US Federal Reserve will raise interest rates next month, economists said. The economy regained some traction in the third quarter", but the growth is not robust," AG Edwards' Thayer. I think that means the Fed can take its time raising rates. We'll probably see one more rate hike before the end of the year." In an effort to pre-empt rising inflation", the Federal Reserve has pushed through three quarter-point rate rises since June this year, taking borrowing costs to 1.75%. On the financial markets, the dollar fell slightly against the euro and the yen, while the Dow Jones index of leading US shares was little changed.

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"business 166.txt Crossrail link 'to get go-ahead' The £1 0bn Crossrail transport plan", backed by business groups, is to get the go-ahead this month," according to The Mail on Sunday. It says the UK Treasury has allocated £7.5bn (\$13.99bn) for the project and that talks with business groups on raising the rest will begin shortly. The much delayed Crossrail Link Bill would provide for a fast cross-London rail link. The paper says it will go before the House of Commons on 23 February. A second reading could follow on 16 or 17 March. ""We've always said we are going to introduce a hybrid Bill for Crossrail in the Spring and this remains the case", " the Department for Transport said on Sunday. Jeremy de Souza, a spokesman for Crossrail, said on Sunday he could not confirm whether the Treasury was planning to invest £7.5bn or when the bill would go before Parliament. However, he said some impetus may have been provided by the proximity of an election. The new line would go out as far as Maidenhead, Berkshire, to the west of London, and link Heathrow to Canary Wharf via the City. Heathrow to the City would take 40 minutes, dramatically cutting journey times for business travellers, and reducing overcrowding on the tube. The line has the support of the Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, business groups and the government, but there have been three years of arguments over how it should be funded. The Mail on Sunday's Financial Mail said the £7.5bn of Treasury money was earmarked for spending in £2.5bn instalments in 2010, 2011 and 2012.

business 167.txt Hariri killing hits Beirut shares Shares in Solidere, the Lebanese company founded by assassinated former prime minister Rafik Hariri, fell 15% in renewed trading in Beirut. The real estate firm, which dominates Lebanon's stock exchange, ended the day down at \$8.08. Traders said there was some panic selling during Friday's session, the first since a thre

e-day market closure to mourn the death of Mr Hariri. Beirut's benchmark BLOM stock index closed down 7.9% at 642.80. Solidere, in which Mr Hariri was a major shareholder, was the major drag on the index. The company owns much of the property in central Beirut, which it restored and redeveloped following the end of Lebanon's bitter 15-year civil war. Solidere should be above \$10 but because of this disaster it is falling", " said one trader. If Solidere drops much lower I would consider it a buying opportunity. This is a very big company held by many Lebanese." " Critics had accused Mr Hariri of using Lebanon's post-war reconstruction drive for his personal financial gain. But his assassination on Monday sent shudders through Lebanon's business community", which saw the billionaire tycoon as the country's best hope for economic revival. Solidere posted profits of \$12.5m in the first half of 2004, and its shares had been gaining in recent months.

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"business 168.txt Small firms 'hit by rising costs' Rising fuel and materials costs are hitting confidence among the UK's small manufacturers despite a rise in output", business lobby group the CBI says. A CBI quarterly survey found output had risen by the fastest rate in seven years but many firms were seeing the benefits offset by increasing expenses. The CBI also found spending on innovation, training and retraining is forecast to go up over the next year. However," firms continue to scale back investment in buildings and machinery. The CBI said companies are looking to the government to lessen the regulatory load and are hoping interest rates will be kept on hold. ""Smaller manufacturers are facing an uphill struggle", " said Hugh Morgan Williams, chair of the CBI's SME Council. The manufacturing sector needs a period of long-term stability in the economy." " The CBI found some firms managed to increase prices for the first time in nine years - but many said increases failed to keep up the rise in costs. Of the companies surveyed", 30% saw orders rise and 27% saw them fall. The positive balance of plus 3 compared with minus 10 in the previous survey. When firms were questioned on output volume, the survey returned a balance of plus 8 - the highest rate of increase for seven years - and rose to plus 11 when looking ahead to the next three months.

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"business 169.txt Buyers snap up Jet Airways' shares Investors have snapped up shares in Jet Airways", India's biggest airline, following the launch of its much anticipated initial public offer (IPO). The IPO for 17.3 million shares was fully sold within 10 minutes of opening, on Friday. Analysts expect Jet to raise at least 16.4bn rupees (\$375m; £198m) from the offering. Interest in Jet's IPO has been fuelled by hopes for robust growth in India's air travel market. The share offer, representing about 20% of Jet's equity, was oversubscribed, news agency Reuters reported. Jet, which was founded by London-based travel agent Naresh Goyal, plans to use the cash to buy new planes and cut its debt. The company has grown rapidly since it launched operations in 1993, overtaking state-owned flag carrier Indian Airlines. However, it faces stiff competition from rivals and low-cost carriers. Jet's IPO is the first in a series of expected share offers from Indian companies this year, as they move to raise funds to help them do business in a rapidly-growing economy.

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"business 170.txt House prices suffer festive fall UK house prices fell 0.7% in December", according to figures from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. Nationally, house prices rose at an annual rate of 10.7%

in December, less than the 13.7% rise the previous month. The average UK house price fell from £180,126 in November to £178,906, reflecting recent Land Registry figures confirming a slowdown in late 2004. All major UK regions, apart from Northern Ireland, experienced a fall in annual growth during December. December is traditionally a quiet month for the housing market because of Christmas celebrations. However, recent figures from the Land Registry - showing a big drop in sales between the last quarter of 2004 and the previous year - suggested the slowdown could be more than a seasonal blip. The volume of sales between October and December dropped by nearly a quarter from the same period in 2003, the Land Registry said. Although both the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and the Land Registry figures point to a slowdown in the market, the most recent surveys from Nationwide and Halifax have indicated the market may be undergoing a revival. After registering falls at the back-end of 2004, Halifax said house prices rose by 0.8% in January and Nationwide reported a rise of 0.4% in the first month of the year.

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"business 171.txt Deutsche Boerse boosts dividend Deutsche Boerse", the German stock exchange that is trying to buy its London rival, has said it will boost its 2004 dividend payment by 27%. Analysts said that the move is aimed at winning over investors opposed to its bid for the London Stock Exchange. Critics of the takeover have complained that the money could be better used by returning cash to shareholders. Deutsche Boerse also said profit in the three months to 31 December was 120.7m euros (\$158.8m; £83.3m). Sales climbed to 364.4m euros, lifting revenue for the year to a record 1.45bn euros. Frankfurt-based Deutsche Boerse has offered £1.3bn (\$2.48bn; 1.88bn euros) for the London Stock Exchange. Rival pan-European bourse Euronext is working also on a bid. Late on Monday," Deutsche Boerse said it would lift its 2004 dividend payment to 70 euro cents (£0.48; \$0.98) from 55 euro cents a year earlier. "There is a whiff of a sweetener in there", Anais Faraj, an analyst at Nomura told the BBC's World Business Report. Most of the disgruntled shareholders of Deutsche Boerse are complaining that the money that is being used for the bid could be better placed in their hands", paid out in dividends," Mr Faraj continued. Deutsche Boerse is trying to buy them off in a sense""", he said.

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"business 172.txt Newest EU members underpin growth The European Union's newest members will bolster Europe's economic growth in 2005", according to a new report. The eight central European states which joined the EU last year will see 4.6% growth, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) said. In contrast," the 12 Euro zone countries will put in a ""lacklustre"" performance", generating growth of only 1.8%. The global economy will slow in 2005, the UNECE forecasts, due to widespread weakness in consumer demand. It warned that growth could also be threatened by attempts to reduce the United States' huge current account deficit which, in turn, might lead to significant volatility in exchange rates. UNECE is forecasting average economic growth of 2.2% across the European Union in 2005. However, total output across the Euro zone is forecast to fall in 2004 from 1.9% to 1.8%. This is due largely to the faltering German economy, which shrank 0.2% in the last quarter of 2004. On Monday, Germany's BdB private banks association said the German economy would struggle to meet its 1.4% growth target in 2005. Separately," the Bundesbank warned that Germany's efforts to reduce its budget deficit below 3% of GDP presented ""huge risks"" given that headline economic growth was set to fall below 1% this year. Publishing its 2005 economic survey", the UNECE said central Europe

n countries such as the Czech Republic and Slovenia would provide the backbone of the continent's growth. Smaller nations such as Cyprus, Ireland and Malta would also be among the continent's best performing economies this year, it said. The UK economy, on the other hand, is expected to slow in 2005," with growth falling from 3.2% last year to 2.5%. Consumer demand will remain fragile in many of Europe's largest countries and economies will be mostly driven by growth in exports. ""In view of the fragility of factors of domestic growth and the damping effects of the stronger euro on domestic economic activity and inflation", monetary policy in the euro area is likely to continue to 'wait and see', " the organisation said in its report. Global economic growth is expected to fall from 5% in 2004 to 4.25% despite the continued strength of the Chinese and US economies. The UNECE warned that attempts to bring about a controlled reduction in the US current account deficit could cause difficulties. ""The orderly reversal of the deficit is a major challenge for policy makers in both the United States and other economies", " it noted.

business 173.txt Brewers' profits lose their fizz Heineken and Carlsberg, two of the world's largest brewers, have reported falling profits after beer sales in western Europe fell flat. Dutch firm Heineken saw its annual profits drop 33% and warned that earnings in 2005 may also slide. Danish brewer Carlsberg suffered a 3% fall in profits due to waning demand and increased marketing costs. Both are looking to Russia and China to provide future growth as western European markets are largely mature. Heineken's net income fell to 537m euros (\$701m; £371m) during 2004, from 798m euro a year ago. It blamed weak demand in western Europe and currency losses. It had warned in September that the weakening US dollar, which has cut the value of foreign sales, would knock 125m euros off its operating profits. Despite the dip in profits, Heineken's sales have been improving and total revenue for the year was 10bn euros, up 8.1% from 9.26bn euros in 2003. Heineken said it now plans to invest 100m euros in aggressive"" and ""high-impact"" marketing in Europe and the US in 2005. Heineken", which also owns the Amstel and Murphy's stout brands, said it would also seek to cut costs. This may involve closing down breweries. Heineken increased its dividend payment by 25% to 40 euro cents, but warned that the continued impact of a weaker dollar and an increased marketing spend may lead to a drop in 2005 net profit. Carlsberg, the world's fifth-largest brewer, saw annual pre-tax profits fall to 3.4bn Danish kroner (456m euros). Its beer sales have been affected by the sluggish European economy and by the banning of smoking in pubs in several European countries. Nevertheless, total sales increased 4% to 36bn kroner, thanks to strong sales of Carlsberg lager in Russia and Poland. Carlsberg is more optimistic than Heineken about 2005, projecting a 15% rise in net profits for the year. However, it also plans to cut 200 jobs in Sweden, where sales have been hit by demand for cheap," imported brands. ""We remain cautious about the medium-to-long term outlook for revenue growth across western Europe for a host of economic", social and structural reasons," investment bank Merrill Lynch said of Carlsberg.

business 174.txt Yangtze Electric's profits double Yangtze Electric Power, the operator of China's Three Gorges Dam, has said its profits more than doubled in 2004. The firm has benefited from increased demand for electricity at a time when power shortages have hit cities and provinces across the country. As a hydroelectric-power generator it has not been hurt by higher coal costs. Net income jumped to 3bn yuan in 2004 (\$365m; £190m), compared with 1.4bn yuan in 2003. Sales surged to 6.2bn yuan, from 3bn yuan a year earlier. The figures topped analysts expectations, even though the rate of growth has slowed from 2003. Analysts forecast that it is likely to decline further this year to a rate of expansion of closer to 20%. Yangtze Electric has been expanding i

ts output to meet demand driven by China's booming economy. The government has delayed the building of a number of power plants in an effort to rein in growth amid concerns that the economy may overheat. That has led to an energy crunch, with demand outstripping supply. Earlier this month, work was halted on an underground power station, and a supply unit on the Three Gorges Dam, as well as a power station on its sister Xiluodu dam because of environmental worries. A total of 30 large-scale projects have been halted across the country for similar reasons. The Three Gorges Dam project has led to more than half a million people being relocated and drawn criticism from environmental groups and overseas human rights activists. Its sister project, the Xiluodu Dam, is being built on the Jinshajiang - or river of golden sand"" as the upper reaches of the Yangtze are known.

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"business 175.txt French consumer spending rising French consumers increased their spending by 1.5% in January", a figure which bodes well for the country's economic growth, figures revealed. The National Statistic Institute (INSEE) added that consumer spending in January rose 3.8% on a year-on-year basis. Rising sales of household equipment were behind the increase. The INSEE also said that French consumer prices fell 0.6% in January, but were up 1.6% on an annual basis. Despite the general increase in spending in January, French households bought fewer cars in January. According to the INSEE, car sales fell 2.8% in January, following a fall of 0.6% in December. But on a year-on-year basis," the sector still saw a sales increase of 6.5%. Consumer spending fuelled France's economic growth in the last quarter of 2004 and analysts expect that it will continue to support the economy. ""It's a growth that will remain fragile and vulnerable to risks like a strong rise in long-term interest rates", tension in the oil price," Emmanuel Ferry, from Exane BNP Paribas told Reuters news agency. Meanwhile in Italy, consumer confidence rose to its highest level since October 2004. Economic research group ISAE has said that Italian consumer confidence rose to 104.4 from 103.3, despite a slight deterioration in short-term sentiment.

business 176.txt GSK aims to stop Aids profiteers One of the world's largest manufacturers of HIV/Aids drugs has launched an initiative to combat the smuggling of cheaper pills - supplied to poorer African countries - back into Europe for resale at far higher price. The company, GlaxoSmithKline, is to alter the packaging and change the colour of the pills, currently provided to developing nations under a humanitarian agreement. It is estimated that drugs companies are losing hundreds of millions of dollars each year as a result of the diversion of their products in this way. This is a very sensitive area for the big drugs companies. They want to maintain their profits, but have been put under tremendous pressure to provide cheap anti-Aids drugs to the world's poorest nations. The result is that drugs supplied to Africa are now more than thirty times cheaper than those sold in Europe; bringing these medicines within the reach of millions of HIV-positive Africans through their government's health care systems. But the wide difference in price also means that there are big gains to be made from illegally diverting these cheaper drugs back into wealthier countries and re-selling them at a higher price. GlaxoSmithKline believes that by coating the pills destined for Africa in a red dye and adding new identification codes both onto the pills and on the packaging, then this trade can be substantially reduced. The company says that it will then be possible to identify specific distributors in Africa who have re-sold humanitarian drugs for profit, as well as those suppliers in Europe that have also been involved in the trade. Glaxo says distribution of the new-look drugs has already begun and that t

heir chemical content is identical to those currently being sold in Europe.

business 177.txt Optimism remains over UK housing The UK property market remains robust despite the recent slowdown, according to mortgage lender Bradford & Bingley and housebuilder George Wimpey. B&B said the buy-to-let market - in which the bank is a major player - would continue to grow much faster than the wider mortgage market. The comments came as it reported a 6% rise in profits to £280.2m (\$532m). Wimpey reported a 19% rise in profits to £450.7m and said recent new home reservations were better than expected. Recent housing market surveys have indicated that the UK property market has cooled in recent months after several years of rapid growth. Last week, figures from the Council of Mortgage Lenders (CML) indicated that the popularity of buy-to-let mortgages - a key phenomenon of the housing boom - could be waning. But B&B - which has a 22% share of the UK buy-to-let mortgage market - said that while rates of growth were moderating, the sector continues to grow at a rate considerably above that of the whole mortgage market"". Overall", B&B said that ""housing market fundamentals remain strong""." Interest rates and unemployment are both likely to remain at historically low levels", real household incomes should continue to grow and housing demand is likely to outstrip supply into the medium-term." Despite the upbeat tone", shares in B&B were down more than 4% at 325.5p in morning trade as analysts worried over future earnings growth. Wimpey's profit figures came in at the top of expectations," with the numbers helped by buoyant sales in the US offsetting a slight slowdown in the UK. Wimpey said the UK housing market had proved ""challenging"" last year. ""By late summer", the market in general had slowed sharply across the country and showed no real improvement during the autumn," it added. However, the first seven weeks of this year had produced promising signs, Wimpey said. Visitor levels and interest in this period have been encouraging and reservations have been at the stronger end of our expectations." Shares in Wimpey were up 6% at 458.5p in morning trade.

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business 178.txt Russia WTO talks 'make progress' Talks on Russia's proposed membership of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) have been ""making good progress"" say those behind the negotiations. But the chairman of the working party", Ambassador Stefan Johannesson of Iceland," warned that there was ""still a lot of work has to be done"". His comments came as President George W Bush said the US backed Russian entry. But he said for Russia to make progress the government must ""renew a commitment to democracy and the rule of law""". His comments come three days before he is due to meet President Vladimir Putin. Russia has been waiting for a decade to join the WTO and hopes to finally become a member by early 2006. A decision could be reached in December", when the WTO's 148 current members gather for a summit in Hong Kong. That would allow an earliest date for membership of January 2006, if the Hong Kong summit gave its approval. While pinpointing several areas in which there are difficulties in the bilateral and multilateral work with Russia," the US said the meeting was ""much more efficient than we've seen for some time""". And Australia said it was ""one of the best (meetings) we can recall in terms of substance""". Mr Johannesson also said progress ""on the bilateral market access side is accelerating""". Sticking points to membership have included limits on foreign ownership in the telecommunications and life insurance businesses", as well as issues surrounding counterfeiting, piracy, and data protection. Some WTO members also dislike Russia's energy price subsidies, which competitors say give Russian businesses an unfair advantage.

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"/"....."business 179.txt Irish duo could block Man Utd bid Irish men JP McManus and John Magnier", who own a 29% stake in Manchester United, will reportedly reject any formal £800m offer for the club. The Sunday Times and The Sunday Telegraph say they will oppose any formal £800m takeover bid from US tycoon Malcom Glazer. Mr Glazer got permission to look at the club's accounts last week. Irish billionaires Mr McManus and Mr Magnier are said to believe that an £800m bid undervalues club prospects. Mr Magnier and Mr McManus, who hold their stake through their Cubic Expression investment vehicle have the power to block a bid. Mr Glazer's financial backers, including JP Morgan, the US investment bank have said they won't back a bid unless it receives backing from the owners of at least 75% of the club's shares. However," there has been much speculation that the Irish duo simply do not think the price offered - 300p a share - is high enough. Mr Glazer has been stalking the premier league football club since 2003. Mr Magnier and Mr McManus issued a statement late on Friday saying that they remained ""long-term investors"" in Man Utd. The Sunday Telegraph says the board of Manchester United also considered a management buyout at just over 300p but did not go ahead with it.

"/"....."business 180.txt Dollar drops on reserves concerns The US dollar has dropped against major currencies on concerns that central banks may cut the amount of dollars they hold in their foreign reserves. Comments by South Korea's central bank at the end of last week have sparked the recent round of dollar declines. South Korea", which has about \$200bn in foreign reserves, said it plans instead to boost holdings of currencies such as the Australian and Canadian dollar. Analysts reckon that other nations may follow suit and now ditch the dollar. At 1300 GMT, the euro was up 0.9% on the day at 1.3187 euros per US dollar. The British pound had added 0.5% to break through the \$1.90 level, while the dollar had fallen by 1.3% against the Japanese yen to trade at 104.16 yen. At the start of the year, the US currency, which had lost 7% against the euro in the final three months of 2004 and had fallen to record lows, staged something of a recovery. Analysts, however, pointed to the dollar's inability recently to extend that rally despite positive economic and corporate data, and highlighted the fact that many of the US's economic problems had not disappeared. The focus once again has been on the country's massive trade and budget deficits," with predictions of more dollar weakness to come. ""The comments from Korea came at a time when sentiment towards the dollar was already softening", said Ian Gunner, a trader at Mellon Financial. On Tuesday, traders in Asia said that both South Korea and Taiwan had withdrawn their bids to buy dollars at the start of the session. Mansoor Mohi-Uddin, chief currency strategist at UBS, said that there was a sentiment in the market that central banks from Asia and the Middle East are buying euros"". A report last month already showed that the dollar was losing its allure as a currency that offered rock-steady returns and stability. Compiled by Central Banking Publications and sponsored by the UK's Royal Bank of Scotland", the survey found 39 nations out of 65 questioned were increasing their euro holdings, with 29 cutting back on the US dollar.

"/"....."business 181.txt India and Russia in energy talks India and Russia are to work together in a series of energy deals", part of a pact which could see India invest up to \$20bn in oil and gas projects. On the agenda are oil and gas extraction as well as transportation deals, to be led by Russia n energy giant Gazprom and India's ONGC. The Indian firm is also expected to ho

ld talks on Tuesday about buying a stake in assets once owned by Yukos. It is reported to be keen on buying a 15% stake in oil unit Yuganskneftegas. The former Yukos subsidiary was controversially sold off last year and eventually acquired by state-owned energy giant Rosneft. Russian media reported that India and Russia signed a memorandum of understanding on energy co-operation on Tuesday during a meeting between Oil and Natural Gas Corporation chairman Subir Raha, Gazprom chairman Aleksey Miller and India's petroleum minister Mani Shankar Aiyar. The agreement is likely to see the two companies develop refining facilities in Russia, India and elsewhere and organise delivery of oil, gas and petrochemicals from Russia to India and other countries across Asia. ONGC could invest in gas and oil fields in Sakhalin, in the far east of Russia," and may also take part in joint tender bids for projects in eastern Siberia and the Caspian Sea. India is urgently searching for fresh energy supplies - particularly liquefied natural gas - as domestic demand is growing at more than 5% a year. ONGC's Mr Raha said the two could work together on joint bids from next year. ""At current oil and gas prices", our cash flow situation is good," he told Reuters. What we are saying is - Gazprom has a huge amount of gas and we have the money. ""The investment may go up to \$20bn or more for a period of five years or so." Russian news agencies reported that India's petroleum minister Mr Aiyar and Russian energy minister Viktor Khristenko would discuss the future of Yugansk at a meeting on Tuesday. ONGC's Mr Raha declined to be drawn on his firm's reported interest in the company. However", he stressed that ONGC was not interested in a 'loan-for-oil deal' in connection to Yugansk," similar to that concluded recently between Rosneft and China's National Petroleum Corporation. ""China's problem is it has immediate demand and they needed the oil for their coastal refineries. We do not. We would like long-term security through equity participation." It is thought that any decision over Yugansk will be delayed until a US court has decided whether to grant Yukos bankruptcy protection. Yukos is suing a host of companies involved in the sale of Yugansk", auctioned off to pay a huge back-tax bill. It has also threatened legal action against any business which has future commercial dealings with its former subsidiary.

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"business 182.txt Weak data buffets French economy A batch of downbeat government data has cast doubt over the French economy's future prospects. Official figures showed on Friday that unemployment was unchanged at 9.9% last month", while consumer confidence fell unexpectedly in October. At the same time," finance minister Nicolas Sarkozy warned that high oil prices pose a threat to French growth. "[Oil prices] will weigh on consumer spending in the short term", and potentially on confidence," he said. World oil prices have risen by more than 60% since the start of the year as production struggles to keep pace with soaring demand. Analysts said French companies, keen to protect their profit margins at a time of rising energy costs, were reluctant to take on extra staff. [The unemployment figures] show the main problem of the French economy: we have growth but without an improvement in employment", said Marc Toubati, an economist at Natexis Banques Populaires. Politicians must have the will and guts to solve structural unemployment with thorough reforms", otherwise in five or ten years," it will be too late." Obligatory employer contributions to worker welfare programmes mean that it costs more to hire staff in France than in many other European economies. Many economists have urged the government to stimulate employment by reducing non-wage payroll costs", and by scrapping restrictions on working hours. The French statistics agency, INSEE, expects the economy to grow by about 2.4% this year, buoyed by strong consumer spending and business investment. That is above the projected eurozone average of just above

2%.

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"business 183.txt Business fears over sluggish EU economy  
As European leaders gather in Rome on Friday to sign the new EU constitution", many companies will be focusing on matters much closer to home - namely how to stay in business. Lille is a popular tourist destination for Britons who want a taste of France at the weekend. But how many tourists look at the impressively grand Victorian Chambre de Commerce, which stands beside the Opera House, and consider that it was built - like the town halls in many northern English towns - on the wealth created by coal, steel and textiles? Like northern England and industrial Scotland, those industries have been in long term decline - the last coal pit closed in 1990. Beck-Crespel is a specialist steel firm in Armentieres, about 20 miles from Lille. The company has not laid off a worker since 1945. It specialises in making bolts and fixings for power stations and the oil industry, but not many of those are being built in Europe these days. Director Hugues Charbonnier says he is under pressure because factories in the Far East are able to make some of his output more cheaply," while his key markets are now in China and India. ""In our business the market is absolutely global", you can not imagine living with our size (of business) even within an enlarged European Union, (if we did that) we would need not 350 people but perhaps just 150 or 200," he says. It isn't just globalisation that is hurting; the law in France means workers are paid for a 39 hour week even though they work just 35 hours. But at least there is still a steel industry. Coal has now totally vanished and textiles are struggling. New business has been attracted, but not enough to make up the difference. That is one reason why people here are not great fans of the EU, says Frederic Sawicki, a politics lecturer at the University of Lille. In the region today the unemployment rate is 12%", in some areas it is 15%. They don't see what Europe is doing for them, so there is a kind of euro scepticism, especially in the working classes," he says. Which is strange because Lille is at the crossroads of Europe - if anywhere should be benefiting from the euro it is here. The euro was designed to increase trade within the eurozone, but the biggest increase in trade has been with the rest of the world. Much of that trade passes through the world's largest port, Rotterdam, in Holland, home to specialist crane maker Huisman Itrec. Its cranes help build oil rigs and lifted the sunken Russian submarine Kursk from the sea bed, but Huisman Itrec is now setting up a factory in China, where costs are cheaper and its main customers are closer. Boss Henk Addink blames the low growth rate in Europe for the lack of orders closer to home. In the US growth is something like 6%", in China they are estimating 15%, and in the EU it is more or less 1%, " he says. Mr Addink blames the euro for stifling demand. He much preferred the old currencies of Europe, which moved in relation to each country's economic performance. In Germany, industry is exporting more these days, but the economy as a whole is once again mired in slow growth and high unemployment. Growth is likely to peak this year at just under 2%. In Britain that would be a bad year; in Germany it is one of the best in recent years. With Germany making up a third of the eurozone's economy, this is a major problem. If Germany doesn't once again become the powerhouse of Europe, growth across the bloc is never going to be as strong as it could be. However, at one factory near the Dutch border things are changing. The Siemens plant at Boscholt makes cordless phones and employs 2,000 staff. Staff have started working an extra four hours a week for no extra pay, after Siemens threatened to take the factory and their jobs to Hungary. Factory manager Herbert Stueker says that he now hopes to increase productivity by nearly 30%". But Germany needs much more reform if all its industry is to compete with places such Hun

gary or China. The Government is reforming the labour market and cutting the generous unemployment system", but the real solution is to cut the wages of low skilled workers, says Helmut Schneider," director of the Institute for the Study of Labour at Bonn University. ""Labour is too costly in Germany", especially for the low skilled labour and this is the main problem. If we could solve that problem we could cut unemployment by half," he says. The EU set itself the target of being the most efficient economy in the world by 2010. Four years into that process, and the target seems further away than ever.

business 184.txt M&S cuts prices by average of 24% Marks & Spencer has cut prices in London and the regions by an average of 24%, according to research from a City investment bank. Dresdner Kleinwort Wasserstein said: In spite of the snow in the UK"," it still feels very early to be cutting prices of spring merchandise." "Stuart Rose", head of M&S," said last year its prices were too high. ""We are bringing in ranges at new price points to compete against mid-market retailers like Next", " said M&S. Next is one of M&S's biggest competitors and the move may force it to lower prices. DrKW said the cuts are either to clear stock or could indicate a longer term step change in pricing in certain areas"" at M&S. ""Either way", this cannot be good news for M&S' margin, it added. We have brought in quite a lot of new clothing at new price points as part of Stuart Rose's strategy of quality, style -and price," said the M&S spokesman. Many analysts believe February is proving to be a difficult month for retailers and British Retail Consortium figures, due in a few weeks, are expected to reflect the tough trading environment. Separately, investment bank Goldman Sachs produced research showing that a basket of 35 M&S goods is now 11% above the high-street average, compared with 43% higher last year. It has been a strange week for M&S, which on Tuesday received a statement from Philip Green, the billionaire Bhs owner, confirming he was not rebidding for the company. This was followed the same day by Mark Paulsmeier, a South African financier, issuing a press release saying his Paulsmeier Group was interested in M&S. A sudden spike in M&S's share price followed. However, an M&S spokesman said on Sunday it had no evidence that Mr Paulsmeier had lined up sufficient finance for a bid. He also said the Takeover Panel and the UK's financial watchdog the Financial Services Authority had been in touch with M&S at the beginning of the week to find out what it knew about the Paulsmeier developments.

business 185.txt US bank 'loses' customer details The Bank of America has revealed it has lost computer tapes containing account details of more than one million customers who are US federal employees. Several members of the US Senate are among those affected, who could now be vulnerable to identity theft. Senate sources say the missing tapes may have been stolen from a plane by baggage handlers. The bank gave no details of how the records disappeared, but said they had probably not been misused. Customers' accounts were being monitored and account holders would be notified if any unusual activity"" was detected", " bank officials said. Bank of America said the tapes went missing in December while being shipped to a back-up data centre. ""We", with federal law authorities, have done a very robust, thorough investigation on this and neither we nor they would make the statement lightly that we believe those tapes to be lost," Alexandra Tower, a spokeswoman for the North Carolina-based bank, told Time magazine. But although there was no evidence of criminal activity, the bank said, the Secret Service - a federal agency whose brief includes investigations of serious financial crime - is said to be looking into the loss. New York Senator Charles Schumer said he was told by the Senate Rules Committee that the tapes were probably stolen from a commercial plane. Whether it is identity theft", terrorism, or other theft, in this new complicated world baggage handlers should have background checks and more care should be taken for who is hired

for these increasingly sensitive positions," the Democrat senator said. Details of his Vermont colleague Pat Leahy's credit card account are among those missing, Senator Leahy's spokeswoman Tracy Schmaler said. About 900,000 military and civilian staff at the defence department are among the 1.2 million affected, according to a Pentagon spokesman.

business 186.txt Huge rush for Jet Airways shares Indian airline Jet Airways' initial public offering was oversubscribed 16.2 times, bankers said on Friday. Over 85% of the bids were at the higher end of the price range of 1,050-1,125 rupees (\$24-\$26). Jet Airways, a low-fare airline, was founded by London-based ex-travel agent Naresh Goya, and controls 45% of the India domestic airline market. It sold 20% of its equity or 17.2 million shares in a bid to raise up to \$443m (£230.8m). The price at which its shares will begin trading will be agreed over the weekend, bankers said. The demand for the IPO was impressive. We believe that over the next two years", the domestic aviation sector promises strong growth, even though fuel prices could be high," said Hit en Mehta, manager of merchant banking firm, Fortune Financial Services. India began to open up its domestic airline market - previously dominated by state-run carrier Indian Airlines - in the 1990s. Jet began flying in 1993 and now has competitors including Air Deccan and Air Sahara. Budget carriers Kingfisher Airlines and SpiceJet are planning to launch operations in May this year. Jet has 42 aircraft and runs 271 scheduled flights daily within India. It recently won government permission to fly to London, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur.

business 187.txt Bank payout to Pinochet victims A US bank has said it will donate more than \$8m to victims of former Chilean military ruler Augusto Pinochet's regime under a Madrid court settlement. Riggs Bank will put money in a special fund to be managed by a Madrid-based charity, the Salvador Allende Foundation, which helps abused victims. The bank had been accused of illegally concealing Gen Pinochet's assets. More than 3,000 people were killed for political reasons under Gen Pinochet's regime, an official report says. Last month in a US court, Riggs Bank pleaded guilty to failing to report suspicious activity relating to accounts held by Gen Pinochet and the government of Equatorial Guinea. On that occasion, it was ordered to pay a fine of \$16m. Gen Pinochet himself has never been put on trial for human rights violations under his 1973-90 rule, despite several high-profile cases against him. He is now facing charges relating to the murder of one Chilean and the disappearance of nine others. He is also being investigated for tax evasion, tax fraud and embezzlement of state funds. The general's opponents rejoiced at the settlement, which was agreed in a court in the Spanish capital, Madrid. A lawyer for the victims, Eduardo Contreras, told Reuters news agency: This demonstrates that the horrors of the Pinochet dictatorship are not a mystery to anyone and that the whole world knows his victims deserve reparations." Riggs spokesman Mark Hendrix said the settlement", details of which will be announced next week," was an opportunity to move on. ""This enables the institution to put the matter behind us"," he told Reuters. The settlement follows a legal complaint filed against the bank by Spanish Judge Baltasar Garzon alleging that it had illegally concealed assets. The bank agreed to create a fund for the victims, but the charges were dropped.

business 188.txt Qwest may spark MCI bidding war US phone company Qwest has said it will table a new offer for MCI after losing out to larger rival Verizon, setting the scene for a possible bidding war. MCI accepted a \$6.75bn (£3.6bn) buyout from telecoms giant Verizon on Monday, rejecting a higher offer from Qwest. Qwest chairman Richard Notebaert sent a letter to MCI's board on Thursday saying that it plans to submit a new offer after examining Verizon's bid. Formerly known as Worldcom, MCI is a long-distance and corporate p

hone firm. Snapping up MCI would give the buyer access to a global telecommunications network and a large number of business-based subscribers. Shares of MCI were up more than 4% in electronic trading after the close of New York markets. Qwest said on Wednesday that MCI had rejected a deal worth \$8bn. We would like to advise you that once we have completed our review of the Verizon merger agreement", we do intend to submit a modified offer to acquire MCI," the letter from Qwest said. Verizon's offer is made up of cash, shares and dividends, and a number of investors have said that it undervalues MCI. Verizon plans to swap 0.41 of its shares and \$1.50 in cash for each MCI share, as well as offering special dividends of \$4.50 a share. Both company boards have backed the deal, but regulators will still need to give their approval. As well as trying to lure investors with the promise of better returns, Qwest also reckons that its offer will face less regulatory scrutiny than Verizon's. The takeover would be the fifth billion-dollar telecoms deal since October as companies look to cut costs and boost client bases. Earlier this month, SBC Communications agreed to buy its former parent and phone trailblazer AT&T for about \$16bn. There may be concerns other than cash, however, especially as MCI only emerged from bankruptcy protection last April. Verizon is far bigger than Qwest, has fewer debts and has built a successful mobile division. Also, MCI, while trading under the name Worldcom, became the biggest corporate bankruptcy in US history after admitting that it illegally booked expenses and inflated profits. Former Worldcom boss Bernie Ebbers is currently standing trial, accused of overseeing an \$11bn fraud. Qwest, meanwhile, had to pay the Securities and Exchange Commission \$250m in October to settle charges that it massaged earnings to keep Wall Street happy.

business 189.txt Fiat chief takes steering wheel The chief executive of the Fiat conglomerate has taken day-to-day control of its struggling car business in an effort to turn it around. Sergio Marchionne has replaced Herbert Demel as chief executive of Fiat Auto, with Mr Demel leaving the company. Mr Marchionne becomes the fourth head of the business - which is expected to make a 800m euro (\$1bn) loss in 2004 - in as many years. Fiat underperformed the market in Europe last year, seeing flat sales. The car business has made an operating loss in five of the last six years and was forced to push back its break-even target from 2005 to 2006. The management changes are part of a wider shake-up of the business following Fiat's resolution of its dispute with General Motors. As part of a major restructuring, Fiat is to integrate the Maserati car company - currently owned by Ferrari - within its own operations. Ferrari, in which Fiat owns a majority stake, could be separately floated on the stock market in either 2006 or 2007. Mr Marchionne, who only joined the company last year, said Fiat Auto was now the principal focus"" of his attention. ""I have made the decision to take on the post of chief executive of the auto unit to speed up the company's recovery", he said. A profound cultural transformation is underway following a management reorganisation that has delivered a more agile and efficient structure," he added. Although Mr Marchionne does not have a background in the car industry, he has been playing an increasing role in the group's activities. Last year, he said that a series of new models, launched as part of the group's recovery plan, had not boosted revenues as much as hoped. The car business, best known for its Alfa Romeo marque, is expected to make a loss of about 800m euros in 2004. Sales are expected to fall in 2005, Fiat said this week, as it exits unprofitable areas such as the rental car market. Mr Demel, a car industry veteran, took the helm in November 2003 after being recruited by former Fiat chief executive Giuseppe Morchio. Mr Morchio made a bid last year to become chairman after the death of president Umberto Agnelli. However, this was rejected by the founding Agnelli family and Mr Morchio subsequently resigned. Earlier this week, Fiat reached an agreement with GM to dissolve an alliance whi

ch could have obliged GM to buy the Italian firm outright. GM will pay Fiat \$2b n as part of the settlement.

business 190.txt Consumers drive French economy France's economic growth accelerated in the last three months of 2004, driven by consumer spending, a report shows. Gross domestic product (GDP) rose by 0.8% in the fourth quarter compared with the previous three month period, the statistical office INSEE said. That expansion pushed annual growth to 2.3%, the fastest rate in two years. Consumer spending was up by 1.2% in the fourth quarter, and there also was a rebound in business investment that gave the recovery an extra shove. Analysts warned that France still was facing challenges and was unlikely to keep expanding at its current pace. France still has a strong economic growth", " said Marc Toutai, an economist at Natexis Banques Populaires. But", if we check the figures in detail," there's a problem." "Consumer spending is still high. But French households have spent their savings to consume. " "France can't sustain a high growth rate without an improvement in the job market. There's too much of a gap between growth and employment." " Unemployment levels are currently stuck at about 10%", and is proving difficult to bring down despite government efforts. Another worry is that demand in Germany and Italy, two of France's main trading partners, is sluggish. Despite the concerns, analysts pointed out that France was outperforming the majority of its European counterparts and that its economy was looking more robust than in previous years. As well as strong domestic demand," exports climbed by 1.3% in the fourth quarter - the biggest increase in foreign sales for a year. " "It's an economic growth that seems well balanced", " said Nicolas Clauquin, an analyst at CCF. In the beginning of 2004", growth was mainly driven by consumer spending. Here it gets contributions from investment and exports," though household consumption is still strong. " "But we expect overall economic growth to fall to 2.0 percent in 2005." "

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"business 191.txt US regulator to rule on pain drug US food and drug regulators will decide on Friday whether to recommend the sale of painkillers that have been linked to a high risk of heart attack and stroke. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) advisory panel will give its verdict after hearing evidence for three days. The painkillers - called COX-2 inhibitors - are sold under brand names such as Celebrex and Vioxx. Vioxx was withdrawn from shelves last year but Merck said it would consider selling it if it gets FDA approval. The FDA has been asked to decide if the benefits to patients justify the increased risks. Putting Vioxx back on the shelves is likely to boost profits at Merck and make easier any legal battles with people who claim to have been injured by the drug", analysts said. Merck voluntarily stopped sales of Vioxx on 30 September, a move which caused the firm's fourth-quarter earnings to slide to \$1.1bn (£581m), from \$1.4bn a year earlier. Merck's shares tumbled more than 10% on the news and the company has had to set aside millions of dollars to cover the cost of Vioxx-related litigation. Alarm bells were rung by a research note called Approve which showed that the risk of heart attack and stroke doubled in patients who had been taking the drug for at least 18 months. The Cox-2 inhibitors were developed by drug companies, including Merck and Pfizer, because they cause users fewer stomach problems than other painkillers. Pfizer is still selling its Celebrex and Bextra products," though investigations have suggested that they may also be harmful to the heart. Merck's announcement of a possible reintroduction of Vioxx caught analysts by surprise. Merck's head of research Peter Kim said that it withdrew Vioxx "based on the information that was available to us at the time", " knowing there were alternative therapies"". He went on to say that things have since changed in the light of new reports. " "Given this

new information", its is not clear that the cardiovascular risk observed in App rove makes Vioxx unique in the class of similar drugs marketed in the US," Mr K im explained. On Thursday, David Graham from the FDA's Office of Drug Safety t old the advisory panel that there really doesn't appear to be a need for Co x-2"" inhibitors. According to calculations presented to the US Senate by Dr Gr aham in November", Vioxx may be linked to as many as to 56,000 American deaths. Facing stem criticism for its handling of the Vioxx case, the FDA said on Tuesd ay that it will create an independent body to oversee the safety of drugs alrea dy in the market place. European regulators, meanwhile," ruled on Thursday that patients who have had heart disease or a stroke should not take Cox-2 inhibitor s. The European Medicines Agency also said doctors should be ""cautious"" about giving the drugs to patients who have risk factors for heart disease.

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"/"business 192.txt Yukos bankruptcy 'not US matter' Russia n authorities do not have to abide by any US court decisions taken with regard to troubled oil giant Yukos", a Houston court has been told. Legal expert Will iam Butler said there was no treaty between the US and Russia to recognise the other's legal rulings. That meant Moscow would not have to adhere to US rulings in the Yukos case. Yukos says a US court was entitled to declare it bankrupt be fore its Yugansk unit was sold, since it has a US subsidiary and local bank acc ounts. Yukos made its surprise Chapter 11 bankruptcy filing in Houston in Dece mber in an unsuccessful attempt to halt the auction of Yugansk, its main oil pr oducing unit, by Russian authorities. Yugansk was sold to help pay off a \$27.5b n (£14.5bn) back tax bill. It was bought for \$9.4bn by a previously unknown gro up, which was in turn bought by state-controlled oil company Rosneft. The US co urt's jurisdiction has been challenged by Deutsche Bank and Gazpromneft, a form er unit of Russian gas monopoly Gazprom which is due to merge with Rosneft. Deu tsche Bank maintains the case has no place in a US court because Yukos has no a ssets in the US, apart from two bank accounts and a house in Houston owned by i ts chief finance officer Bruce Misamore. Deutsche Bank is involved in the case because it is itself being sued by Yukos. It had agreed to loan Gazpromneft the money to bid for Yugansk. US bankruptcy judge Letitia Clark, who issued an inju nction in December to try and prevent the Yugansk sale," has said she will rule ""pretty promptly"," however I do not anticipate ruling on it before next Tuesd ay"". Yukos has claimed it sought help in the US because other forums - Russia n courts and the European Court of Human Rights - were either unfriendly or off ered less protection. It has claimed that Russia imposed the huge tax bill and forced the sale of Yugansk as part of a campaign to destroy Yukos and its forme r owner Mihkail Khodorkovsky", who is facing a 10-year prison term in Russia fo r fraud and tax evasion. Yukos' parent company, the Gibraltar-based Menatep Gro up, is suing Russia in Europe for \$28.3bn in financial damages. The company is also seeking \$20bn in a separate US lawsuit against Rosneft and Gazprom for the ir role in the sale of Yugansk.

"/"business 193.txt Borussia Dortmund near bust German foot ball club and former European champion Borussia Dortmund has warned it will go bankrupt if rescue talks with creditors fail. The company's shares tumbled aft er it said it has ""entered a life-threatening profitability and financial situ ation"". Borussia Dortmund has posted record losses and missed rent payments on its Westfallen stadium. Chief executive Gerd Niebaum stepped down last week and creditors are now pushing for greater control. Shares in Borussia Dortmund", Ge rmany's only stock-market listed football club," dropped by almost 23% to 2.05

euros during early afternoon trading. Fund manager Florian Hamm - Borussia Dortmund's largest investor - said he would only invest more money in the company if he got a greater say in how it is run. ""I demand better transparency", he is quoted as saying by Germany's Manager Magazin. The club has also faced calls to appoint executives from outside the club. Borussia Dortmund posted a record loss of 68m euros (\$89m; £47m) in the 12 months through June. It made a loss of 27.2m euros in the first half of the current fiscal year and said that total debts will increase to 134.7m euros by the middle of 2006 unless a restructuring plan is pushed through. This is the bill for their mismanagement over the past years," said HVB analyst Peter-Thilo Halser. The club appointed an auditor, who has recommended a number of steps, including deferring the rent due on the stadium and suspending debt repayments until at least the 2006-2007 fiscal year. Stephen Schechter, a UK investment banker who has held talks with Borussia Dortmund over a possible bond sale, said the club needs a capital injection of 35m euros. They need strong people on the board who do not have a history with the club", " he said.

business 194.txt 'Post-Christmas lull' in lending UK mortgage lending showed a post-Christmas lull"" in January", indicating a slowing housing market, lenders have said. Both the Council of Mortgage Lenders (CML) and Building Society Association (BSA) said lending was down sharply. The CML said gross mortgage lending stood at £17.9bn, compared with £21.8bn in January last year. The BSA said mortgage approvals - loans approved but not yet made - were £2bn, down from £2.6bn in January 2004. At the same time," the British Bankers' Association (BBA) said lending was ""weaker"". Overall", the BBA said mortgage lending rose by £4bn in January," a far smaller increase than the £5.1bn seen in December. This was a return to the ""weaker pattern"" of lending seen in the last months of 2004", the BBA added. However," it is the year-on-year lending comparisons which are the most striking. The CML said lending for house purchases and gross mortgage lending were 29% and 18% lower year-on-year respectively. ""These figures show beyond doubt the recent slowdown in the housing market", " Peter Williams, CML deputy director, said.

business 195.txt UK 'risks breaking golden rule' The UK government will have to raise taxes or rein in spending if it wants to avoid breaking its golden rule""", a report suggests. The rule states that the government can borrow cash only to invest, and not to finance its spending projects. The National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR) claims that taxes need to rise by about £10bn if state finances are to be put in order. The Treasury said its plans were on track and funded until 2008. According to NIESR," if the government's current economic cycle runs until March 2006 then it is ""unlikely"" the golden rule will be met. Should the cycle end a year earlier", " then the chances improve to ""50/50"". Either way", fiscal tightening is needed, NIESR said. The report is the latest to call into question the viability of government spending projections. Earlier this month, accountancy firm Ernst & Young said that Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown's forecasts for tax revenues were too optimistic. It claimed revenues were likely to be £6bn below estimates by the end of the tax year despite the economy growing in line with forecasts. A Treasury spokesperson dismissed the latest claims," saying it was ""on track to meeting spending rules and the golden rule in the current cycle and beyond"". ""Spending plans have been set out until 2008 and they are fully affordable." Other than its warning on possible tax hikes", the NIESR report was optimistic about the state of the UK and global economy. It said the recent record-breaking surge in oil prices would have a limited effect on worldwide expansion," saying that if anything the ""world economy will continue to grow strongly""". Global gross domestic product (GDP) is tipped to be 4.1% this year", dipping to

4% in 2005, before picking up again to 4.2% in 2006. The US will continue to drive expansion until 2006, albeit at a slightly slower rate, as will be the case in Japan. Hinting at better times for UK exporters," NIESR said the euro zone ""is expected to pick up speed"". Growth in Britain also is set to accelerate", it forecast. ""Despite weak growth in the third quarter", the forces sustaining the upswing remain intact and the economy will expand robustly in 2005 and 2006," NIESR said, adding that the economy will become better balanced over the next two years as exports stage a recovery"". GDP is expected at 3.2% in 2004", and 2.8% in both 2005 and 2006. The main cloud on the horizon, NIESR said, was the UK's much analysed and fretted over property market.

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"business 196.txt Worldcom director ends evidence The former chief financial officer at US telecoms firm WorldCom has finished giving evidence at the trial of his ex-boss Bernie Ebbers. Scott Sullivan admitted to jurors he was willing to commit fraud to meet Wall Street earnings projections. Mr Ebbers is on trial for fraud and conspiracy in relation to WorldCom's collapse in 2002. He pleads not guilty. Mr Sullivan has spent two days being cross-examined by lawyers for former Worldcom chief executive Mr Ebbers. Attorney Reid Weingarten has attempted to portray Mr Sullivan as a liar and on Thursday quizzed him about his decision to commit fraud to meet analysts' profit estimates. ""At that point in time"," Mr Sullivan said, referring to the first false entries in late 2000, I knew it was wrong and I knew it was against the law"," but I thought we would get through it in the short term." Mr Sullivan",42, has already pleaded guilty to fraud and will be sentenced following Mr Ebbers' trial, where he is appearing as a prosecution witness. Mr Ebbers,63, has always insisted that he was unaware of any hidden shortfalls in WorldCom's finances. The former finance officer said Mr Ebbers knew about the improper accounting entries that were made between 2000 and 2002 to conceal soaring expenses and inflate revenue. Mr Ebbers could face a sentence of 85 years if convicted of all the charges he is facing. WorldCom's problems appear to have begun with the collapse of the dotcom boom which cut its business from internet companies. Prosecutors allege that the company's top executives responded by orchestrating massive fraud over a two-year period. WorldCom emerged from bankruptcy protection in 2004, and is now known as MCI. On Monday, MCI agreed to a buyout by Verizon Communications in a deal valued at \$6.75bn.

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"business 197.txt Ukraine steel sell-off 'illegal' The controversial sell-off of a Ukrainian steel mill to a relative of the former president was illegal", a court has ruled. The mill, Krivorizhstal, was sold in June 2004 for \$800m (£424m) - well below other offers. President Viktor Yushchenko, elected in December, is planning to revisit many of Ukraine's recent privatisations. Krivorizhstal is one of dozens of firms which he says were sold cheaply to friends of the previous administration. On Wednesday, Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko said as many as 3,000 firms could be included on the list of firms whose sale was being reviewed. Mr Yushchenko had previously said the list would be limited to 30-40 enterprises. More than 90,000 businesses in all, from massive corporations to tiny shopfronts, have been sold off since 1992, as the command economy built up when Ukraine was part of the Soviet Union was dismantled. Analysts have suggested that the government needs to avoid the impression of an open-ended list, so as to preserve investor confidence. Thursday's ruling by a district court in Perchesk overturned a previous decision in a lower court permitting the sale. The consortium which won the auction for the mill was created

by Viktor Pinchuk, son-in-law of former-President Leonid Kuchma, and Rinat Akhmetov, the country's richest man. The next step is for the supreme court to annul the sale altogether, opening the way for Krivorizhstal to be resold. Mr Yushchenko has suggested a fair valuation could be as much as \$3bn. One of the foreign bidders who lost out, steel giant LNM, told BBC News that it would be interested in any renewed sale.

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"business 198.txt Cairn shares up on new oil find Shares in Cairn Energy have jumped 6% after the firm said an Indian oilfield was larger than previously thought. Cairn said drilling to the north-west of its development site in Rajasthan had produced "very strong results". The company also said it now believed the development area would be able to produce oil for more than 25 years. Cairn's share price rose 300% last year after a number of oil finds", but its shares were hit in December following a disappointing drilling update. December's share fall means that Cairn is still in danger of being relegated from the FTSE 100 when the index is reshuffled next month. Cairn's shares closed up 64 pence, or 6%, at 1130p on Thursday. Before Christmas, Cairn revealed that drilling to the north of the field in Rajasthan had been disappointing, which caused its shares to lose 18% in one day. However, on Thursday, "the group said its belief that the path of oil in the area actually moved further to the west had proved correct. "This area does need more appraisal drilling but it looks very strong", Dr Mike Watts head of exploration said. Chief executive Bill Gammell added: The more we progress in Rajasthan the better we feel about it." Cairn made the discovery after having been granted an extension to their drilling licence in January by Indian authorities. The firm has applied for a 30-month extension to scout for oil outside its main development area", which includes the Mangala and Aishwariya fields where Cairn has previously announced major discoveries. It also said production at its other fields across the globe was likely to surpass levels seen in 2004.

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"business 199.txt Georgia plans hidden asset pardon Georgia is offering a one-off 'tax amnesty' to people who hid their earnings under the regime of former president Eduard Shevardnadze. The country's new president, Mikhail Saakashvili, has said that anyone now willing to disclose their wealth will only have to pay 1% in income tax. The measure is designed to legitimise previously hidden economic activity and boost Georgia's flagging economy. Georgia's black market is estimated to be twice the size of its legal economy. Mr Saakashvili, elected president in January after Mr Shevardnadze was toppled, has urged the Georgian Parliament to approve the amnesty as soon as possible. It is one of a series of proposals designed to tackle corruption, which was rampant during the Shevardnadze era, and boost Georgia's fragile public finances. The new government is encouraging companies to pay taxes by scrapping existing corruption investigations and destroying all tax records from before 1 January," three days before President Saakashvili was elected. ""There are people who have money but are afraid to show it", the president told a government session. Documentation about where this money came from doesn't exist because under the former, entirely warped regime," earning capital honestly was not possible." By declaring their assets and paying the one-off tax"," people would be able to ""legalise their property""", Mr Saakashvili stressed. ""No one will have the right to check this money's origin. This money must go back into the economy." The amnesty will not extend to people who made money through drugs trafficking or international money laundering. Criminal investigations in such cases -thoug

ht to involve about 5% of Georgian businesses -are to continue. Mr Saakashvili has accused the Shevardnadze regime", which was toppled by a popular uprising in November, of allowing bribery to flourish. Georgia's economy is in a desperate condition. Half the population are living below the poverty line with many surviving on income of less than \$4, or three euros, a day. The unemployment rate is around 20% while the country has a \$1.7bn public debt.

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"business 200.txt Cuba winds back economic clock Fidel Castro's decision to ban all cash transactions in US dollars in Cuba has once more turned the spotlight on Cuba's ailing economy. All conversions between the US dollar and Cuba's ""convertible"" peso will from 8 November be subject to a 10% tax. Cuban citizens", who receive money from overseas, and foreign visitors, who change dollars in Cuba, will be affected. Critics of the measure argue that it is a step backwards, reflecting the Cuban president's desire to increase his control of the economy and to clamp down on private enterprise. In a live television broadcast announcing the measure," President Castro's chief aide said it was necessary because of the United States' increasing ""economic aggression""." "The ten percent obligation applies exclusively to the dollar by virtue of the situation created by the new measures of the US government to suffocate our country"," he said. The Bush administration has taken an increasingly harsh line on Cuba in recent months. President Bush's government, which has been a strong supporter of the 40-year-old trade embargo on Cuba, introduced even tighter restrictions on Cuba in May. Cubans living in the US are now limited to one visit to Cuba every three years and they can only send money to their immediate relatives. A leading expert on the Cuban economy says that Castro's tax plan smacks more of a desperate economic measure than a political gesture. I think it is primarily an effort to raise some cash", says Jose Barrionuevo, head of strategy for Latin American emerging markets for Barclays Capital. It underscores the fact that the economy is in very bad shape and the government is looking for sources of revenue." The tax will hit the families of Cuban exiles hardest as they benefit from the money their displaced relatives send home. This money", known as remittances, can amount to as much as \$1bn a year. Those remaining in Cuba will have to pay the tax. Their relatives abroad may choose to send money in other currencies which are not subject to the tax, such as euros, or increase their dollar payments to compensate. However, many of Cuban's poorest citizens could be worse off as a result. The tax will also affect the two million tourists who visit Cuba every year, particularly those Americans who continue to defy a ban on travel there. Cuba's tourist industry has been one of its few economic success stories over the last ten years and, according to the UN Economic Commission for Latin America, is now worth \$3bn to the country. The tax is designed to provide much-needed revenue for Cuba's cash-strapped economy. Cuba badly needs dollars to pay for essential items such as food, fuel and medicine. Much of Cuba's basic infrastructure is in a state of disrepair. In recent weeks, Cuba has suffered its most serious power cuts in a decade and there have also been water shortages in parts of the island. Cuba's economy had staged a modest recovery during the mid 1990s as the collapse of the Soviet Union forced it to embrace foreign capital, decentralise trade and permit limited private enterprise. However, a decline in foreign tourism since 2002, periodic hurricanes and the increasing costs of importing oil have put a strain on the economy. It has however yet to be seen if the tax will provide a solution to the government's economic problems. The tax could fuel an active black market in currency trading," Mr Barrionuevo said. ""The main impact could be that it will create a black market which you typically see in countries", like Venezuela, which have restrictions o

n capital," he says. Mr Barrioneuvo says the measure could be dropped if it has a damaging effect on economic activity. It is intended to be a permanent measure but I am not sure it can last too long.""

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"business 201.txt Novartis hits acquisition trail Swiss drugmaker Novartis has announced 5.65bn euros (\$7.4bn; £3.9bn) of purchases to make its Sandoz unit the world's biggest generic drug producer. Novartis", which last month forecast record sales for 2005, said it had bought all of Germany's Hexal. It also acquired 67.7% of Hexal's US affiliate Eon Labs, and offered to buy the remaining shares for \$31 each. Novartis said that it would be able to make cost savings of about \$200m a year following the acquisitions. Novartis' shares rose 1% to 57.85 Swiss francs in early trading. The deal will see Novartis' Sandoz business overtake Israel's Teva Pharmaceuticals as the world's biggest maker of generics. Based on 2004 figures the newly merged producer would have sales of more than \$5bn, the company estimated. Novartis said that it would merge a number of departments," adding that there may be job cuts. ""The strong growth outlook for Sandoz", which will create jobs, is expected to partially compensate for necessary reductions in the work force," the firm said in a statement. Generic drugs are chemically identical to their more expensive branded rivals. Producers such as Sandoz can copy the branded products usually after their patent protection expires and can sell them more cheaply as they do not have to pay research and development cost. There are more than 150 generic drugmakers worldwide and analysts have predicted consolidation in a market that they call fragmented. However, not all analysts were initially convinced about the deal. This is a very expensive acquisition", Birgit Kuhlhoff, from Sal Oppenheim investment bank, told Reuters. I find it strange that they are making acquisitions in exactly those markets where they suffered price pressure.""

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"business 202.txt MCI shareholder sues to stop bid A shareholder in US phone firm MCI has taken legal action to halt a \$6.75bn (£3.6bn) buyout by telecoms giant Verizon", hoping to get a better deal. The lawsuit was filed on Friday after Qwest Communications, which had an earlier offer for MCI rejected, said it would submit an improved bid. MCI's directors have backed Verizon," despite it tabling less money. They are accused of breaching their fiduciary duties by depriving MCI shareholders "of maximum value"". According to the legal papers filed in a Delaware court", Verizon is set to pay an "unconscionable", "unfair and grossly inadequate" sum for MCI", which was formerly known as Worldcom. Qwest said on Wednesday that MCI had rejected a deal worth \$8bn. A number of large MCI shareholders expressed unhappiness at the decision, saying that Verizon's offer, made up of cash, shares and dividends, undervalued the company. Friday's lawsuit argues that the Verizon offer makes no provision for future growth prospects and that consolidation in the US phone industry will put a premium on MCI's network, assets and clients. MCI's directors have argued that Verizon is bigger than Qwest, has fewer debts and has built a successful mobile division. Chief executive Michael Capellas spent last week meeting with shareholders in an effort to win their backing. In 2002, investors in the then-named Worldcom lost millions when the company filed for bankruptcy following an accounting scandal. However, the firm - now renamed MCI - has put its operations in order and emerged from bankruptcy protection last April. It is a long-distance and corporate phone firm, and would provide the buyer with access to a global telecommunications network and a large number of business-based subscribers. MCI shares jumped on Friday, hitting their highest level since April 2004 am

id speculation that it would be the focus of a bidding war. A takeover of MCI w ould be the fifth billion-dollar telecoms deal since October as companies look to cut costs and boost client bases. Earlier this month, SBC Communications agr eed to buy its former parent and phone pioneer AT&T for about \$16bn.

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"business 203.txt 'Standoff' on Deutsche's LSE bid Deutsc he Boerse investors unhappy with its London Stock Exchange bid will have no cha nce to throw out the exchange's management until May", " Reuters says. The Sund ay Times reported that hedge funds TCI and Atticus were planning to demand the removal of the group's chairman and chief executive. But Deutsche Boerse told n ews agency Reuters such a move would have to wait until May's annual general me eting. Investors want Deutsche to return cash to shareholders rather than bid. ""We are long-term investors and are experienced in removing management. We are not scared to take this to its conclusion this time", " Atticus' David Slager tol d the Sunday Times. However, Deutsche Boerse told Reuters: TCI's request for t he removal of the supervisory board will be considered at the annual general me eting on May 25." " The Sunday Times reported that TCI had been drawing up a li st of heavyweight executives to replace Deutsche's chairman Rolf Breuer and chi ef executive Werner Seifert. The group owns more than 5% of Deutsche - more tha n enough to demand an extraordinary general meeting to call on shareholders to oust the German exchange's management. Under German law Deutsche does not need investor backing to make a takeover bid. TCI and Atticus have opposed the LSE b id for some time saying it would destroy shareholder value", and would be bette r spent on a share buyback. Deutsche is in competition with pan-European bourse Euronext to take over the London exchange. Many commentators have suggested a b idding war between the two could break out. However, any such move would have t o wait until March when the Office of Fair Trading completes an investigation i nto the competition aspects of the pair's takeover proposals.

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"business 204.txt Bush to outline 'toughest' budget Presi dent Bush is to send his toughest budget proposals to date to the US Congress", seeking large cuts in domestic spending to lower the deficit. About 150 federa l programs could be cut or axed altogether as part of a \$2.5 trillion (£1.3 tri llion) package aimed at curbing the giant US budget deficit. Defence spending w ill rise, however," while the proposals exclude the cost of continuing military operations in Iraq. Vice-President Dick Cheney said the budget was the ""tighte st"" so far. At the heart of the administration's fifth budget", presented to Congress on Monday," is an austere package of domestic measures. These would se e discretionary spending rise below the projected level of inflation. Such belt-tightening is designed to tackle the massive budget deficit increases of Pres ident Bush's first term. Mr Cheney admitted that the budget was the toughest of the Bush Presidency but argued it was ""fair and responsible"". ""It is not som ething we have done with a meat axe", nor are we suddenly turning our back on t he most needy people in our society," he said. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, increased expenditure on national security after 9/11 and the 2001 recession wiped out the budget surplus inherited by President Bush in 2001 and turned it into a record deficit. The shortfall is projected to rise to \$427bn in 2005. E ducation, environmental protection and transport initiatives are set to be scal ed back as a first step towards reducing the deficit to \$230bn by 2009. Most c ontroversially, the government is seeking to cut the Medicaid budget, which pro vides health care to the nation's poorest, by \$45bn and to reduce farm subsidie

s by \$587m. Spending on defence and homeland security is set to increase, although not by as much as originally planned. President Bush's proposals would see the Pentagon's budget rise by \$19bn to \$419.3bn while homeland security would get an extra \$2bn. The budget does not include the cost of running military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, for which the administration is expected to seek an extra \$80bn from Congress later this year. Also not featuring in the proposals is the cost of funding the administration's radical proposed overhaul of social security provision. Some experts believe this could require borrowing of up to \$4.5bn trillion over a twenty year period. Despite the Republicans holding a majority in both houses of Congress, the proposals will be fiercely contested over the next few months. John McCain, a Republican Senator, said he was pleased the administration was prepared to tackle the deficit. With the deficits that we are now running", I am glad the president is coming over with a very austere budget," he said. However, Democratic Senator Kent Conrad said the proposals exposed the country to huge financial commitments beyond 2009. The cost of everything he [President Bush] advocates explodes", he said.

business 205.txt Orange colour clash set for court A row over the colour orange could hit the courts after mobile phone giant Orange launched action against a new mobile venture from Easyjet's founder. Orange said it was starting proceedings against the Easymobile service for trademark infringement. Easymobile uses Easygroup's orange branding. Founder Stelios Haji-Ioannou has pledged to contest the action. The move comes after the two sides failed to come to an agreement after six months of talks. Orange claims the new low-cost mobile service has infringed its rights regarding the use of the colour orange and could confuse customers - known as passing off". ""Our brand", and the rights associated with it are extremely important to us, Orange said in a statement. In the absence of any firm commitment from Easy, "we have been left with no choice but to start an action for trademark infringement and passing off." "However", Mr Haji-Ioannou, who plans to launch Easymobile next month, vowed to fight back," saying: ""We have nothing to be afraid of in this court case. ""It is our right to use our own corporate colour for which we have become famous during the last 10 years." "The Easyjet founder also said he planned to add a disclaimer to the Easygroup website to ensure customers are aware the Easymobile brand has no connection to Orange. The new service is the latest venture from Easygroup", which includes a chain of internet cafes, budget car rentals and an intercity bus service. Easymobile will allow customers to go online to order SIM cards and airtime - which will be rented from T-Mobile - for their existing handsets.

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"business 206.txt Standard Life cuts policy bonuses Stand ard Life", Europe's largest mutual life insurer, has cut bonuses for with-profit policyholders. Annual bonus rates on its with-profits life policies were cut from 2.5% to 2%, while bonuses on pension policies were reduced from 3.25% to 2.5%. It is the sixth time in three years Standard Life has made cuts to bonus rates, despite an 8.7% rise in the value of the with-profits fund in 2004. The insurer blamed the cuts on poor share returns and low interest rates. With-profits policies are designed to smooth out the peaks and troughs of stock market volatility. Profits made in good years are kept in reserve to pay investors an annual bonus even when the stock market performs badly. Slumping share prices throughout 2001 and 2002 forced most firms to trim bonus rates on their policies. Standard Life came in for criticism for sticking with stock market investments during 2001 and 2002. The insurer argued that shares outperformed other investments over the long term and that policyholders would feel the benefit when t

he stock market recovered. Recently, Norwich Union and Axa Sun Life both cut their with-profit bonus rates. John Gill, managing director of the insurer's life and pensions division," said that a strong stock market recovery in the past two years had only ""partly compensated for losses during 2001 and 2002"". In addition," low interest rates meant that ""long-term investment returns are well below historic levels""", Mr Gill added. However," Mr Gill maintained that with-profits continued to perform well over the long term. ""Our payouts continue to stand up well against other types of long-term investments over similar periods," he said. Standard Life has an estimated 2.4 million with-profits policyholders. Last year, the company announced that it was looking to float on the stock market in 2006.

business 207.txt EMI shares hit by profit warning Shares in music giant EMI have sunk by more than 16% after the firm issued a profit warning following disappointing sales and delays to two album releases. EMI said music sales for the year to March will fall 8-9% from the year before, with profits set to be 15% lower than analysts had expected. It blamed poor sales since Christmas and delays to the releases of new albums by Coldplay and Gorillaz. By 1200 GMT on Monday, EMI shares were down 16.2% at 235.75 pence. EMI said two major albums scheduled for release before the end of the financial year in March - one by Coldplay and one by Gorillaz - have now had their release dates put back. EMI Music's sales", particularly re-orders, in January have also been lower than anticipated and this is expected to continue through February and March, the company added. Therefore, for the full year, at constant currency," EMI Music's sales are now expected to be 8% to 9% lower than the prior year." The company said it expected profits to be about £138m (\$259.8m). Alain Levy", chairman and chief executive of EMI Music," described the performance as ""disappointing""", but added that he remained optimistic over future trends in the industry. ""The physical music market is showing signs of stabilisation in many parts of the world and digital music", in all its forms, continues to develop at a rapid pace," he said. Commenting on the delay to the release of the Coldplay and Gorillaz albums, Mr Levy said that creating and marketing music is not an exact science and cannot always coincide with our reporting periods"". ""While this rescheduling and recent softness is disappointing", it does not change my views of the improving health of the global recorded music industry," he added. Paul Richards, an analyst at Numis Securities, said the market would be focusing on the slump in music sales rather than the timing of the two albums. It's unusual to see this much of a downgrade just because of phasing", he said.

business 208.txt China's Shanda buys stake in Sina Chines e online game operator Shanda Interactive Entertainment has bought a 20% stake in Sina, the country's biggest internet portal firm. The move may be a precursor to a full takeover, with analysts saying that a better-known international firm may also now show an interest in Sina. Shanda said that it may boost its stake in Sina, even buying it outright. A merger would create a firm that offers online role-playing games, news, entertainment and wireless messaging. Sina said that the purchase of a stake by Shanda would have no impact on its business. The board of directors said in a statement that it would continue to act in the best interests of all the company stakeholders", including shareholders," employees and customers"". Both companies are listed on the New York Stock Exchange's (NYSE) technology-dominated Nasdaq index. In a filing with the US Securities and Exchange Commission", Sina said its shares were purchased between 12 January and 10 February for about \$230m. Rumours about a possible takeover boosted Sina's shares by more than 10% on Friday. They added an extra 6.4% to \$27.24 in electronic trading after the trading session had finished. And there may be more gains amid bid speculation when trading resumes in New York on Tuesday after

Monday's public holiday," analysts forecast. ""There could still be some potential parties that could still counter bid"," said Wallace Cheung, an analyst at DBS Vickers. Even though Shanda has 20% of Sina", they still have quite a long way to take full control." However", Mr Cheung noted that a foreign company trying to take control of a Chinese internet portal firm, with its ability to filter and pass on news, may not be viewed very favourably by Beijing.

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"business 209.txt Mixed reaction to Man Utd offer Shares in Manchester United were up over 5% by noon on Monday following a new offer from Malcolm Glazer. The board of Man Utd is expected to meet early this week to discuss the latest proposal from the US tycoon that values the club at £800m (\$1.5bn). Manchester United revealed on Sunday that it had received a detailed proposal from Mr Glazer. A senior source at the club told the BBC: ""This time it's different"". The board is obliged to consider this deal. But the Man Utd supporters club urged the club to reject the new deal. Manchester United past and present footballers Eric Cantona and Ole Gunnar Solskjaer", and club manager Sir Alex Ferguson, have lent their backing to the supporters' group," Shareholders United. They have all spoken out against the bid. A spokesman for the supporters club said: ""I can't see any difference (compared to Mr Glazer's previous proposals) other than £200m less debt. ""He isn't bringing any money into the club; he'll use our money to buy it."" Mr Glazer's latest move is being led by Mr Glazer's two sons", Avi and Joel, according to the Financial Times. A proposal was received by David Gill, United's chief executive, at the end of last week, pitched at about 300p a share. David Cummings, head of UK equities for Standard Life Investments," said he believed a ""well funded"" 300p a share bid would be enough for Mr Glazer to take control of the club. ""I do not think there is anything that Manchester United fans can do about it" he told the BBC. They can complain about it but it is curtains for them. They may not want him but they are going to get him."" The US tycoon", who has been wooing the club for the last 12 months," has approached the United board with ""detailed proposals""", it has confirmed. Mr Glazer, who owns the Tampa Bay Buccaneers team, hopes this will lead to a formal bid being accepted. He is believed to have increased the amount of equity in the new proposal, though it is not clear by how much. For his proposal to succeed, he needs the support of United's largest shareholders, the Irish horseracing tycoons JP McManus and John Magnier. They own 29% of United through their Cubic Expression investment vehicle. Mr Glazer and his family hold a stake of 28.1%. But it is not yet known whether Mr McManus and Mr Magnier would support a Glazer bid. NM Rothschild, the investment bank, is advising Mr Glazer, according to the Financial Times. His previous adviser, JPMorgan, quit last year when Mr Glazer went ahead and voted against the appointment of three United directors to the board, against its advice. But the FT said it thought JP Morgan may still have had some role in financing Mr Glazer's latest financial proposal.

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"business 210.txt Gold falls on IMF sale concerns The price of gold has fallen after the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said it will look at ways of using its gold reserves to provide debt relief. By revaluing its holdings", the IMF may be able to sell billions of dollars of gold and use the cash to cancel debts owed by the world's poorest nations. The plan was put forward by G7 finance ministers over the weekend. The price of gold fell to \$413.50 an ounce in Asia," before rebounding slightly in early European trading. IMF boss Rodrigo Rato was asked by G7 ministers to carry out a study into the f

easibility of revaluing and selling gold reserves. He is expected to present his conclusions at an IMF meeting in Washington during April. "Whatever happens the market is going to be disconcerted and on the back foot until the April IMF meetings," said John Reade, an analyst at UBS. The IMF values its gold reserves at between \$40 and \$50 an ounce, a price that was fixed in the 1970s and is about a tenth of the metal's current market value. The IMF has 3,217 tonnes of gold, or about 113.5m ounces. Bringing the book price of the gold in line with market value would boost the IMF's balance sheet, giving it more money to distribute. This idea has been put forward before, but there now seems to be a more committed political drive to address the issue of global poverty. This is the first time there has been a mention of the use of gold in a G7 communiqué; for achieving debt relief," said UK Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown. At their meeting in London, G7 finance ministers backed plans to write off up to 100% of the debts owed by some of the world's poorest countries. Mr Brown said the meeting would be remembered as the 100% debt relief summit"". While debt relief seems to have jumped to the top of the global agenda", not everyone is convinced that selling IMF gold is the best way forward. The US, which can veto any plan to sell IMF gold should it so choose," said it is looking at other ways of solving the problem. "The US is not convinced that's the necessary way to do it", said Treasury Under Secretary John Taylor. Canada, a key gold producer, also expressed reservations.

business 211.txt Electronics firms eye plasma deal Consumer electronics giants Hitachi and Matsushita Electric are joining forces to share and develop technology for flat screen televisions. The tie-up comes as the world's top producers are having to contend with falling prices and intense competition. The two Japanese companies will collaborate in research & development, production, marketing and licensing. They said the agreement would enable the two companies to expand the plasma display TV market globally. Plasma display panels are used for large, thin TVs which are replacing old-style televisions. The display market for high-definition televisions is split between models using plasma display panels and others - manufactured by the likes of Sony and Samsung - using liquid-crystal displays (LCDs). The deal will enable Hitachi and Matsushita, which makes Panasonic brand products, to develop new technology and improve their competitiveness. Hitachi recently announced a deal to buy plasma display technology from rival Fujitsu in an effort to strengthen its presence in the market. Separately, Fujitsu announced on Monday that it is quitting the LCD panel market by transferring its operations in the area to Japanese manufacturer Sharp. Sharp will inherit staff, manufacturing facilities and intellectual property from Fujitsu. The plasma panel market has seen rapid consolidation in recent months as the price of consumer electronic goods and components has fallen. Samsung Electronics and Sony are among other companies working together to reduce costs and speed up new product development.

business 212.txt MG Rover China tie-up 'delayed' MG Rover's proposed tie-up with China's top carmaker has been delayed due to concerns by Chinese regulators, according to the Financial Times. The paper said Chinese officials had been irritated by Rover's disclosure of its talks with Shanghai Automotive Industry Corp in October. The proposed deal was seen as crucial to safeguarding the future of Rover's Longbridge plant in the West Midlands. However, there are growing fears that the deal could result in job losses. The Observer reported on Sunday that nearly half the workforce at Longbridge could be under threat if the deal goes ahead. Shanghai Automotive's proposed £1bn investment in Rover is awaiting approval by its owner, the Shanghai city government and by the National Development and Reform Commission, which oversees foreign investment by Chinese firms. According to the FT, the regulator has been annoyed by

Rover's decision to talk publicly about the deal and the intense speculation which has ensued about what it will mean for Rover's future. As a result, hopes that approval of the deal may be fast-tracked have disappeared, the paper said. There has been continued speculation about the viability of Rover's Longbridge plant because of falling sales and unfashionable models. According to the Observer, 3,000 jobs - out of a total workforce of 6,500 - could be lost if the deal goes ahead. The paper said that Chinese officials believe cutbacks will be required to keep the MG Rover's costs in line with revenues. It also said that the production of new models through the joint venture would take at least eighteen months. Neither Rover nor Shanghai Automotive commented on the reports.

business 213.txt US bank boss hails 'genius' Smith US Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan has given a speech at a Scottish church in honour of the pioneering economist, Adam Smith. He delivered the 14th Adam Smith Lecture in Kirkcaldy, Fife. The Adam Smith Lecture celebrates the author of 1776's Wealth of Nations, which became a bible of capitalism. Dr Greenspan was invited by Chancellor Gordon Brown, whose minister father John used to preach at the St Bryce Kirk church. Mr Brown introduced Dr Greenspan to the 400 invited guests as the world's greatest economist". Dr Greenspan", 79, who has been in the UK to attend the G7 meeting in London, said the world could never repay the debt of gratitude it owed to Smith," whose genius he compared to that of Mozart. He said the philosopher was a ""towering contributor to the modern world"". "Kirkcaldy", the birthplace in 1723 of Adam Smith and, by extension, of modern economics, is also of course," where your chancellor was reared. ""I am led to ponder to what extent the chancellor's renowned economic and financial skills are the result of exposure to the subliminal intellect-enhancing emanation in this area."" He continued: ""Smith reached far beyond the insights of his predecessors to frame a global view of how market economics", just then emerging," worked. ""In so doing he supported changes in societal organisation that were to measurably enhance standards of living."" Dr Greenspan said Smith's revolutionary philosophy on human self-interest", laissez-faire economics and competition had been a force for good in the world. ""The incredible insights of a handful of intellectuals of the Enlightenment - especially with Smith toiling in the environs of Kirkcaldy - created the modern vision of people free to choose and to act according to their individual self-interest", he said. Following his lecture, Dr Greenspan - who received an honorary knighthood from the Queen at Balmoral in 2002 - was awarded an honorary fellowship of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. He later opened an exhibition dedicated to Smith in the atrium of Fife College of Further and Higher Education. Joyce Johnston, principal of the college, said: It is very fitting that the world's premier economist delivered this lecture in tribute to the world's first economist." Dr Greenspan - who became chairman of the Federal Reserve for an unprecedented fifth term in June 2004 - will step down in January next year. He has served under Presidents George W Bush", Bill Clinton, George Bush, and Ronald Reagan. He was also chairman of the council of economic advisors to Gerald Ford.

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"business 214.txt Economy 'strong' in election year UK businesses are set to prosper during the next few months - but this could trigger more interest rate rises", according to a report. Optimism is at its highest since 1997 and business will reap the benefits of a continuing rise in public spending, say researchers at BDO Stoy Hayward. The Bank of England is expected to keep rates on hold this week - but they could go up later in the year. Rates are likely to rise after the anticipated general election in May. The BDO optimism index - a leading indicator of GDP growth two quarters ahead edged up in Janu

ary to 102.5, from 102.2 in October. The rise is due, in part, to an increase in public spending and increased merger and acquisition activity. The only thing blighting business optimism this year will be uncertainties associated with the general election, BDO said. Its BDO's output index - which predicts GDP movements a quarter in advance - remained at 100.8 for January, implying GDP growth at 2.9% in the second quarter of 2005. However, the output index is being held back by recent interest rate rises, sterling's strength against the dollar and high oil prices, the group noted. Its inflation index, which has risen continuously over the last 8 months," climbed to 110.0 in January from 108.0 in October last year. ""The UK is looking strong going into the general election", but businesses need to prepare themselves for a jolt ahead as the Bank of England reacts to growth and inflationary pressures," said Peter Hemington, partner at BDO Stoy Hayward. Growth will probably slow by the end of 2005 and it is likely that we will see higher interest rates or a sharp drop in demand for products and services." "

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"business 215.txt SEC to rethink post-Enron rules The US stock market watchdog's chairman has said he is willing to soften tough new US corporate governance rules to ease the burden on foreign firms. In a speech at the London School of Economics", "William Donaldson promised ""several initiatives"". European firms have protested that US laws introduced after the Enron scandal make Wall Street listings too costly. The US regulator said foreign firms may get extra time to comply with a key clause in the Sarbanes-Oxley Act. The Act comes into force in mid-2005. It obliges all firms with US stock market listings to make declarations", which, critics say, will add substantially to the cost of preparing their annual accounts. Firms that break the new law could face huge fines, while senior executives risk jail terms of up to 20 years. Mr Donaldson said that although the Act does not provide exemptions for foreign firms," the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) would ""continue to be sensitive to the need to accommodate foreign structures and requirements"". There are few", if any, who disagree with the intentions of the Act, which obliges chief executives to sign a statement taking responsibility for the accuracy of the accounts. But European firms with secondary listings in New York have objected - arguing that the compliance costs outweigh the benefits of a dual listing. The Act also applies to firms with more than 300 US shareholders, a situation many firms without US listings could find themselves in. The 300-shareholder threshold has drawn anger as it effectively blocks the most obvious remedy," a delisting. Mr Donaldson said the SEC would ""consider whether there should be a new approach to the deregistration process"" for foreign firms unwilling to meet US requirements. ""We should seek a solution that will preserve investor protections"" without turning the US market into ""one with no exit""", he said. He revealed that his staff were already weighing up the merits of delaying the implementation of the Act's least popular measure - Section 404 - for foreign firms. Seen as particularly costly to implement, Section 404 obliges chief executives to take responsibility for the firm's internal controls by signing a compliance statement in the annual accounts. The SEC has already delayed implementation of this clause for smaller firms - including US ones - with market capitalisations below \$700m (£374m). A delegation of European firms visited the SEC in December to press for change, the Financial Times reported. It was led by Digby Jones, director general of the UK's Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and included representatives of BASF, Siemens and Cadbury Schweppes. Compliance costs are already believed to be making firms wary of US listings. Air China picked the London Stock Exchange for its secondary listing in its \$1.07bn (£558m) stock

market debut last month. There are also rumours that two Chinese state-run banks - China Construction Bank and Bank of China - have abandoned plans for multi-billion dollar listings in New York later this year. Instead, the cost of Sarbanes-Oxley has persuaded them to stick to a single listing in Hong Kong, according to press reports in China.

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"business 216.txt Nissan names successor to Ghosn Nissan has named a lifetime employee to run its operations after Carlos Ghosn", its highly successful boss, takes charge at Renault. As chief operating officer, Toshiyuki Shiga will run Nissan on a daily basis, although Mr Ghosn, who masterminded its recovery, will remain chief executive. Mr Ghosn is to become chairman and chief executive of Renault, which owns 44% of the Japanese carmaker, in April. Mr Ghosn transformed Nissan into a fast-growing and profitable business. Mr Shiga will nominally serve as Mr Ghosn's deputy. However, he will be Nissan's most senior Japan-based executive and will be in charge of the firm's global sales and marketing. He is currently in charge of Nissan's operations across Asia and Australasia and is credited with significantly improving its sales in China. He will inherit a strong legacy from Mr Ghosn, who has overseen a dramatic turnaround in Nissan's fortunes in the past five years. Dubbed 'le cost killer' for pushing through huge cost cuts in previous jobs, Mr Ghosn reduced Nissan's overheads by 20% and trimmed its workforce by about 200,000 after taking charge in 1999. These actions helped Nissan turn a 684bn yen (\$6.4bn) loss in 2000 into a 331bn yen (\$2.7bn) profit the following year. During his tenure, Nissan has increased its market share and made significant strides in key export markets. Nissan aims to increase vehicle sales to more than four million by 2008, launching 28 new models in the process. In his new job as Renault chief executive, Mr Ghosn will devote 40% of his time to Renault," 40% to Nissan and the rest to the group's activities in North America and other key markets. Mr Ghosn said Mr Shiga's appointment would ensure a ""seamless"" transition in management. ""I need a leadership team capable of accelerating the performance and delivery of results that has characterized Nissan over the past six years"", Mr Ghosn said. I have full confidence in Toshiyuki Shiga and the new leadership team to help me implement the next chapter of Nissan's growth." Nissan also announced a number of other management appointments with promotions for several younger executives.

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"business 217.txt Ukraine trims privatisation check Ukraine is to review ""dozens"" of state asset sales as the country's new administration tackles corruption. The figure announced by President Viktor Yushchenko is less than the 3",000 cases mentioned last week, but will cover many of the biggest deals. Ukraine recently ousted long-serving leader Leonid Kuchma and has said it wants closer European Union links. In a separate statement, the EU said that the US should back Ukraine's entry into the World Trade Organisation. The comments came as Viktor Yushchenko prepared to head to Brussels to meet with US President George W Bush and other North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) leaders. He is the only non-Nato member leader invited to attend the summit. Mr Yushchenko recently defeated Moscow-backed presidential candidate and Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych at the polls, and has made no secret of his wish to fight corruption and make Ukraine more transparent. Earlier this month, new Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko said as many as 3,"000 firms may have their privatisations put under the spotlight. Her comments raised concerns among a number of investors and Mr Yushchenko was seen on Monday as trying to soothe their frayed

nerves. ""We acknowledge that business in Ukraine is now shaped and 98% of privatisations were carried out according to the law", Mr Yushchenko said on Monday. We have trust in this business and want to defend it by law," he continued, adding that any review would focus on dozens of companies", "not hundreds or thousands"". He cited last year's sale of Ukrainian steel producer Krivorizhstal as one that had raised concerns. It was sold in June 2004 to a consortium that included Viktor Pinchuk", son-in-law of former-President Kuchma, and Rinat Akhmetov, the country's richest man, for \$800m (£424m) - despite other higher offers. Vice-Prime Minister Oleg Rybachuk called on the EU to recognise the steps that Ukraine was taking, fearing that should the country not be rewarded for its efforts there may be a backlash against closer relations with Brussels. He said that while he understood that Ukraine was not ready for EU membership," the country needed to see progress on topics such as trade and visa requirements. ""We deserve an honest response", Mr Rybachuk told the Associated Press in an interview. We understand the difficulties. We refuse to understand double standards." Ukraine may find it has a sympathetic ear in Brussels ""The EU has reiterated that we support (Ukraine's) fast accession to the WTO and if possible we would like that to happen some time during the year", said Claude Veron-Reville, a spokesman for EU trade commissioner Peter Mandelson. We have said as much to the Americans. We feel that it is important for us all to pull together for Ukraine to be allowed into the WTO. Mr Yushchenko was careful not to turn his back on Russia", which borders the country to the east," saying it was important to maintain 'pragmatic' ties with Moscow. ""Russia is Ukraine's eternal strategic partner", Mr Yushchenko said.

business 218.txt Absa and Barclays talks continue South Africa biggest retail bank Absa has said it is still in talks with UK bank Barclays over the sale of majority stake in the group. In November, Absa said it was close to striking a deal with Barclays. But the group said Barclays is still waiting for the approval of South Africa's banking and competition authorities to make a formal offer. Absa also announced that it expects to see earnings grow by 20-25% in its current financial year. Discussions with Barclays are continuing", but shareholders are advised that no agreement has been reached as to any offer being made by Barclays to acquire a majority stake in Absa," Absa said in a statement. If Barclays buys a stake in Absa it will be one of the largest foreign investments in South Africa in recent years. Absa currently has a market value of about \$8.5bn (£4.4bn). Analysts said Absa's earnings forecast was better than expected. However, the company warned that headline earnings growth would be trimmed by about four percentage points because of share options for a black economic empowerment transaction and a staff share incentive scheme. The South African group will release its results for the year to 31 March on 30 May.

business 219.txt Rescue hope for Borussia Dortmund Shares in struggling German football club Borussia Dortmund slipped on Monday despite the club agreeing a rescue plan with creditors on Friday. The club, which has posted record losses and racked up debts, said last week that it was in a life-threatening profitability and financial situation"". Creditors agreed on Friday to suspend interest payments until 2007. News of the deal had boosted shares in the club on Friday", but the stock slipped back 7% during Monday morning. In addition to the interest-payment freeze, Borussia Dortmund also will get short-term loans to help pay salaries. It estimated that it needs almost 30m euros (\$39m; £21m) until the end of June if it is to pay its bills. The football club is hoping that all its creditors will agree to defer rent payments on its Westfalen stadium. Borussia officials met with almost all the banks involved in its financing on Friday and over the weekend. Three creditors have yet to agree to the

deal struck last week. On 14 March, one of these creditors - property investment fund Molsiris which owns the club's stadium - holds its AGM at which it will discuss the rescue plan. Chief executive Gerd Niebaum stepped down last week and creditors have been pushing for a greater say in how the club is run. Borussia Dortmund also is facing calls to appoint executives from outside the club. The club posted a record loss of 68m euros in the 12 months through June. Adding to its woes, Borussia Dortmund was beaten 5-0 by Bayern Munich on Saturday.

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"business 220.txt Standard Life concern at LSE bid Standar Life is the latest shareholder in Deutsche Boerse to express concern at the German stock market operator's plans to buy the London Stock Exchange. It said Deutsche Boerse had to show why its planned £1.35bn (\$2.5bn) offer for the LSE was good for shareholder value. Reports say Standard Life", which owns a 1% stake in Deutsche Boerse," may seek a shareholder vote on the issue. Fellow shareholders US-based hedge fund Atticus Capital and UK-based TCI Fund Management have also expressed doubts. Deutsche Boerse's supervisory board has approved the possible takeover of the LSE despite the signs of opposition from investors.

"The onus is on Deutsche Boerse's management to demonstrate why the purchase of the LSE creates more value for shareholders than other strategies", such as a buyback," said Richard Moffat, investment director of UK Equities at Standard Life Investments. Atticus Capital, holding 2% of Deutsche Boerse, wants it to buy back its own shares rather than buy the LSE. And TCI which holds about 5%, has made a request for an extraordinary shareholders meeting to be held to vote on replacing the company's entire supervisory board. It has also demanded that shareholders be consulted about the proposed acquisition, and whether the operator of the Frankfurt stock exchange should return \$500m (£266m) to shareholders instead. In December, Deutsche Boerse, which also owns the derivatives market Eurex and the clearing firm Clearstream, put an informal offer of 530 pence per LSE share on the table. However, the LSE said the cash offer undervalued"" both its own business and the benefits of such a tie-up. Since then an improved offer from Deutsche Boerse has been anticipated as its management has continued talks with LSE chief executive Clara Furse. But the London exchange is also holding talks with Deutsche Boerse's rival Euronext", which operates the Amsterdam, Brussels, Lisbon and Paris exchanges, as well as London-based international derivatives market Liffe.

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"business 221.txt BP surges ahead on high oil price Oil giant BP has announced a 26% rise in annual profits to \$16.2bn (£8.7bn) on the back of record oil prices. Last week", rival Shell reported an annual profit of \$17.5bn - a record profit for a UK-listed company. BP added that it was increasing its fourth-quarter dividend by 26% to 8.5 cents," and that it would continue with share buybacks. BP chief executive Lord Browne said the results were strong ""both operationally and financially." The company is earning about \$1.8m an hour. Despite the record annual profits figure", BP's performance was below the expectations of some City analysts. However, BP's share price rose 4p or nearly 1% in morning trading to 548p. Its profit rise for the year included profits of \$3.65bn (£1.97bn) for the final three months of 2004 - up from \$2.89bn a year ago but below its third quarter. Speaking on the BBC's Today programme on Tuesday," Lord Browne said the profits were not solely down to the high oil price alone. ""The profits are up more than the price of oil is up", he said. Lord Browne pointed out that BP was reaping the benefits of its investment in oil exploration. We have spent many years buying (assets) when the price is low," h

e said. The company has made new discoveries in Egypt, the Gulf of Mexico and Angola. However, Lord Browne rejected calls for a windfall tax on his company's huge profits, saying that in the North Sea it paid progressively more tax, the more profits it made. Lord Browne believes oil prices will remain quite high. Currently above \$40 a barrel, he said: The price of oil will be well supported above \$30 a barrel for the medium term." "BP put production for the year at 3.997 billion barrels of oil", up 10% on 2003, but slightly lower than the four billion barrels it had initially aimed for.

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"business 222.txt Oil companies get Russian setback International oil and mining companies have reacted cautiously to Russia's decision to bar foreign firms from natural resource tenders in 2005. US oil giant Exxon said it did not plan to take part in a new tender on a project for which it had previously signed a preliminary agreement. Miner Highland Gold said it regretted any limit on privatisation while BP", a big investor," declined to comment. Only firms at least 51% Russian-owned will be permitted to bid. The Federal Natural Resources Agency said ""the government is interested in letting Russian companies develop strategic resources"". The foreign ownership issue will be dealt with according to Russia's competition law", natural resources minister Yuri Trutnev was quoted as saying by the Interfax news agency. No further details were given, with Mr Trutnev suggesting that Russia may decide on a case-by-case basis. Observers said that the move may represent a shift in policy, as the administration of Vladimir Putin puts the protection of national interests above free market dynamics. Russia recently wrested back control of a large chunk of its oil industry from stock-market listed company Yukos, a move that prompted calls of outrage from many investors. Analysts warned that it was still too early to draw too many conclusions from this new set of proposals. Companies echoed this sentiment," saying that they would require more information before ringing the alarm bells. "It's not good. But it is very understandable", said Al Breach, an economist at UBS Brunswick. But if the investment climate is stable - that's much more important. "Foreigners of course would like to have free entry but... this is not the end of the world." "A number of other nations", including Mexico, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, protect their national resources from foreign firms. What has surprised observers is that since the collapse of communism Russia has been courting foreign investment. BP spent \$7.5bn to create Russian-registered oil company TNK-BP, and has a partnership to develop the Sakhalin 5 petroleum field with state-owned Rosneft. Exxon, the world's largest oil company, has signed preliminary agreements to develop the Sakhalin 3 field. Company spokesman Glenn Waller said Exxon still considered the deal valid, despite Russia inviting new offers for the land block. According to Mr Waller," Exxon ""were not planning to bid at a new tender anyway"". "We regret the ministry has taken such a decision", said Ivan Kulakov, deputy chairman of Highland Gold - a mining firm that has the motto Bringing Russia's Gold to Market"". "It would be a shame if that has a negative impact on the investment climate." "Other firms that have been linked with investment in Russia include France's Total", the US-based ChevronTexaco, and miner Barrick Gold.

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"business 223.txt Gaming firm to sell UK dog tracks Six UK greyhound tracks have been put up for sale by gaming group Wembley as part of a move which will lead to the break-up of the group. Wembley announced the planned sale as it revealed it was to offload its US gaming division to BLB Investors. US gaming consortium BLB will pay \$339m (£182.5m) for the US unit", although

gh the deal is subject to certain conditions. BLB holds a 22% stake in Wembley and last year came close to buying the whole firm in a £308m takeover deal. Shares in Wembley were up 56 pence, or 7.6%, at 797p by mid-morning. The sale of the US gaming unit will leave Wembley with its UK business. This includes greyhound tracks at Wimbledon in London, Belle Vue in Manchester, Perry Barr and Hall Green in Birmingham, Oxford and Portsmouth. Analysts have valued the six tracks at between £40m-£50m. The US business accounts for about 90% of Wembley's operating profit and consists of operations in Rhode Island and Colorado. BLB's purchase of the US unit is subject to the agreement of a revenue-sharing deal being struck with Rhode Island authorities. Wembley said that, once the deal was completed, "it anticipated returning surplus cash to shareholders. ""Whilst the completion of the sale of the US Gaming Division remains subject to a number of conditions", we believe this development is a positive step towards the maximisation of value for shareholders," said Wembley chairman Claes Hultman. Wembley sold the English national football stadium in 1999 to concentrate on its gaming operations.

business 224.txt Man Utd to open books to Glazer Manchester United's board has agreed to give US tycoon Malcolm Glazer access to its books. Earlier this month, Mr Glazer presented the board with detailed proposals on an offer to buy the football club. In a statement, the club said it would allow Mr Glazer limited due diligence"" to give him the opportunity to take the proposal on to a formal bid. But it said it continued to oppose Mr Glazer's plans", calling his assumptions ""aggressive"" and his plan ""damaging"". Many of Manchester United's supporters own shares in the club", and the fan-based group Shareholders United is strongly opposed to any takeover by Mr Glazer. About 300 fans protested outside the Old Trafford ground two days ago. Rival local club Manchester City has pleaded with visiting fans not to protest inside its ground when the two teams play a televised match on Sunday. Manchester United's response comes as little surprise," as the board made clear. ""Any board has a responsibility to consider a bona fide offer proposal", the club said in its statement. Should it become a firm offer, it should be at a price that the board is likely to regard as fair"" and on terms which ""may be deliverable"". But it also stressed that it stayed opposed to Mr Glazer's proposal. ""The board continues to believe that Mr Glazer's business plan assumptions are aggressive", the statement said, and the direct and indirect financial strain on the business could be damaging." Whether or not the bid is attractive in monetary terms", in the case of Manchester United many investors hold the stock for sentimental rather than financial reasons. At present, Mr Glazer and his family hold a 28.1% stake, making them Manchester United's second biggest shareholders. They own the successful Tampa Bay Buccaneers American football team based in Florida. If the family makes a formal offer, they will need the support of the club's biggest shareholders. Irish horse racing millionaires JP McManus and John Magnier own 29% of United through their investment vehicle Cubic Expression, and have yet to express a view on the bid approach. A group of five MPs are calling on the Department of Trade and Industry to block any takeover of the club by the US football magnate on public interest grounds. They have signed a House of Commons motion, and Tony Lloyd, the Manchester Central MP, whose constituency includes the club's Old Trafford ground," has pledged to take the matter ""to Tony Blair if necessary"". The Commons motion says ""any takeover designed to transform the club into a private company would be against the interests of those supporters and football"". However", the DTI has dismissed the proposal. A spokesman said the department did not believe there was a case for changing the Enterprise Act so that takeovers of football clubs could be looked at on non-competition grounds. Mr Glazer's offer values the club at £800m (\$1.5bn). Pitched at 300p per sh

are, it also relies less on debt to finance it than an earlier approach from the US tycoon, which was rejected out of hand. Manchester United shares closed at 270.25p on Friday, down 3.75p on the day.

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"business 225.txt Sales 'fail to boost High Street' The January sales have failed to help the UK High Street recover from a poor Christmas season", a survey has found. Stores received a boost from bargain hunters but trading then reverted to December levels, the British Retail Consortium and accountants KPMG said. Sales in what is traditionally a strong month rose by 0.5% on a like-for-like basis, compared with a year earlier. Consumers remain cautious over buying big-ticket items like furniture, said BRC director general Kevin Hawkins. Higher interest rates and uncertainty over the housing market continue to take their toll on the retail sector, the BRC said. But clothing and footwear sales were said to be generally better than December, while department stores also had a good month. In the three-months to January, like-for-like sales showed a growth rate of -0.1%, the same as in the three months to December," the BRC said. ""Following a relatively strong New Year's bank holiday", trading then took a downward turn," said Mr Hawkins. Even extending some promotions and discounts and the pay-day boost later in the month could not tempt customers." The previous BRC survey found Christmas 2004 was the worst for 10 years for retailers. And according to Office for National Statistics data", sales in December failed to meet expectations and by some counts were the worst since 1981.

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"business 226.txt McDonald's to sponsor MTV show McDonald's", the world's largest restaurant chain, is to sponsor a programme on music channel MTV as part of its latest youth market promotion. The show Advance Warning highlights new talent and MTV reckons it will give McDonald's access to nearly 400 million homes in 162 countries. McDonald's golden arches," name and "I'm loving it"" catchphrase will be used throughout the half-hour programme. The move comes amid growing concerns about obesity in Europe and the US. The European Union has called on the food industry to reduce the number of adverts aimed at young children", warning that legislation would be introduced unless voluntary steps were taken. In the US, food group Kraft is among firms that already have cut back on promoting sugar and fattening products to the young. McDonald's has also been taking steps to improve its junk food reputation, revamping its menu and providing clients with health-related products such as pedometers. As well as burgers like the Big Mac and Quarter Pounder with Cheese," the company now sells healthier options such as salads and fresh fruit. Chief executive Jim Skinner attributed an 8.3% increase in January worldwide sales to the "variety of our menu""", among other things. Hooking up with MTV is expected to add extra momentum to McDonald's recent revival. MTV, which played a key role in the emergence of the music video, is to show Advance Warning on all 25 of its channels across the world. The programme can at present only been seen in the US, where it has featured artists like British stars Joss Stone and Franz Ferdinand. McDonald's has targeted the youth market in the past with its advertisements, signing up stars like jelly-legged dancer Justin Timberlake and all-woman singing group Destiny's Child.

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"business 227.txt Call to save manufacturing jobs The Trades Union Congress (TUC) is calling on the government to stem job losses in man

ufacturing firms by reviewing the help it gives companies. The TUC said in its submission before the Budget that action is needed because of 105",000 jobs lost from the sector over the last year. It calls for better pensions," child care provision and decent wages. The 36-page submission also urges the government to examine support other European countries provide to industry. TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber called for ""a commitment to policies that will make a real difference to the lives of working people.""" "Greater investment in childcare strategies and the people delivering that childcare will increases the options available to working parents", he said. A commitment to our public services and manufacturing sector ensures that we can continue to compete on a global level and deliver the frontline services that this country needs." He also called for ""practical measures"" to help pensioners," especially women who he said ""are most likely to retire in poverty"". The submission also calls for decent wages and training for people working in the manufacturing sector.

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"business 228.txt Tsunami 'to hit Sri Lanka banks' Sri Lanka's banks face hard times following December's tsunami disaster", officials have warned. The Sri Lanka Banks Association said the waves which killed more than 30,000 people also washed away huge amounts of property which was securing loans. According to its estimate, as much as 13.6% of the loans made by private banks to clients in the disaster zone has been written off or damaged. State-owned lenders may be even worse hit, it said. The association estimates that the private banking sector has 25bn rupees (\$250m; £135m) of loans outstanding in the disaster zone. On one hand, banks are dealing with the death of their customers, along with damaged or destroyed collateral. On the other, most are extending cheap loans for rebuilding and recovery, as well as giving their clients more time to repay existing borrowing. The combination means a revenue shortfall during 2005," SLBA chairman - and Commercial Bank managing director - AL Goonera the told a news conference. ""Most banks have given moratoriums and will not be collecting interest", at least in this quarter," he said. In the public sector, more than one in ten of the state-owned People's Bank's customers in the south of Sri Lanka were affected, a bank spokesman told Reuters. He estimated the bank's loss at 3bn rupees.

business 229.txt Shares rise on new Man Utd offer Shares in Manchester United closed up 4.75% on Monday following a new offer from US tycoon Malcolm Glazer. The board of the football club is expected to meet early this week to discuss the latest proposal, which values the club at £800m (\$1.5bn). Manchester United revealed on Sunday that it had received a detailed proposal from Mr Glazer, which looks set to receive more serious scrutiny. The club has previously rejected Mr Glazer's approaches out of hand. But a senior source at the club told the BBC: This time it's different." Supporters' group Shareholders United", however," urged the club to reject the new deal. A spokesman for the Shareholders United said: ""I can't see any difference (compared to Mr Glazer's previous proposals) other than £200m less debt. ""He isn't bringing any money into the club; he'll use our money to buy it." Mr Glazer's latest move is being led by Mr Glazer's two sons", Avi and Joel, according to the Financial Times. A proposal was received by David Gill, United's chief executive, at the end of last week, pitched at about 300p a share. David Cummings, head of UK equities for Standard Life Investments," said he believed a ""well funded"" 300p a share bid would be enough for Mr Glazer to take control of the club. ""I do not think there is anything that Manchester United fans can do about it", he told the BBC. They can complain about it but it is curtains for them. They may not

want him but they are going to get him." "The US tycoon", who has been wooing the club for the last 12 months," has approached the United board with ""detailed proposals""", it has confirmed. Mr Glazer, who owns the Tampa Bay Buccaneers team, hopes this will lead to a formal bid being accepted. He is believed to have increased the amount of equity in the new proposal, though it is not clear by how much. For his proposal to succeed, he needs the support of United's largest shareholders, the Irish horseracing tycoons JP McManus and John Magnier. They own 29% of United through their Cubic Expression investment vehicle. Mr Glazer and his family hold a stake of 28.1%. But it is not yet known whether Mr McManus and Mr Magnier would support a Glazer bid. NM Rothschild, the investment bank, is advising Mr Glazer, according to the Financial Times. His previous adviser, JPMorgan, quit last year when Mr Glazer went ahead and voted against the appointment of three United directors to the board, against its advice. But the FT said it thought JP Morgan may still have had some role in financing Mr Glazer's latest financial proposal.

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"business 230.txt Yukos drops banks from court bid Russia  
n oil company Yukos has dropped the threat of legal action against five banks it had accused of involvement in the sale of its key Yugansk unit. State-owned Rosneft bought the unit for \$9.3bn (£5bn) after Yukos was forced to sell assets to meet a \$27.5bn tax bill. Yukos says the sale was illegal and is pursuing damages in a US court. Its lawyers now accept ABN Amro", BNP Paribas, Calyon, JP Morgan Chase Bank, and Dresdner Kleinwort Wasserstein were not involved in the sale financing. However, Yukos still has an outstanding complaint against Deutsche Bank, which it alleges to be the leader of a consortium that was behind a bid for Yugansk by state gas monopoly Gazprom. The company has also accused Gazprom, the Russian Federation and two other Russian firms. Gazprom had been expected to win the December auction, but ended up not bidding. Yugansk was sold to a little-known shell company, which in turn was bought by Rosneft. Yukos claims its downfall was punishment for the political ambitions of its founder Mikhail Khodorkovsky. The firm, whose finance chief is now based in the US, filed for bankruptcy in Houston, Texas, and sought a court injunction against the sale. But Deutsche Bank has suggested Yukos artificially manufactured a legal case to stop the sale of its main asset. A hearing scheduled for February 16 and 17 will rule on whether the US court has jurisdiction in the case.

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"business 231.txt Venezuela reviews foreign deals Venezuela  
la is to review all foreign investment in its mining industries in an effort to strengthen its indigenous industrial output. President Hugo Chavez has ordered all existing contracts with foreign firms to be examined to see if they provide maximum benefits to the country. The review will cover production of gold", aluminium and iron ore although it excludes the country's oil sector. Chavez has sought to extend the state's role in all sectors of the economy. The left-wing president is conducting a controversial review of land ownership in the country while also seeking to create a state-run telecoms firm to compete with foreign-owned businesses. He has argued that major economic reforms are vital to improve the lives of Venezuela's poorest citizens. Announcing the review of raw material production, minister Victor Alvarez said the government would seek to transfer technology," training capability and content from projects with foreign partners. "We are defending our national sovereignty over the use of our national resources which must serve the endogenous development of the nation", Mr Alvarez said. For this reason we are reviewing all memorandums of understanding, al

l letters of intent, all agreements that have been signed, all contracts," to check which of these comply with these directives. ""Everything", absolutely everything," has to be reviewed." Venezuela has previously assured foreign companies with operations in the mineral rich country that it respects existing contracts. However", "the government insisted that it needed to develop its own industrial infrastructure in order to create new jobs and lessen its reliance on foreign partners. ""If we don't do this", we are just going to carry on being slaves, suppliers of raw materials, all our lives and we will never develop our own productive capacity," Mr Alvarez added. Companies from the United States, Canada, France and Switzerland all have substantial investments in Venezuela's mining sector.

business 232.txt Lloyd's of London head chides FSA The head of Lloyd's of London, the insurance market, has criticised Britain's financial watchdog, the Financial Services Authority (FSA). In a speech on Monday, Mr Prettejohn urged the FSA to force brokers to disclose the size of their commissions. The FSA should change", "and change now" said Mr Prettejohn", "who wants it to move from ""disclosure on request"" to mandatory disclosure. The call came in a speech on improving the London insurance market. ""The FSA should not bide their time and 'wait and see'. They should seize the moment", "Mr Prettejohn, Lloyd's chief executive said. The FSA took over regulation of the general insurance sector in January, but it sidestepped calls to require brokers to disclose the commissions they earn from insurers to their clients. Last week, the City watchdog gave brokers and insurers guidance on managing conflicts of interest. Brokers must give information on their commissions if, and only if, their customers request it, the FSA said. In the US, lack of transparency about brokers' commissions has led to problems. The world's biggest insurance broker Marsh & McLennan said last week it would pay \$850m to settle charges, raised by New York Attorney General Eliot Spitzer in October, that it sought to rig bids in conjunction with insurers. The probe centred around so-called contingent commissions, whereby brokers were rewarded according to how much business they brought to an insurer, an arrangement that did not always benefit brokers' customers. All of the insurance business written in the Lloyd's market is placed via brokers.

business 233.txt Bat spit drug firm goes to market A German firm whose main product is derived from the saliva of the vampire bat is looking to raise more than 70m euros (\$91m; £49m) on the stock market. The firm, Paion, said that it hoped to sell 5 million shares - a third of the firm - for 11-14 euros a share. Its main drug, desmoteplase, is based on a protein in the bat's saliva. The protein stops blood from clotting - which helps the bat to drink from its victims, but could also be used to help stroke sufferers. The company's shares go on sale later this week, and are scheduled to start trading on the Frankfurt Stock Exchange on 10 February. If the final price is at the top of the range, the company could be valued at as much as 200m euros. The money raised will be spent largely on developing the company's other drugs, since desmoteplase has already been licensed to one manufacturer, Forest Laboratories.

business 234.txt Vodafone appoints new Japan boss Vodafone has drafted in its UK chief executive William Morrow to take charge of its troubled Japanese operation. Mr Morrow will succeed Shiro Tsuda as president of Vodafone KK, Japan's number three mobile operator, in April. Mr Tsuda, who will become chairman, was appointed president only two months ago but the business has struggled since then, losing customers in January. Vodafone had pinned its hopes on the launch of its 3G phones in November but demand for them has been slow. While it has more than 15 million customers in Japan, Vodafone has found it difficult to satisfy Japan's technologically demanding mobile users. It suffice

red a net loss of more than 58,000 customers in January, its second monthly reverse in the last year. Vodafone is going to need to put a lot of money into Japan if it wants to rebuild the business", " Tetsuro Tsusaka, a telecoms analyst with Deutsche Bank, told Reuters. I do not know if it will be worth it for them to spend that kind of money just for Japan." "

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"/"business 235.txt Pension hitch for long-living men Male life expectancy is much higher than originally estimated", leading pension researchers have said. The Pensions Policy Institute (PPI) said life expectancy for unskilled and professional men has been understated. Life expectancy at birth is 71 years for a manual worker and 79 years for a professional - a gap of eight years. But if measured at age 65 instead, the PPI said, a manual worker will live to 81 years and a professional worker to 86 years - a gap of just five years. The PPI's estimate is higher because it excludes people who have died before they reach 65 years of age and also takes into account ongoing improvements in life expectancy. The government has ruled out raising the state pension age, because it says it would penalise lower-skilled workers who generally have lower life expectancies. Chris Curry, PPI research director," said its calculations suggested there could be more pressure on state pension spending than originally envisaged. ""Even people in social class V [unskilled manual workers] who are widely likely to have the lowest life expectancy can still expect to live 16 years after state pension age", " he said. Researchers have not updated life expectancy projections for women, who on average live longer than men.

business 236.txt Card fraudsters 'targeting web' New safe guards on credit and debit card payments in shops has led fraudsters to focus on internet and phone payments, an anti-fraud agency has said. Anti-fraud consultancy Retail Decisions says 'card-not-present' fraud, where goods are paid for online or by phone, has risen since the start of 2005. The introduction of 'chip and pin' cards has tightened security for transactions on the High Street. But the clampdown has caused fraudsters to change tack, Retail Decisions said. The introduction of chip and pin cards aimed to cut down on credit card fraud in stores by asking shoppers to verify their identity with a confidential personal pin number, instead of a signature. Retail Decisions chief executive Carl Clump told the BBC that there was no doubt"" that chip and pin would ""reduce card fraud in the card-present environment"". ""However", it is important to monitor what happens in the card-not-present environment as fraudsters will turn their attention to the internet, mail order, telephone order and interactive TV," he said. We have seen a 22% uplift in card-not-present fraud here in the UK... since the start of the year. ""Fraud doesn't just disappear", it mutates to the next weakest link in the chain," he said. Retail Decisions' survey on the implementation of chip and pin found that shoppers had adapted easily to the new system, but that banks' performance in distributing the new cards had been patchy, at best. The main issue is that not everyone has the pins they need", " said Mr Clump. Nearly two thirds - 65% - of the 1,000 people interviewed said they had used chip and pin to make payments. Of these, 83% were happy with the experience, though nearly a quarter said they struggled to remember their pin number. However, only 34% said they had received replacement cards with the necessary 'chip' technology from all their card providers. Furthermore, 16% said that none of their cards had been replaced, while 30% said only some had. UK shoppers spent £5.3bn on plastic cards in 2003, the last full year for which figures are available from the Association of Payment Clearing Services (Apacs). Altogether, card scams on UK-issued cards totalled £402.4m in 2003. Card-not-present fraud rose an annual 6% to £116.4m, making it the biggest category even then. Within t

his, internet fraud totalled £43m, Apacs' figures show.

business 237.txt Britannia members' £42m windfall More than 800,000 Britannia Building Society members are to receive a profit share worth on average £52 each. Members of the UK's second largest building society will share £42m, with 100,000 receiving a windfall of more than £100. Depending on how much they borrow or invest, members earn reward"" points which entitle them to a share of the society's profits. The payouts are bigger than last year", because of stricter eligibility rules. Last year, Britannia members shared £42m, but the average payment was only £38. To qualify for this year's payment, customers must have been members for at least two years on 31 December 2004. Britannia has also stopped making payments to members if they are worth less than £5. To qualify for the profit share, members must have either a mortgage, or an investment account other than a deposit account. Customers can also qualify if they have Permanent Interest Bearing Shares (PIBS). The profit share scheme was introduced in 1997 and has paid out more than £370m. Britannia will unveil its results on Wednesday.

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business 238.txt Firms pump billions into pensions Employers have spent billions of pounds propping up their final salary pensions over the past year", research suggests. A survey of 280 schemes by Incomes Data Services' (IDS) said employer contributions had increased from £5.5bn to £8.2bn a year, a rise of 49.7%. Companies facing the biggest deficits had raised their pension contributions by 100% or more, IDS said. Many firms are struggling to keep this type of scheme open, because of rising costs and increased liabilities. A final salary scheme, also known as a defined benefit scheme, promises to pay a pension related to the salary the scheme member is earning when they retire. The rising cost of maintaining such schemes has led many employers to replace final salary schemes with money purchase, or defined contribution, schemes. These are less risky for employers. Under money purchase schemes, employees pay into a pension fund which is used to buy an annuity - a policy which pays out an income until death - on retirement. IDS said there were some schemes in good health. But, in many cases," firms had been forced to top up funds to tackle "" yawning deficits"". The level of contributions paid by employers has increased gradually since the late 1990s. In 1998/99", for example, contributions rose by 4.7% and in 2002/03 by 8.6%. In contrast, between 1996 and 1998, some employers cut their contribution levels. Helen Sudell, editor of the IDS Pensions Service," said the rise in contributions was ""staggering"" and the highest ever recorded by IDS. ""We have warned before that the widespread closure of final salary schemes to new entrants is just the beginning of a much bigger movement away from paternalistic provision", said Ms Sudell. With figures like this there can be little doubt that many employers will have to reduce future benefits at some point for those staff still in these schemes.""

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business 239.txt UK homes hit £3.3 trillion total The value of the UK's housing stock reached the £3.3 trillion mark in 2004 - triple the value 10 years earlier", a report indicates. Research from Halifax, the country's biggest mortgage lender, suggests the value of private housing stock is continuing to rise steadily. All regions saw at least a doubling in their assets during the past decade. But Northern Ireland led the way with a 262% rise, while Scotland saw the smallest increase of just 112%. The core retail price index rose by just 28% in the same period, underlining how effective an investment in housing has been for most people during the past decade. More than a third o

f the UK's private housing assets - representing more than a trillion pounds in value - are concentrated in London and the South East, the Halifax's figures indicate. Tim Crawford, Group Economist at Halifax, " said: ""The value of the private housing stock continues to grow and the family home remains", by a large margin," the most valuable asset of the majority of households in the UK." Hali fax's own monthly figures on house sales - issued on Thursday - suggest the average price of a British property now stands at £163",748 after a 0.8% rise in January. Housing experts are split on prospects for the market, with some saying price growth will slow but not fall, while others predict a sharp drop in value s.

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"business 240.txt Economy 'strong' in election year UK businesses are set to prosper during the next few months - but this could trigger more interest rate rises", according to a report. Optimism is at its highest since 1997 and business will reap the benefits of a continuing rise in public spending, say researchers at BDO Stoy Hayward. The Bank of England is expected to keep rates on hold this week - but they could go up later in the year. Rates are likely to rise after the anticipated general election in May. The BDO optimism index - a leading indicator of GDP growth two quarters ahead edged up in January to 102.5, from 102.2 in October. The rise is due, in part, to an increase in public spending and increased merger and acquisition activity. The only thin blighting business optimism this year will be uncertainties associated with the general election, BDO said. Its BDO's output index - which predicts GDP movements a quarter in advance - remained at 100.8 for January, implying GDP growth at 2.9% in the second quarter of 2005. However, the output index is being held back by recent interest rate rises, sterling's strength against the dollar and high oil prices, the group noted. Its inflation index, which has risen continuously over the last 8 months," climbed to 110.0 in January from 108.0 in October last year. ""The UK is looking strong going into the general election", but businesses need to prepare themselves for a jolt ahead as the Bank of England reacts to growth and inflationary pressures," said Peter Hemington, partner at BDO Stoy Hayward. Growth will probably slow by the end of 2005 and it is likely that we will see higher interest rates or a sharp drop in demand for products and services.""

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"business 241.txt G7 backs Africa debt relief plan G7 finance ministers have backed plans to write off up to 100% of the debts of some of the world's poorest countries. UK chancellor Gordon Brown said the London meeting of the world's seven richest nations would be remembered as ""the 100% debt relief summit"". Some 37 countries could benefit after a case-by-case review by bodies including the World Bank and the IMF", he said. But the US says it cannot support Mr Brown's International Finance Facility to boost aid to developing countries. BBC correspondents said the meeting had produced some movement towards the UK's ambitions," but much work was needed. Mr Brown said it was a major breakthrough for the international organisations to offer up to 100% multilateral debt relief - ""the vast bulk"" of money owed by the poorest countries. ""We could be at the beginning of the final stage of the process where the debts that were owed by the poorest countries", built up over 20 or 30 years, debts that are simply unpayable in the real world, are finally taken care of," he said. He added: It is the richest countries hearing the voices of the poor." But he said they would insist on government reforms and the need for transparency", tackling corruption and openness from both the poorest and richest nations. BBC

correspondent Patrick Bartlett said while it was an agreement in principle," the organisations involved now have to look at how it would work in practice. Oxford senior policy adviser Max Lawson welcomed the statement and said G7 ministers had ""passed the first hurdle of 2005"". But he added: ""They need to move quickly to turn their proposals into real change for the world's poorest. ""Two million children will die needlessly between now and the next meeting in April. If rich countries are going to keep their promises to tackle obscene poverty they need deliver - and deliver quickly."" Talks are continuing on how to finance increased overseas development assistance. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is to look at a proposal to use its gold supplies to help the debt relief effort when it meets in April. Mr Brown said G7 ministers had agreed to defer debt interest payments and repayments for some countries affected by the tsunami until the end of 2005. But UK plans for an International Finance Facility (IFF) to help deal with debt in the developing world have not been agreed. Mr Brown wanted to provide \$10bn (£5.38bn) a year over a decade", using G7 backing so the money could be borrowed up front on financial markets. It is a key element of his proposals for a modern version of the Marshall Plan, which brought US aid to rebuild Europe after World War II," for the developing world. Mr Brown said it was ""winning support every day"" and said a programme had been agreed to draw up more details in time for the G8 summit in July. But US Treasury Under-Secretary John Taylor said the US could not support the IFF because of its ""legislative process"". ""The US is completely committed to poverty reduction and providing financing to do that", he said. But this particular mechanism does not work for the United States. It works for other countries," and that is fine." "Earlier", he told BBC Radio 4's Today programme the US had increased support for Africa in the past four years from \$1.1bn per year to \$4.6bn per year. But South Africa Finance Minister Trevor Manuel told the BBC's Talking Point programme what was needed was one approach, with all wealthy nations on board. He said much of the money pledged by the US had not yet been dispensed. The UK has made poverty in the poorest nations a key theme for its 2005 presidency of the Group of Eight (G8), which comprises the G7 and Russia. The G8 countries will meet at Gleneagles in Scotland. At a dinner on Friday night, former South African president Nelson Mandela backed Mr Brown's plan when he urged the finance chiefs to write-off African debt and provide an extra \$50bn (£26.69bn) a year in aid for the next decade. Talks also centred on the impact of the rising economies of China and India, the US budget and trade deficits, how the US, Europe and Japan can act to boost global economic growth," and HIV/Aids. G7 ministers called for more flexibility in international exchange rates and said ""excess volatility"" would impede economic growth. Representatives from China", India, Russia, South Africa and Brazil were invited to attend some of the sessions. A G8 summit is set to take place in July.

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"business 242.txt Q&A: Malcolm Glazer and Man Utd The battle for control of Manchester United has taken another turn after the club confirmed it had received a fresh takeover approach from US business tycoon Malcolm Glazer. No formal offer has been made yet", but Manchester United have confirmed they have received a ""detailed proposal"" from the US entrepreneur which could lead to a bid. Reports have put the offer at 300p per share", which would value Manchester United at about £800m (\$1.5bn). The approach by the 76-year-old owner of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers American football team is reportedly being led by his two sons, Avi and Joel. A previous approach to the United board by Mr Glazer in October last year was turned down. However," the BBC has learnt that the club is unlikely to reject the latest plan out of hand. Mr Glazer's prev

ious offer involved borrowing large amounts of money to finance any takeover. That would have left the club with debt levels which were deemed ""not... in the best interests of the company"" by Manchester United's board when they rejected his approach last year. However", Mr Glazer's latest offer is reported to have cut the amount of borrowing needed by £200m. While United's board may be casting a serious eye over Mr Glazer's latest proposals," supporters remain fiercely opposed to any deal. Supporters' group Shareholders United - which has proved adept in rallying opposition to Mr Glazer's campaign - said it would fight any move. ""Manchester United are a debt-free company. We don't want to fall into debt and we don't need to fall into debt", Shareholders United's Sean Bones told the BBC. United's players also appear unhappy at the prospect of a takeover. A lot of people want the club's interest to be with people who have grown up with the club and got its interests at heart," Rio Ferdinand told BBC Radio Five Live. No-one knows what this guy will be bringing to the table."" The key to any successful bid will be attracting the support of United's largest shareholders", the Irish horse racing tycoons John Magnier and JP McManus. Through their Cubic Expression vehicle they own 28.9% of the club. Mr Glazer owns 28.1%. Joe McLean, a football specialist at accountancy firm Grant Thornton," said the support of Mr Magnier and Mr McManus was ""utterly crucial"". ""Mr Glazer's bid will not proceed without their support and they have previously indicated that they are holding their stake as an investment. ""If that's the case", the shares will therefore need a price attachment of about 300 pence," maybe 305. ""If that's the case then Mr Glazer might well secure their support - if he does", this bid could well go ahead."" Indeed it is. Malcolm Glazer was little-known in the UK until he started to build up his stake in Manchester United in late 2003. In February 2004 he said he was ""considering"" whether to bid for the club. No bid emerged", but Mr Glazer continued to increase his holding in the club. In October 2004," Manchester United said they had received a ""preliminary approach""", which turned out to have come from Mr Glazer. However, the board rejected the move because of the amount of debt it would involve. At the club's annual general meeting in November, Mr Glazer took revenge by using his hefty stake in the club to oust three directors from the board. Legal adviser Maurice Watkins, commercial director Andy Anson and non-executive director Philip Yea were voted out, against the wishes of chief executive David Gill. But the move led to bankers JP Morgan and public relations firm Brunswick withdrawing from the Glazer bid team.

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"business 243.txt Making your office work for you Our mission to brighten up your working lives continues - and this time", we're taking a long hard look at your offices. Over the next few months, our panel of experts will be listening to your gripes about where you work, and suggesting ways to make your workspace more efficient, more congenial or simply prettier. This week, we're hearing from Marianne Petersen, who is planning to convert a barn in Sweden into a base for her freelance writing work. Click on the link under her photograph to read her story, and then scroll down to see what the panel have to say. And if you want to take part in the series, go to the bottom of the story to find out how to get in touch. Working from home presents a multitude of challenges. Understanding your work personality allows you to work in terms of your own style. Do you feel confident about your work output without conferring with others? Are you able to retain discipline and self motivate to get the job done? Do you build on the ideas of others - or are you a more introspective problem solver?. In order for a virtual office to succeed, keeping the boundary between work and home life is essential. It may be useful to be quite rigid about

who is allowed to visit, and to keep strict office hours. Referring to the space as work will give those around you a clear message that this is professional space. It is imperative to consider how to bring the outside world into yours, keeping up to date with developments and maintaining a network. Isolated work environments mean this has to be carefully thought out, and a strategy has to be developed that suits both your personality and your industry. Joining professional groups or forming a loose association of like-minded people may assist. It is useful to structure these meetings in advance as often they get relegated to less important status when times are busy - with the danger that when the workload eases, they have to be resurrected. Prior to any interior work being undertaken it is essential to ensure that the roof and walls are made water-and-weather-tight, and the structure is checked for stability. It appears that the roof of trusses may need repairs and additional bracing. Ideally, the roof should be replaced with an outer material in keeping with the character and location of the barn. This would also allow for a well-insulated inner skin to be provided which should be light coloured. It is likely that the most efficient way of heating the building is with electricity. In order to provide this the owner will need to have an electrical engineer calculate the potential heating, power and lighting load to make sure the mains supply and distribution capacity are adequate. Ideally, it would be good to have a mains water supply and some means of drainage for toilet and washing facilities. The walls should be dry lined with a single skin of plasterboard laid over rockwool slab which will allow good wall insulation and the power and lighting circuits to be concealed, and the walls should be painted in a light colour. The owner mentions she might lay a new floor over the existing planks; this will improve the insulation and offer a level surface. I would suggest laying new oak veneer planks which can work in with the character of the barn. As for lighting, consider a combination of floor mounted uplights, wall lights (wall washers) and selected downlights. Use a combination of mains voltage fluorescent fittings and dimmable units which can vary the light levels and the feel of the interior. Please click on the link to the right here to see my ideas for Marianne's barn. The layout of this office reflects the need to have a working area and a more relaxed meeting space. Large desk space and extensive storage would combine with tub chairs to maximise the space available. The finishes chosen for the furniture will need to reflect the unusual setting, while the lighting and temperature control mechanisms used will further influence the workplace. Regarding accessing the internet via the connection in the main house, your plan of going wireless is sensible. A wireless router/access point in the house with a wireless LAN card in the PC in the renovated area may be sufficient. However, important points to consider are the distance between the two buildings and the nature of the materials through which the signals have to pass, which could result in a weak signal strength. You may require an additional wireless access point in the renovated area. Your local IT supplier will be able to advise on this. If you haven't already invested in robust firewall and anti-virus software, it is essential to do so, to protect your investment. To really take advantage of wireless technology, you might consider a laptop computer and a docking station with external mouse and monitor. Or you could use one of the new Tablet computers, which allow you to write directly on the screen and convert into text with built-in hand recognition software. And finally, you will save money and space by considering a multi-function product for print, scan, copy and fax.

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"business 244.txt Market unfazed by Aurora setback As the Aurora limped back to its dock on 20 January", a blizzard of photos and intervi

ews seemed to add up to an unambiguous tale of woe. The ship had another slice of bad luck to add to its history of health scares and technical trouble. And its owner, P&O Cruises - now part of the huge US Carnival Corporation - was looking at a significant slice chopped off this year's profits and a potential PR fiasco. No-one, however, seems to have told the stock markets. The warning of a five-cent hit to 2005 earnings came just 24 hours after one of the world's biggest investment banks had upped its target for Carnival's share price, from £35 to £36.20. Other investors barely blinked, and by 1300 GMT Carnival's shares in London were down a single penny, or 0.03%, "at £32.26. Why the mismatch between the public perception and the market's response? ""The Aurora issue had been an ongoing one for some time", says Deutsche Bank's Simon Champion. It was clearly a source of uncertainty for the company - it was a long cruise," after all. But the stock market is very good at treating these issues as one-off events." "Despite its string of bad luck", he pointed out, Aurora is just one vessel in a large Carnival fleet, the UK's P&O Princess group having been merged into the much larger US firm in 2003. And generally speaking, "Carnival has a reputation for keeping its ships pretty much on schedule. ""Carnival has an incredibly strong track record", Mr Champion. Similarly, analysts expect the impact on the rest of the cruise business to be limited. The hundreds of disappointed passengers who have now had to give up the opportunity to spend the next three months on the Aurora have got both a refund and a credit for another cruise. That should mitigate some of the PR risk, both for Carnival and its main competitor, Royal Caribbean. While not common", cancellations for technical reasons are not entirely unusual in the industry, wrote analysts from Citigroup Smith Barney in a note to clients on Friday. Moreover, "such events typically have a limited impact on bookings and pricing for future cruises." "After all", the Aurora incident may be big news in the UK - but for Carnival customers elsewhere it's unlikely to make too much of a splash. Assuming that Citigroup is right, and demand stays solid, the structure of the industry also works in Carnival's favour. In the wake of P&O Princess's takeover by Carnival, the business is now to a great extent a duopoly. Given the expense of building, outfitting and running a cruise ship, "slowing supply growth" is a certainty", said David Anders at Merrill Lynch on Thursday. In other words, if you do want a cruise, your options are limited. And with Carnival remaining the market leader, it looks set to keep selling the tickets - no matter what happens to the ill-fated Aurora in the future.

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"business 245.txt The 'ticking budget' facing the US The budget proposals laid out by the administration of US President George W Bush are highly controversial. The Washington-based Economic Policy Institute", which tends to be critical of the President, looks at possible fault lines. US politicians and citizens of all political persuasions are in for a dose of shock therapy. Without major changes in current policies and political prejudices, the federal budget simply cannot hold together. News coverage of the Bush budget will be dominated by debates about spending cuts, but the fact is these will be large cuts in small programs. From the standpoint of the big fiscal trends, the cuts are gratuitous and the big budget train wreck is yet to come. Under direct threat will be the federal government's ability to make good on its debts to the Social Security Trust Fund. As soon as 2018, the fund will begin to require some cash returns on its bond holdings in order to finance all promised benefits. The trigger for the coming shock will be rising federal debt, which will grow in 10 years, by conservative estimates, to more than half the nation's total annual output. This upward trend will force increased borrowing by the federal go

vernment, putting upward pressure on interest rates faced by consumers and business. Even now, a growing share of US borrowing is from abroad. The US Government cannot finance its operations without heavy borrowing from the central banks of Japan and China, among other nations. This does not bode well for US influence in the world. The decline of the dollar is a warning sign that current economic trends cannot continue. The dollar is already sinking. Before too long, credit markets are likely to react, and interest rates will creep upwards. That will be the shock. Interest-sensitive industries will feel pain immediately - sectors such as housing, automobiles, other consumer durables, agriculture, and small business. Some will recall the news footage of angry farmers driving their heavy equipment around the US Capitol in the late 1970s. There will be no need for constitutional amendments to balance the budget. The public outcry will force Congress to act. Whether it will act wisely is another matter. How did this happen? By definition, the deficit means too little revenue and too much spending - but this neutral description doesn't adequately capture the current situation. Federal revenues are at 1950s levels, while spending remains where it has been in recent decades - much higher. In addition, the United States has two significant military missions. The Bush administration's chosen remedy is the least feasible one. Reducing domestic spending," or eliminating ""waste", "fraud and abuse"" is toothless because this slice of the budget is too small to solve the problem. Indeed", if Congress were rash enough to balance the budget in this way, there would hardly be any such spending left. Law enforcement, space exploration, environmental clean-up, economic development, the Small Business Administration, housing, veterans' benefits, aid to state and local governments would all but disappear. It's fantasy to think these routine government functions could be slashed. The biggest spending growth areas are defence (including homeland security), and health care for the elderly and the poor. To some extent, increases in these areas are inevitable. The US population is aging, and the nation does face genuine threats in the world. But serious savings can only be found where the big money is. Savings in health care spending that do not come at the expense of health can only be achieved with wholesale reform of the entire system, public and private. Brute force budget cuts or spending caps would ill-serve the nation's elderly and indigent. On the revenue side, the lion's share of revenue lost to tax cuts enacted since 2000 will have to be replaced. Some rearranging could hold many people harmless and focus most of the pain on those with relatively high incomes. Finally, blind allegiance to a balanced budget will have to be abandoned. There is no good reason to fixate on it, anyway. Moderate deficits and slowly rising federal debt can be sustained indefinitely. Borrowing for investments in education and infrastructure that pay off in future years makes sense. The sooner we face that reality, the sooner workable reforms can be pursued. First on the list should be tax reform to raise revenue, simplify the tax code, and restore some fairness eroded by the Bush tax cuts. Second should be a dispassionate re-evaluation of the huge increase in defence spending over the past three years, much of it unrelated to Afghanistan, Iraq, or terrorism. Third must be the start of a serious debate on large-scale health care reform. One thing is certain - destroying the budget in order to save it is not going to equip the US economy and government for the challenges of this new century.

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"business 246.txt Ebbers 'aware' of WorldCom fraud Former WorldCom boss Bernie Ebbers was directly involved in the \$11bn financial fraud at the firm", his closest associate has told a US court. Giving evidence in the criminal trial of Mr Ebbers, ex-finance chief Scott Sullivan implicated his c

olleague in the accounting scandal at the firm. Mr Sullivan, WorldCom's former number two, is the government's chief witness in its case against Mr Ebbers. Mr Ebbers has denied multiple charges of conspiracy and fraud. Senior WorldCom executives are accused of orchestrating a huge fraud at the former telecoms company in which they exaggerated revenues and hid the cost of expenses. The firm was forced into bankruptcy, the largest in US history. Mr Sullivan, 42, pleaded guilty to fraud last year and agreed to assist the government with its case against Mr Ebbers. Prosecutors have alleged that Mr Ebbers, 63, directed Mr Sullivan to hide the true state of the company's finances by providing false information to the firm's accountants. Mr Ebbers has denied all the charges, saying he was unaware of the fraud. His lawyers claim that their client was unfamiliar with detailed accounting practices and left that side of the business to Mr Sullivan. However, "on Monday Mr Sullivan named Mr Ebbers as one of five executives who participated in the accounting fraud. ""He [Ebbers] has got a hands-on grasp of financial information", "Mr Sullivan told a New York court. On his first day of questioning, Mr Sullivan admitted to falsifying the company's financial statements. We did not disclose these adjustments", "he said. We did not talk about these adjustments and the information was false." "Mr Sullivan said his former boss knew more about accounting matters than many chief financial officers and described him as ""detail-oriented""". He portrayed Mr Ebbers", a charismatic businessman who built up WorldCom from a small regional operator into one of America's largest telecoms firms," as obsessed with costs. ""He would talk about that there were more coffee filters than coffee bags and that means employees are taking coffee home", "he said. We needed to cut expenses. We needed to cut a lot more than coffee expenses." "Mr Sullivan is at the centre of the government's case against Mr Ebbers. Mr Ebbers could face a sentence of 85 years if convicted of all the charges he is facing.

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business 247.txt Renault boss hails 'great year' Strong sales outside western Europe helped Renault boost its profits by more than 40% in 2004 although the firm warned of lower margins this year. France's second largest carmaker enjoyed a healthy 43% rise in net profits to 2.4bn euros (\$3.1bn; £2.9bn) as sales rose 8% to 40.7bn euros. The firm said strong demand outside western Europe and the good performance of its Megane range lifted its results. Chairman Louis Schweitzer said 2004 had been a ""great year"" for the firm. Renault sold more than 2.4 million vehicles in 2004", an increase of 4% on the previous year. Growth came mainly from outside western Europe, with particularly strong sales in Turkey, Russia and North Africa. In total," sales outside western Europe - Renault's core market - rose 16.5%. Japanese carmaker Nissan - in which Renault owns a 44% stake - contributed 1.7bn euros in net income over the year. Nissan chairman Carlos Ghosn is to succeed Mr Schweitzer at the head of Renault later this year. Renault said the outlook for the industry in Europe this year was ""stable""", with small growth forecast in other regions. The firm will benefit from the launch of a new Clio model in the coming year and the roll-out of the Logan in many markets. However, the firm said it expected operating margins to be lower in 2005," at 4% of sales as opposed to 5%. ""In a sluggish market and an environment impacted by the rise in raw material prices", Renault intends to continue to grow its global sales," the company said in a statement.

business 248.txt Survey confirms property slowdown Government figures have confirmed a widely reported slowdown of the UK's housing market in late 2004. House prices were 11.8% higher on the year in the last quarter of 2004, down from 16.3% in the July-to-September quarter, the Land Registry

said. The average house price in England and Wales was £182,920, down from £187,971 in July-September. The volume of sales between October and December dropped by nearly a quarter from the same period in 2003. The government figures are the first official confirmation of falls in the market at the end of 2004. Land Registry figures are less up to date than those of banks and building societies, since they record completions not mortgage approvals. However, the figures are viewed as the most accurate measure of house prices as they include all property transactions, including cash sales. The cost of buying a home fell in seven out of 10 regions between the third and fourth quarters of 2004. The biggest annual gains were made in Wales, where house prices were up by 23% in the fourth quarter. House prices rose the slowest in Greater London, being up by 6%. In the capital, the volume of sales fell by 23% from 36,185 in 2003 to 28,041 for the same period in 2004. There was also a decline in the number of million-pound properties sold in the capital, with 436 properties over £1m sold compared to 469 for the same period in 2003. Although the figures point to a slowdown in the market, the most recent surveys from Nationwide and Halifax have indicated the market may be undergoing a revival. After registering falls at the back end of 2004, Halifax said house prices rose by 0.8% in January and Nationwide reported a rise of 0.4% in the first month of the year. Members of the Bank of England's rate-setting committee will make their latest decision on interest rates on Thursday.

business 249.txt Bush budget seeks deep cutbacks President Bush has presented his 2006 budget, cutting domestic spending in a bid to lower a record deficit projected to peak at \$427bn (£230bn) this year. The \$2.58 trillion (£1.38 trillion) budget submitted to Congress affects 150 domestic programmes from farming to the environment, education and health. But foreign aid is due to rise by 10%, with more money to treat HIV/Aids and reward economic and political reform. Military spending is also set to rise by 4.8%, to reach \$419.3bn. The budget does not include the cost of running military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, for which the administration is expected to seek an extra \$80bn from Congress later this year. Congress will spend several months debating George W Bush's proposal. The state department's planned budget would rise to just under \$23bn - a fraction of the defence department's request - including almost \$6bn to assist US allies in the war on terror". However", the administration is keen to highlight its global effort to tackle HIV/Aids, the BBC's Jonathan Beale reports, and planned spending would almost double to \$3bn, with much of that money going to African nations. Mr Bush also wants to increase the amount given to poorer countries through his Millennium Challenge Corporation. The scheme has been set up to reward developing countries that embrace what the US considers to be good governance and sound policies. Yet Mr Bush's proposed spending of \$3bn on that project is well below his initial promise of \$5bn. A key spending line missing from proposals is the cost of funding the administration's proposed radical overhaul of Social Security, the pensions programme on which many Americans rely for their retirement income. Some experts believe this could require borrowing of up to \$4.5 trillion over a 20-year period. Neither does the budget include any cash to purchase crude oil for the US emergency petroleum stockpile. Concern over the level of the reserve, created in 1970s," has led to rises in oil prices over the past year. The Bush administration will instead continue to fill the reserve by taking oil - rather than cash - from energy companies that drill under federal leases. The outline proposes reductions in budgets at 12 out of 23 government agencies including cuts of 9.6% at Agriculture and 5.6% at the Environmental Protection Agency. The spending plan for the year beginning 1 October is banking on a healthy US economy to boost government income by 6.1% to \$2.18 trillion. Spending is forecast to grow by 3.5% to \$2.57

trillion. But the budget is still the tightest yet under Mr Bush's presidency. ""In order to sustain our economic expansion", we must continue pro-growth policies and enforce even greater spending restraint across federal government," Mr Bush said in his budget message to Congress. Mr Bush has promised to halve the US's massive budget deficit within five years. The deficit, partly the result of massive tax cuts early in Mr Bush's presidency, has been a key factor in pushing the US dollar lower. The independent Congressional Budget Office estimates that the shortfall could shrink to little more than \$200bn by 2009, returning to the surpluses seen in the late 1990s by 2012. But its estimates depend on the tax cuts not being made permanent, in line with the promise when they were passed that they would sunset""", or disappear, in 2010. Most Republicans, however, want them to stay in place. And the figures also rely on the "Social Security trust fund"" - the money set aside to cover the swelling costs of retirement pensions - being offset against the main budget deficit.

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"business 250.txt Profits stall at China's Lenovo Profits at Chinese computer firm Lenovo have stood still amid slowing demand at home and stiffening competition. The firm is in the international spotlight after last year signing a deal to buy the PC division of personal computer pioneer IBM. Lenovo's profit for the three months to December was HK\$327m (US\$42m; £22m)", less than 1% up on the year before. Chinese PC sales have risen by a fifth in each of the past two years, but are now growing more slowly. The company is still by far the biggest player in China, with more than a quarter of the market. But Western firms such as Dell and Hewlett-Packard are also mounting a more solid fight for market share in China, and Lenovo's sales were down 3.7% by revenue to HK\$6.31bn. If the \$1.75bn agreement Lenovo signed with IBM on 8 December goes through, it will mark the end of an era. IBM pioneered the desktop PC market in the early 1980s, although strategic mis-steps helped lose it its early dominance. In any case, margins in PC market are now wafer thin, and profits have been hard to come by for most vendors except direct-sales giant Dell. But investors have been less than impressed with Lenovo's move, designed to take it out of China and further onto the world stage. Its shares are down 20% since the announcement two months ago, largely because of the unprofitability of the unit it is buying. There have been rumours that the deal could be in trouble because US government agencies fear it could offer China opportunities for industrial espionage. The reports of the possibility of an investigation into the risk sent Lenovo's shares up 6% in late January.

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"business 251.txt MCI shares climb on takeover bid Shares in US phone company MCI have risen on speculation that it is in takeover talks. The Wall Street Journal reported on Thursday that Qwest has bid \$6.3bn (£3.4bn) for MCI. Other firms have also expressed an interest in MCI", the second-largest US long-distance phone firm, and may now table rival bids, analysts said. Shares in MCI, which changed its name from Worldcom when it emerged from bankruptcy, were up 2.4% at \$20.15. Press reports suggest that Qwest and MCI may reach an agreement as early as next week, although rival bids may muddy the waters. The largest US telephone company Verizon has previously held preliminary merger discussions with MCI, Reuters quoted sources as saying. Consolidation in the US telecommunications industry has picked up in the past few months as companies look to cut costs and boost client bases. A merger between MCI and Qwest would be the fifth billion-dollar telecoms deal since October. Last week, SBC Communications agreed to buy its former parent and phone trailblazer AT&T for about \$16

bn. Competition has intensified and fixed-line phone providers such as MCI and AT&T have seen themselves overtaken by rivals. Buying MCI would give Qwest, a local phone service provider, access to MCI's global network and business-based subscribers. MCI also offers internet services. MCI was renamed after it emerged from Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in April last year. It hit the headlines as Worldcom in 2002 after admitting it illegally booked expenses and inflated profits. The scandal was a key factor in a global slide in share prices and the reverberations are still being felt today. Shareholders lost about \$180bn when the company collapsed, while 20,000 workers lost their jobs. Former Worldcom boss Bernie Ebbers is currently on trial, accused of overseeing an \$11bn fraud.

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"business 252.txt BT offers equal access to rivals BT has moved to pre-empt a possible break-up of its business by offering to cut wholesale broadband prices and open its network to rivals. The move comes after telecom regulator Ofcom said in November that the firm must offer competitors "real equality of access to its phone lines". At the time", Ofcom offered BT the choice of change or splitting into two. Ofcom is carrying out a strategic review aimed at promoting greater competition in the UK telecom sector. BT's competitors have frequently accused it of misusing its status as the former telecoms monopoly and controller of access to many customers to favour its own retail arm. This latest submission was delivered to the watchdog ahead of a deadline for the second phase of its review. "Central to the proposals are plans by BT to offer operators lower wholesale prices", faster broadband services and transparent, highly-regulated access to BT's local network, the former monopoly said in a statement. The United Kingdom has the opportunity to create the most exciting and innovative telecoms market in the world, BT chief executive Ben Verwaayen said. BT has a critical role to play, and today we are making a set of far-reaching proposals towards that framework," he said. BT wants lighter regulation in exchange for the changes, as well as the removal of the break-up threat. The group is to set up a new Access Services division - with a separate board which would include independent members - to ensure equal access for rivals to the local loop""", the copper wires that run between telephone exchanges and households. The company also unveiled plans to cut the wholesale prices of its most popular broadband product by about 8% from April in areas of high customer demand. It added that it plans to invest £10bn in the next five years to create a "21st Century network". To meet the growing demand for greater bandwidth", BT said it would begin trials in April with a view to launching higher-speed services nationally from the autumn. Telecom analysts Ovum welcomed the move," saying BT had "given a lot of ground"". "The big question now is whether the industry", and particularly Ofcom feels BT's proposals go far enough ...Now the real negotiation begins," director of telecoms research Tony Lavender said. Internet service provider (ISP) Plus.net also backed the proposals saying we will be entirely happy if Ofcom accepts them"". "BT has been challenged to play fair and its plans will introduce a level playing field. The scenario now is how well people execute their business plans as a service provider", chief executive Lee Stafford said. Chris Panayis, managing director of ISP Freedom2surf said that it would make the situation clearer for business. I think it's the first productive thing we've had from BT", he said. AOL backed the price cuts but said regulation was still needed to ensure a level playing field. This is a reminder to Ofcom that as long as BT can change the dynamics of the whole broadband market at will, the process of opening up the UK's local telephone network to infrastructure investment and competition remains fragile," a spokesman said. Ofcom needs to return to regulation of the wholesale broadband service [IPStream] and

provide more robust rules for local loop unbundling if consumers are to see the benefits of increased competition and infrastructure investment." More than 100 telecom firms", consumer groups and other interested parties are expected to make submissions to the regulator during this consultation phase. Ofcom is expected to spend the next few weeks examining the proposals before making an announcement within the next few months.

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"business 253.txt Jobs growth still slow in the US The US created fewer jobs than expected in January", but a fall in jobseekers pushed the unemployment rate to its lowest level in three years. According to Labor Department figures, US firms added only 146,000 jobs in January. The gain in non-farm payrolls was below market expectations of 190,000 new jobs. Nevertheless it was enough to push down the unemployment rate to 5.2%, its lowest level since September 2001. The job gains mean that President Bush can celebrate - albeit by a very fine margin - a net growth in jobs in the US economy in his first term in office. He presided over a net fall in jobs up to last November's Presidential election - the first President to do so since Herbert Hoover. As a result, job creation became a key issue in last year's election. However, when adding December and January's figures, the administration's first term jobs record ended in positive territory. The Labor Department also said it had revised down the jobs gains in December 2004, from 157,000 to 133,"000. Analysts said the growth in new jobs was not as strong as could be expected given the favourable economic conditions. "It suggests that employment is continuing to expand at a moderate pace", said Rick Egelton, deputy chief economist at BMO Financial Group. We are not getting the boost to employment that we would have got given the low value of the dollar and the still relatively low interest rate environment." "The economy is producing a moderate but not a satisfying amount of job growth", said Ken Mayland, president of ClearView Economics. That means there are a limited number of new opportunities for workers."

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"business 254.txt News Corp eyes video games market News Corp", the media company controlled by Australian billionaire Rupert Murdoch, is eyeing a move into the video games market. According to the Financial Times, chief operating officer Peter Chernin said that News Corp is "kicking the tyres of pretty much all video games companies". Santa Monica-based Activision is said to be one firm on its takeover list. Video games are "big business", the paper quoted Mr Chernin as saying. We "would like to get into it". The success of products such as Sony's Playstation", Microsoft's X-Box and Nintendo's Game Cube have boosted demand for video games. The days of arcade classics such as Space Invaders, Pac-Man and Donkey Kong are long gone. Today, games often have budgets big enough for feature films and look to give gamers as real an experience as possible. And with their price tags reflecting the heavy investment by development companies, video games are proving almost as profitable as they are fun. Mr Chernin, however, told the FT that News Corp was finding it difficult to identify a suitable target. "We are struggling with the gap between companies like Electronic Arts (EA)", which comes with a high price tag, and the next tier of companies," he explained during a conference in Phoenix, Arizona. These may be too focused on one or two product lines." Activision has a stock market capitalisation of about \$2.95bn (£1.57bn)", compared to EA's \$17.8bn. Some of the games industry's main players have recently been looking to consolidate their position by making acquisitions. France's Ubisoft, one of Europe's biggest video game publishers, has been trying to remain independent since

Electronic Arts announced plans to buy 19.9% of the firm. Analysts have said that industry mergers are likely in the future.

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"business 255.txt Call to overhaul UK state pension The UK pension system has been branded inadequate and too complex by a leading retirement think-tank. The Pensions Policy Institute (PPI) said replacing the state pension with a ""citizen's pension"" would help tackle inequality and complexity. The change would see pensions being calculated on length of residency in the UK rather than National Insurance (NI) contributions. Reform could reduce poverty by aiding people with broken employment records. The PPI added that once the state system was reformed the government should look at options to overhaul private and workplace pensions. The think tank's proposals were made in response to the recent publication of the Pensions Commission's initial report into UK retirement savings. According to the Pensions Commission's report 12 million working people are not saving enough for their retirement. As a result", living standards could fall for the next generation of UK pensioners. The report added that a combination of higher taxes, higher savings and/or a higher average retirement age was needed to solve the UK pension crisis.

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"business 256.txt Singapore growth at 8.1% in 2004 Singapore's economy grew by 8.1% in 2004", its best performance since 2000, figures from the trade ministry show. The advance, the second-fastest in Asia after China, was led by growth of 13.1% in the key manufacturing sector. However, a slower-than-expected fourth quarter points to more modest growth for the trade-driven economy in 2005 as global technology demand falls back. Slowdowns in the US and China could hit electronics exports, while the tsunami disaster may effect the service sector. Economic growth is set to halve in Singapore this year to between 3% and 5%. In the fourth quarter, the city state's gross domestic product (GDP) rose at an annual rate of 2.4%. That was up from the third quarter, when it fell 3.0%", but was well below analyst forecasts. ""I am surprised at the weak fourth quarter number. The main drag came from electronics", said Lian Chia Liang, economist at JP Morgan Chase. Singapore's economy had contracted over the summer, weighed down by soaring oil prices. The economy's poor performance in the July to September period followed four consecutive quarters of double-digit growth as Singapore bounced back strongly from the effects of the deadly Sars virus in 2003.

business 257.txt Turkey knocks six zeros off lira Turkey is to relaunch its currency on Saturday, knocking six zeros off the lira in the hope of boosting trade and powering its growing economy. The change will see the end of such dizzyingly-high denominations as five million lira - enough for a short taxi ride - and the 20m note, worth \$15. These valuations were the product of decades of inflation which, as recently as 2001, was as high as 70%. Inflation has since been tamed and economic prospects are improving. The currency - officially to be known as the new lira - will be launched at midnight on 1 January. From that point, the one-million lira note will become the new one-lira coin. The government hopes the change will be seen as a promise of growing economic stability as Turkey embarks on the long process of trying to join the European Union. On an everyday level, it is hoped the change will stimulate more international trade and end confusion among foreign investors and Turks alike. The transition to the new Turkish lira shows clearly that our economy has broken the vicious circle that it was imprisoned in for long years", said Sureyya Ser

denegeli, head of the Turkish Central Bank. The new lira is also the symbol of the stable economy that we dreamed of for long years." "The Turkish economy teetered on the brink of collapse in 2001 when the lira plunged in value and two million people lost their jobs. Turkey had to turn to the International Monetary Fund for financial assistance", accepting a \$18bn loan in return for pushing through a wide-ranging austerity programme. These tough measures have borne fruit. Inflation fell below 10% earlier this year for the first time in decades while exports are up 30% this year. Meanwhile, the economy is expanding at a healthy rate, with 7.9% growth expected in 2004. The government hopes that the new currency will cement the country's economic progress," two weeks after EU leaders set a date for the start of Turkey's accession talks. The slimmed-down lira is likely to be widely welcomed by the business community. " "The Turkish lira has been like funny money", Tevfik Aksoy, chief Turkish economist for Deutsche Bank, told Associated Press. Now at least in cosmetic terms it will look like real currency." " However", some do not feel quite so happy about seeing the nominal value of their investments reduced. " "If a person has 10 billion lira in investments this will suddenly decrease", shop owner Hayriye Evren, told Associated Press. This will definitely affect people psychologically." "

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"business 258.txt S Korea spending boost to economy South Korea will boost state spending next year in an effort to create jobs and kick start its sputtering economy. It has earmarked 100 trillion won (\$96bn) for the first six months of 2005", 60% of its total annual budget. The government's main problems are " "slumping consumption and a contraction in the construction industry" ". It aims to create 400",000 jobs and will focus on infrastructure and home building," as well as providing public firms with money to hire new workers. The government has set an economic growth rate target of 5% for next year and hinted that would be in danger unless it took action. " "Internal and external economic conditions are likely to remain unfavourable in 2005", the Finance and Economy Ministry said in a statement. It blamed continuing uncertainties such as fluctuating oil prices and foreign exchange rates and stagnant domestic demand that has shown few signs of a quick rebound" ". In 2004", growth will be between 4.7% and 4.8%, the ministry said. Not everyone is convinced the plan will work. " "Our primary worry centres on the what we believe is the government's overly optimistic view that its front loading of the budget will be enough to turn the economy around", consultancy 4Cast said in a report. The problem facing South Korea is that many consumers are reeling from the effects of a credit bubble that only recently burst. Millions of South Koreans are defaulting on their credit card bills, and the country's biggest card lender has been hovering on the verge of bankruptcy for months. As part of its spending plans, the government said it will ask firms to roll over mortgage loans that come due in the first half of 2005" ". It also pledged to look at ways of helping families on low incomes. The government voiced concern about the effect of redundancies in the building trade. " "Given the economic spill over and employment effect in the construction sector", a sharp downturn in the construction industry could have other adverse effects," the ministry said. As a result, South Korea will give private companies also will be given the chance to build schools, hospitals, houses and other public buildings. It also will look at real estate tax system. Other plans on the table include promoting new industries such as bio-technology and nano-technology, as well as offering increased support to small and medium sized businesses. The focus will be on job creation and economic recovery", given that unfavourable domestic and global conditions are likely to dog the Korean economy in 2005," the ministry said.

business 259.txt Latin America sees strong growth Latin America's economy grew by 5.5% in 2004, its best performance since 1980, while exports registered their best performance in two decades. The United Nations' Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean said the region grew by 5.5% this year. The Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) said regional exports reached \$445.1bn (£227bn; 331bn euros) in 2004. Doubts about the strength of the US recovery and overheating of the Chinese economy do however pose risks for 2005. Both organisations also warned that high oil prices raise the risk of either inflation or recession. Nevertheless, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) still forecasts growth of 4% for 2005. Strong recovery in some countries, such as Venezuela and Uruguay, boosted the overall performance of the region. ECLAC also said that the six largest Latin American economies (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Venezuela) grew by more than 3% for only the second time in 20 years. Chinese and US economic strength helped boost exports, as did strong demand for agricultural and mining products. In fact, Latin American exports to China grew 34%, to \$14bn. Higher oil prices also helped boost exports, as Mexico and Venezuela are important oil exporters. Regional blocs as well as free trade agreements with the US contributed to the region's strong performance, the IADB said.

business 260.txt Asia shares defy post-quake gloom Indonesia, Indian and Hong Kong stock markets reached record highs. Investors seemed to feel that some of the worst-affected areas were so under-developed that the tragedy would have little impact on Asia's listed firms. Obviously with a lot of loss of life", a lot of time is needed to clean up the mess, bury the people and find the missing," said ABN Amro's Eddie Wong. [But] it's not necessarily a really big thing in the economic sense." India's Bombay Stock Exchange inched slightly above its previous record close on Wednesday. Expectations of strong corporate earnings in 2005 drove the Indonesian stock exchange in Jakarta to a record high on Wednesday. In Hong Kong", the Hang Seng index may be benefiting in part from the potential for its listed property companies to gain from rebuilding contracts in the tsunami-affected regions of South East Asia. In Sri Lanka, some economists have said that as much as 1% of annual growth may be lost. Sri Lanka's stock market has fallen about 5% since the weekend, but it is still 40% higher than at the start of 2004. Thailand may lose 30bn baht (£398m; \$768m) in earnings from tourism over the next three months, according to tourism minister Sontaya Kunplome. In the affected provinces," he expects the loss of tourism revenue to be offset by government reconstruction spending. Thailand intends to spend a similar sum - around 30bn baht - on the rebuilding work. ""It will take until the fourth quarter of next year before tourist visitors in Phuket and five other provinces return to their normal level," said Naris Chaiyasoot, director general at the ministry's fiscal policy office. In the Maldives the cost of reconstruction could wipe out economic growth, according to a government spokesman. Our nation is in peril here", said Ahmed Shaheed, the chief government spokesman. He estimated the economic cost of the disaster at hundreds of millions of dollars. The Maldives has gross domestic product of \$660m. It won't be surprising if the cost exceeds our GDP", he said. In the last few years, we made great progress in our standard of living - the United Nations recognised this. Now we see this can disappear in a few days," a few minutes." Shaheed noted that investment in a single tourist resort - the economic mainstay - could run to \$40m. Between 10 and 12 of the 80-odd resorts have been severely damaged", and a similar number have suffered significant damage. However, many experts, including the World Bank, have pointed out that it is still difficult to assess the magnitude of the disaster and its likely economic impact. In part, this is because of its scale," and because delivering aid and recovering the dead remai

n priorities. ""Calculators will have to wait,"" said an IMF official in a briefing on Wednesday. The financial and world community will be turning toward reconstruction efforts and at that point people will begin to have a sense of the financial impact.""

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business 261.txt Booming markets shed few tears The market", former British government minister Michael Heseltine once said, has no morality. And indeed, stock exchange traders around Asia have wasted little time regretting the victims of this week's disaster. Stock markets in Indonesia and India have hit all-time highs this week; even in Sri Lanka, more comprehensively affected, the main index has lost only 5% since the waves hit. Bigger markets further afield have barely twitched. The MSCI World share index, a measure of global stock market performance, hit its highest level this week since early 2001; the BBC Global 30 has risen by 3% in the past week. And this at a time when - all sentiment aside - insurance costs are already estimated in the tens of billions of dollars, and countries around the region are looking at trimming their growth forecasts. In fact, the markets are being perfectly rational. For a start, the notional insurance cost of the disaster will have little bearing on corporate bottom lines. The overwhelming majority of the victims will have had no insurance: according to estimates from India, only one-quarter of those affected there were wealthy enough to afford insurance, and only one-quarter of that group at most will have taken out policies. Indonesia is likely to have even lower take-up rates. And where insurance certainly is in place - in, for example, the many tourist complexes affected - the costs will be borne in far-away corners of the global reinsurance market, rather than landing locally. Second, stock markets do not trade the sort of companies likely to have been damaged. Most of the biggest companies traded on the soaring Jakarta Stock Exchange are in oil, technology and financial services - none of which have been hit by the flooding. Tourist businesses, the most likely sufferers, are either foreign-owned or too small to have their shares listed. Those that are listed have suffered: Confifi Hotel Holdings, a small Sri Lankan tourism firm, has halved in value this week. But there are winners as well as losers. Asian stock markets are heavily inclined towards property and construction companies, many of which will be rubbing their hands over the reconstruction opportunities. In Indonesia, shares in state construction companies Adhi Karya and Semen Gresik have jumped sharply this week. More broadly, the academic consensus is that major disasters are largely neutral in their longer-term economic impact. According to the Natural Hazards Research and Applications Information Center at Colorado State University, there is little evidence that disasters are inevitably followed by a depression. The need to find money to replace lost and damaged property is balanced by the beneficial effect of reconstruction activity; there is rarely, the centre says, any sort of rebuilding boom, but in most cases sizeable indirect losses are avoided. A study of the 1993 Des Moines floods, from the Disaster Research Center at the University of Delaware\*, found that 70% of local businesses were no worse off after the disaster," and another 18% felt themselves better off. ""Although it is commonly assumed on the basis of anecdotal evidence that disasters result in business failures and bankruptcies on a large scale", our research indicates that most businesses, even those that are especially hard-hit, do indeed recover," the authors concluded. But disasters have a vast psychological impact, and markets are driven by psychological factors. In particular, many analysts warn of panic spreading unchecked through the global financial system, as investors seek to cover themselves against the unforeseeable effects of unpredictable events. In fact, again, the risks here are lower than they seem. Even the

costliest natural disaster is rendered minuscule by the global capital market - currently \$30 trillion and rising. A series of recent shocks, the Colorado cent re has argued, have demonstrated that this seamless global contagion hardly ever happens: market tremors rarely translate into economic slumps, and economic woes rarely seriously undermine markets. The trillion-dollar debts of Japan's banks, for example, have had no effect on stock markets further afield than Tokyo. And the US stock market was on its way down long before 11 September, 2001; it rose by 20% during the six months following the attacks. It is not that the broking community is indifferent to disasters or feelings", " one Bombay trader said this week. But the reaction would have been seen if business had been affected. Business sense probably tends to overrule everything else." "

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"business 262.txt Asian quake hits European shares Shares in Europe's leading reinsurers and travel firms have fallen as the scale of the damage wrought by tsunamis across south Asia has become apparent. More than 23,000 people have been killed following a massive underwater earthquake and many of the worst hit areas are popular tourist destinations. Reinsurance firms such as Swiss Re and Munich Re lost value as investors worried about rebuilding costs. But the disaster has little impact on stock markets in the US and Asia. Currencies including the Thai baht and Indonesian rupiah weakened as analysts warned that economic growth may slow. "It came at the worst possible time", " said Hans Goetti, a Singapore-based fund manager. The impact on the tourist industry is pretty devastating", " especially in Thailand." Travel-related shares dropped in Europe", with companies such as Germany's TUI and Lufthansa and France's Club Mediterranee sliding. Insurers and reinsurance firms were also under pressure in Europe. Shares in Munich Re and Swiss Re - the world's two biggest reinsurers - both fell 1.7% as the market speculated about the cost of rebuilding in Asia. Zurich Financial, Allianz and Axa also suffered a decline in value. However, their losses were much smaller, reflecting the market's view that reinsurers were likely to pick up the bulk of the costs. Worries about the size of insurance liabilities dragged European shares down, although the impact was exacerbated by light post-Christmas trading. Germany's benchmark Dax index closed the day 16.29 points lower at 3,817.69 while France's Cac index of leading shares fell 5.07 points to 3,817.69. Investors pointed out, however, that declines probably would be industry specific," with the travel and insurance firms hit hardest. "It's still too early for concrete damage figures", " Swiss Re's spokesman Floiran Woest told Associated Press. That also has to do with the fact that the damage is very widely spread geographically." " The unfolding scale of the disaster in south Asia had little immediate impact on US shares", however. The Dow Jones index had risen 20.54 points, or 0.2%, to 10,847.66 by late morning as analysts were cheered by more encouraging reports from retailers about post-Christmas sales. In Asian markets, adjustments were made quickly to account for lower earnings and the cost of repairs. Thai Airways shed almost 4%. The country relies on tourism for about 6% of its total economy. Singapore Airlines dropped 2.6%. About 5% of Singapore's annual gross domestic product (GDP) comes from tourism. Malaysia's budget airline, AirAsia fell 2.9%. Resort operator Tanco Holdings slumped 5%. Travel companies also took a hit, with Japan's Kinki Nippon sliding 1.5% and HIS dropping 3.3%. However, the overall impact on Asia's largest stock market, Japan's Nikkei, was slight. Shares fell just 0.03%. Concerns about the strength of economic growth going forward weighed on the currency markets. The Indonesian rupiah lost as much as 0.6% against the US dollar, before bouncing back slightly to trade at 9,300. The Thai baht lost 0.3% against the US currency, trading at 39.10. In India, where more than 2,000 people are thought

to have died, the rupee shed 0.1% against the dollar. Analysts said that it was difficult to predict the total cost of the disaster and warned that share prices and currencies would come under increasing pressure as the bills mounted.

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"business 263.txt Split-caps pay £194m compensation Inves tors who lost money following the split-capital investment trust scandal are to receive £194m compensation", the UK's financial watchdog has announced. Eighteen investment firms involved in the sale of the investments agreed the compensation package with the Financial Services Authority (FSA). Splits were marketed as a low-risk way to benefit from rising share prices. But when the stock market collapsed in 2000, the products left thousands of investors out of pocket. An estimated 50,000 people took out split-capital funds, some investing their life savings in the schemes. The paying of compensation will be overseen by an independent company," the FSA said. Further details of how investors will be able to claim their share of the compensation package will be announced in the new year. ""This should save investors from having to take their case to the Financial Ombudsman Service", something, no doubt, that will be very welcome," Rob McIvor, FSA spokesman, told BBC News. Agreeing to pay compensation did not mean that the eighteen firms involved were admitting any guilt, the FSA added. Any investor accepting the compensation will have to waive the right to take their case to the Financial Ombudsman Service. The FSA has been investigating whether investors were misled about the risks posed by split-capital investment trusts. The FSA's 60 strong investigation team looked into whether fund managers colluded in a so-called magic circle""", in the hope of propping up one another's share prices. Firms involved were presented with 780 files of evidence detailing 27,000 taped conversations and over 70 interviews. In May, the FSA was widely reported as having asked firms to pay up to £350m in compensation. Mr McIvor told the BBC that the final settlement figure was smaller because two unnamed firms had pulled out of the compensation negotiations. Investors in these two firms may now have to take any compensation claim to the Financial Ombudsman Service or the courts.

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"business 264.txt French suitor holds LSE meeting European stock market Euronext has met with the London Stock Exchange (LSE) amid speculation that it may be ready to launch a cash bid. Euronext chief Jean-Francois Theodore held talks with LSE boss Clara Furse the day after rival Deutsche Boerse put forward its own bid case. The German exchange said it had held ""constructive," professional and friendly"" talks with the LSE. But Euronext declined to comment after the talks ended on Friday. Speculation is mounting that the Germans may raise their bid to £1.5bn. Deutsche Boerse previously offered £1.3bn", which was rejected by the LSE, while Euronext is rumoured to have facilities in place to fund a £1.4bn cash bid. So far, however," neither have tabled a formal bid. But a deal with either bidder would create the biggest stock market operator in Europe and the second biggest in the world after the New York Stock Exchange. There was speculation Euronext would use Friday's meeting as an opportunity to take advantage of growing disquiet over Deutsche Boerse's own plans for dominance over the London market. Unions for Deutsche Boerse staff in Frankfurt has reportedly expressed fears that up to 300 jobs would be moved to London if the takeover is successful. ""The works council has expressed concerns that the equities and derivatives trade could be managed from London in the future," Reuters news agency reports a union source as saying. German politicians are also said to be angry over the market operator's promise to move its headqua

rters to London if a bid were successful. Meanwhile, LSE shareholders fear that Deutsche Boerse's control over its Clearstream unit - the clearing house that processes securities transactions - would create a monopoly situation. This would weaken the position of shareholders when negotiating lower transaction fees for share dealings. LSE and Euronext do not have control over their clearing and settlement operations, a situation which critics say is more transparent and competitive. The German group's ownership of Clearstream has been seen as the main stumbling block to a London-Frankfurt merger. Commentators believe Deutsche Boerse, which has now formally asked German authorities to approve its plan to buy the LSE, may offer to sell Clearstream to gain shareholder approval. Euronext, so far, has given little away as to what sweeteners it will offer the LSE - Europe's biggest equity market - into a deal.

business 265.txt Troubled Marsh under SEC scrutiny The US stock market regulator is investigating troubled insurance broker Marsh & McLennan's shareholder transactions, the firm has said. The Securities and Exchange Commission has asked for information about transactions involving holders of 5% or more of the firm's shares. Marsh has said it is co-operating fully with the SEC investigation. Marsh is also the focus of an inquiry by the New York attorney-general into whether insurers rigged the market. Since that inquiry was launched in October, Marsh has replaced its chief executive and held a boardroom shake-out to meet criticism by lessening the number of company executives on the board. Prosecutors allege that Marsh - the world's biggest insurance broker - and other US insurance firms may have fixed bids for corporate cover. This is the issue at the heart of the inquiry by New York's top law officer, Eliot Spitzer, and a separate prosecution of five insurers by the State of California. The SEC's investigation into so-called related party transactions includes dealings in the Trident Funds, managed by MMC Capital, the company's private equity firm. Marsh's new chief executive, Michael Cherkasky, is trying to negotiate a settlement with Mr Spitzer. Mr Spitzer has built up a reputation as a fierce critic and campaigner against corporate America's misdeeds. The uncertainty unleashed by the scandal has prompted three credit rating agencies - Standard & Poor's, Moody's and Fitch - to downgrade Marsh in recent weeks. According to the Financial Times, insurance analysts are now questioning whether Marsh will be able to maintain its strong record of earning growth as they draw up forecasts for the first quarter of next year. Doubts also exist over how much the company may have to pay regulators and lawyers to put the scandal behind.

business 266.txt Could Yukos be a blessing in disguise? Other things being equal, the notion of entrepreneurs languishing in jail while their companies are sold off for a song ought to be bad for business. But in the looking-glass world of modern Russia, the opposite might just be true, a new report\* has argued. The study, from the Centre for Economic Policy Research, does not praise the rough handling of oil company Yukos. But it argues that more rigorous tax policing has benefited all Russian firms, even targets of the tax police. An increase in tax enforcement can increase the amount [of dividends and other income] outside shareholders will receive", even accounting for increased levels of taxation," the authors say. The paper's reasoning is complex, and is based on a sophisticated model of the relationship between tax regimes and corporate governance - in particular, the propensity of management to steal from the company. The calculations demonstrated what many Russian analysts already knew: that increasing the tax rate increases the amount that managers steal, since undeclared income becomes relatively more valuable. In the West, meanwhile, higher tax rates translate far more smoothly into higher government revenues. On the other hand, increasing the rigour with which taxes are collected encourages companies to become more transparent, forcing them to be able to demonstrate

their financial position far more accurately. The net result, the authors say, is that the extra amount companies pay in tax is more than compensated for by greater efficiency and financial soundness. After Vladimir Putin became president in 2000, he did not raise taxes, but put a lot of effort - too much, critics argue - into enforcement. Since then, the Russian stock market has more than trebled in value, a rise the authors attribute at least in part to the newly tough approach. The report highlights the case of Sibneft, a Russian oil company that came close to merging with Yukos last year. After Mr Putin came to power, the company's overall effective tax rate rose from 2.6% to 10.4%, and Sibneft was the target of a series of aggressive raids by fiscal police. But shareholders benefited hugely: Sibneft started to pay dividends - \$53m in 2000 and almost \$1 bn in 2001 - and closed down the network of opaque subsidiaries it had previously used for siphoning off unofficial funds. According to the authors, although a variety of changes were sweeping through Russian industry at the time, the increase in tax enforcement is the only likely explanation for the change of fortunes at Sibneft and many of its peers. Does this analysis make sense? In part, certainly. For all its faults, corporate Russia has become far more orderly and law-abiding since 2000. Companies have rushed to list their shares on international stock exchanges - something unthinkable in the wilder days of the 1990s - and most large firms now produce their accounts to international standards. Foreign direct investment, long negligible, is starting to flow in serious amounts - \$7bn in 2003 - and stock market returns have been among the healthiest in Europe. But the authors' model does not quite cover all the complexities. For a start, the model assumes that the various parties have clearly-defined motivation: companies want to maximise profit, governments want to maximise tax revenue. In fact, the alarmingly close connections between big business and government in Russia - connections often greased by bribery - blur the apparently antagonistic relationship. Companies can, for example, persuade officials to overlook non-payment of taxes. And the authors' definition of tax enforcement seems unrealistically Western. Genuine, disinterested tax collection might well work wonders in Russia; the problem with recent examples has been the erratic and unpredictable way laws are enforced. The case against Yukos, for example, has moved in fits and starts, with little clarity from the government about its intentions, and little faith from investors that the letter of the law would be followed. As far as most commentators are concerned, the state is pursuing Yukos out of a political vendetta, rather than simply to enforce fiscal rectitude. Since Yukos' founder, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, was arrested a year ago, the Russian market has dropped by 10% - an indication that few investors feel optimistic about the salutary effect on corporate performance.

business 267.txt Nasdaq planning \$100m share sale The owner of the technology-dominated Nasdaq stock index plans to sell shares to the public and list itself on the market it operates. According to a registration document filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission, Nasdaq Stock Market plans to raise \$100m (£52m) from the sale. Some observers see this as another step closer to a full public listing. However Nasdaq, an icon of the 1990s technology boom, recently poured cold water on those suggestions. The company first sold shares in private placements during 2000 and 2001. It technically went public in 2002 when the stock started trading on the OTC Bulletin Board, which lists equities that trade only occasionally. Nasdaq will not make money from the sale, only investors who bought shares in the private placings, the filing documents said. The Nasdaq is made up shares in technology firms and other companies with high growth potential. It was the most potent symbol of the 1990s internet and telecoms boom, nose-diving after the bubble burst. A recovery in the fortunes of tech giants such as Intel, and dot.com survivors such as Amazon has helped

d revive its fortunes.

business 268.txt Giving financial gifts to children Your child or grandchild may want the latest toy this Christmas, but how about giving them a present that will help their financial future? Gifts of the financial variety might have a longer lasting impact. It may encourage children to save or start a fund which could count towards university costs, for example. The government is trying to encourage saving at an early age, through its new Child Trust Fund. The first vouchers, worth £250 or £500 for low-income families, will be distributed from January. All children born after 1st September 2002 will be eligible. Parents will need to decide which financial institution will manage this gift in time for the start of the scheme in April 2005. Parents and relatives will be able to top up the fund with up to £1,200 a year, which will grow free of income and capital gains tax. As the Child Trust Fund will not be in force in time for Christmas, relatives could invest their gifts in a higher rate children's deposit account, and use this as a feeder fund. There are accounts designed to start children off in the savings habit and they often pay a higher rate of interest. Some of the best instant-access accounts currently available include the Ladybird account from the Saffron Walden Building Society, paying 5.35% for a minimum balance of £1 and the Alliance & Leicester FirstSaver which pays 5.25%, also starting at £1. Interest earned by children is subject to income tax. However, children, like adults, have a personal income tax allowance (£4,745 for the current tax year). If the account holds money gifted by friends and relatives - but not parents - any interest earned from the savings account may be set against the allowance. As long as the total amount of interest falls within the allowance, then no tax will be payable. When the account is opened a form R85 "", available from the bank or building society, should be completed. This confirms that the account holder is a non-taxpayer and allows interest to be received without the deduction of income tax. The tax rules are different for parents who save on behalf of a child. Only £100 of interest (per parent) can be tax-free. Where interest exceeds this level, the whole of the interest will be taxed on the parent. This is to prevent parents from holding their own cash savings in their children's names and taking advantage of the tax allowances. Where both parents and other relatives are saving on behalf of a child, consideration should be given to opening separate accounts - one for parents' gifts and one for gifts from other relatives. Therefore, it may be preferable for parents to contribute to the Child Trust Fund which is tax free, with any gifts from relatives that take the total above the annual £1,200 limit being directed to a deposit account. Another favourite solution is Premium Bonds. With the promise of riches far greater than a mere deposit account, they make great presents. The parent or guardian will be responsible for the Bonds and will receive notification of the purchase. Any prizes will be sent to the parent or child's guardian. The minimum for each purchase is £100 and Bonds are sold in multiples of £10. There are gift opportunities beyond cash accounts and these should not be ignored. Over the longer term, stock market funds have outperformed other types of investment, although in the shorter term they can be volatile. One of the benefits of investing for children is that investment is generally for the longer term - more than ten years - which helps to reduce the risks associated with investing in shares. One way to spread the risk is to invest in the stock market through a unit or investment trust. These are pooled investment funds which give access to a wide range of shares. These funds may be actively managed, where a fund manager picks individual stocks based on a view of their future potential, or passive, where a manager invests in all the shares that comprise a stock market index, for example, the FTSE 100. Exchange Traded Funds offer an alternative way to track a stock market. These are single shares that give the r

eturn of an underlying index (so are really another form of tracker). The difference is that the charges are quite low. The only drawback with all financial gifts is that the children gain an absolute right to the money at age 18, and parents will have no control over how it is spent. For larger gifts it may be worthwhile taking professional advice on the establishment of a suitable trust that will allow ongoing control over the capital and income.

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"business 269.txt Air China in \$1bn London listing Chin a's national airline is to make its overseas stock market debut with a dual listing in London and Hong Kong", the London Stock Exchange (LSE) has said. Air China plans to raise \$1bn (£514m) from the flotation. Share trading will begin on 15 December, the LSE said. For China's aviation authorities, the listing is part of the modernisation of its airline sector to cope with soaring demand for air travel. No further details of the share price or number of shares were given. The LSE has been working hard to woo Chinese companies to choose London, "rather than New York for their listings. It opened an Asia-Pacific office in Hong Kong last month. ""We are delighted that Air China has chosen London for its listing outside China", said LSE chief executive Clara Furse. The London Stock Exchange offers ambitious Chinese companies access to the world's most international equity market combined with high regulatory and corporate governance standards, she said. A spokesman for the LSE said: We've been engaged with them (Air China) for about 18 months," two years now." As part of its pitch to bring listings to London", the LSE is thought to be highlighting the extra costs and red-tape imposed by new US laws passed since the Enron scandal, whilst stressing London's strong regulatory environment. Germany's Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder began a three-day visit to Beijing on Monday by signing a deal worth 1bn euros (\$1.3bn; £690m) for Airbus to sell 23 new planes to Air China, the Deutsche Welle radio station reported. China's booming economy has created huge demand for air travel among middle-class Chinese, turning the country into a sales battleground between rival plane makers Airbus and Boeing. Air China's long-awaited flotation is part of a strategy to modernise a dozen state-owned carriers, which have been reorganised into three groups under Air China, China Southern and China Eastern. Merrill Lynch are sole bookrunners for Air China's flotation, which will take the form of a share placing with institutional investors in London, though retail investors may be able to buy Air China shares in Hong Kong. Air China's primary listing will be in Hong Kong, with a secondary listing in London. The shares will be denominated in Hong Kong dollars. However, investors may be wary of Chinese stocks. The collapse last week of China Aviation Oil, the Singapore-listed arm of a Chinese jet fuel trader, has cast the spotlight on corporate governance shortcomings at Chinese firms.

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"business 270.txt Oil prices reach three-month low Oil prices have fallen heavily for a second day", closing at three-month lows after news that US crude stocks have improved ahead of winter. London Brent crude closed at \$40.15 on Thursday - a drop of 5.1% - having dived below \$40 a barrel for the first time since mid-September. US light crude traded in New York lost more than \$2 to \$43.25, "its lowest close since 10 September. The price of both benchmark crudes has dropped 12% in two days. The falls were triggered when the Energy Information Administration (EIA) said on Wednesday that US crude stocks were 3.5% higher than a year ago. The news calmed worries about winter shortages. Weak US fuel and heating oil stocks have been a persistent factor in pushing up oil prices. ""It's amazing how quickly sentiment changed", " said Rick Muell

r, an analyst at Energy Security Analysis. Analysts also attributed the fall to mild early-winter weather, which has tempered demand for heating oil. The stronger fuel inventories helped boost US stock markets to nine-month highs on Wednesday, though only the Nasdaq index had hung onto those gains by the end of Thursday. In London, the FTSE 100 index closed 15 points higher at 4,751. The long-awaited drop in oil prices helped to ease persistent investor jitters over the impact of energy costs on company profits and economic growth. However, traders warned that the fall could be short-lived if there is a cold snap in North America this winter or any major supply problems in other parts of the world. The price of crude is still up about 30% on the start of 2004, but has fallen from the record of \$55.67 set in late October. Opec nations have increased production to 25-year highs to meet global demand and this has helped rebuild US stocks hit by supply disruptions after Hurricane Ivan in September. Traders were also encouraged by comments on Wednesday from the energy minister of Opec member Algeria. Chakib Khelil said the cartel was likely to keep output unchanged when it meets next week. However, some analysts believe the sharp fall in crude prices may harden Opec's attitude to over-production, leading to a scaling back of oil output. Fears still remain over the level of US heating oil stocks, which are rising but remain down on 2004 levels. A cold spell in north America would start to deplete supplies and could spark further price rises. Analysts, however, say prices will fall further if inventories continue to rise. Mother Nature is going to be huge in the next several weeks", " said Kyle Cooper, at Citigroup Global Markets. Long term I think we're headed to \$30-35 but I don't think we're doing that yet. We have a lot of winter left." " John Person", president of National Futures Advisory Services, said the EIA data indicated there should be adequate supplies for the next three months in the US. .

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"business 271.txt Arsenal 'may seek full share listing' A  
rsenal vice-chairman David Dein has said the club may consider seeking a full listing for its shares on the London Stock Exchange. Speaking at the Soccerex football business forum in Dubai", " he said a full listing was "one of the options" for funding after the club moves to its new stadium. The club - which is currently listed on the smaller Ofex share exchange - is due to move into its new 60,000-seater Emirates Stadium at Ashburton Grove for the start of the 2006/07 season. Mr Dein also warned the current level of TV coverage of the Premiership may be reaching saturation level, with signs that match attendances have been dropping off in the first few months of this season. When Arsenal moves to its new stadium it will see its proportion of turnover from media earnings drop from 52% this season to 34% in two years' time. The club is hoping to increase matchday earnings from 29% to 40% of turnover, and has not ruled out other money-earning means, " including a full share listing. "When the new stadium opens we will go through a thorough financial review", Mr Dein said. Listing would be one option, " but we are flexible and no decisions have been made on that issue yet. " "We want to be in the best financial health - maybe clubs can do it (listing)", " Manchester United have been a success." " Mr Dein said that", although television money and coverage had driven the English game forward in the past 10 years, he feared there might now be too many games being shown. Since the formation of the Premier League in season 1992/93, " Premiership clubs have seen their income from television soar. " "Television has been the driving force over the past 10 years... but we must constantly improve if we want to remain as the world's leading league competition. " "We must monitor the quality of the product and ensure attendances do not decline", " and we must balance that with the quantity of exposure on TV too. " "I think we have practically reached saturat

ion point... sometimes I think less is more." "The club is funding its move to Ashburton Grove through a number of sources", including debt from banks, from money it already has and will receive in coming years from sponsors, and from the sale of surplus property, including its Highbury Stadium. It is also looking to create new revenue streams from overseas markets," including Asia. ""We have two executives travelling round Japan and China at the moment building relationships with organisations and clubs", and we know our supporters clubs are growing there too," as they are around the world. ""We have got a very good product", so it is very important we go and look at these markets," and make sure we are on the case."

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"business 272.txt Markets signal Brazilian recovery The Brazilian stock market has risen to a record high as investors display growing confidence in the durability of the country's economic recovery. The main Bovespa index on the Sao Paolo Stock Exchange closed at 24",997 points on Friday, topping the previous record market close reached the previous day. The market's buoyancy reflects optimism about the Brazilian economy, which could grow by as much as 4.5% in 2004. Brazil is recovering from last year's recession - its worst in a decade. Economic output declined 0.2% in 2003 and President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva - elected as Brazil's first working-class president in 2002 - was strongly criticised for pursuing a hardline economic policy. Investors have praised his handling of the economy as foreign investment has risen, unemployment has fallen and inflation has been brought under control. Analysts believe the stock market will rise above the 25,"000 mark for the first time before too long. ""There should be more space for gains until the end of the year", somewhere up to 27,000 points," said Paschoal Tadeu Buonomo, head of equities trading at brokers TOV. Brazil's currency, the real, also rose to its highest level against the dollar in more than two years on Friday. Although interest rates still stand at a punitive 17.25%, inflation has fallen from 9% to 7% while exports are booming, particularly of agricultural products. For the first time in decades", we have all three economic policy pillars in line during a recovery, Finance Minister Antonio Palocci told the Associated Press news agency. Government accounts are in surplus," we have a current account surplus and inflation is under control." "Investors were deeply suspicious of President da Silva", a former trade union leader who campaigned on a programme of extensive land redistribution and a large rise in the minimum wage. However, Mr da Silva has stuck to an orthodox monetary policy inherited from his predecessor even in the face of last year's economic crisis. This has earned him the disapproval of rural farm workers, thousands of whom took to the streets of Brasilia on Thursday to protest against government policies. President da Silva has defended his policies, arguing that Brazil cannot afford to continue the cycle of boom and bust which afflicted it in recent decades.

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"business 273.txt Markets fall on weak dollar fears Rising oil prices and the sinking dollar hit shares on Monday after a finance ministers' meeting and stern words from Fed chief Alan Greenspan. The London FTSE fell 0.8% while Tokyo's Nikkei 225 dropped 2.11%", its steepest fall in three months. G20 finance ministers said nothing about supporting the dollar, whose slide could further jeopardise growth in Japan and Europe. And Mr Greenspan warned Asian states could soon stop funding the US deficit. On Monday afternoon, the euro was close to an all-time high against the dollar at above \$1.30. Oil pushed higher too on Monday, as investors fretted about cold weather in the US and E

urope and a potential output cut from oil producers' group Opec, although price s had cooled by the end of the day. In London, the benchmark Brent crude price closed down 51 cents at \$44.38 a barrel," while New York light sweet crude clos ed down 25 cents at \$48.64 a barrel. The slide comes as the US has been attempt ing to talk up the traditional ""strong dollar"" policy. The latest to pitch i n has been President George W Bush himself", who told the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation (Apec) summit in Chile that he remained committed to halving the b udget deficit. Together with a \$500bn trade gap, the red ink spreading across A merica's public finances is widely seen as a key factor driving the dollar lowe r. And last week US Treasury Secretary John Snow told an audience in the UK tha t the policy remained unaltered. But he also said that the rate was entirely up to the markets - a signal which traders took as advice to sell the dollar. Some had looked to the G20 meeting for direction. But Mr Snow made clear exchange ra tes had not been on the agenda. For the US government, letting the dollar drift is a useful short-term fix. US exports get more affordable, helping perhaps to close the trade gap. In the meantime, the debt keeps getting bigger, with Co ngress authorising an \$800bn rise in what the US can owe - taking the total to \$8.2 trillion. But in a speech on Friday, Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan warned that in the longer term things are likely to get tricky. At present, much of gap in both public debt is covered by selling bonds to Asian states suc h as Japan and China, since the dollar is seen as the world's reserve currency. Similarly, Asian investment helps bridge the gap in the current account - the d eficit between what the US as a whole spends and what it earns. But already they are turning more cautious - an auction of debt in August found few takers. An d Mr Greenspan said that could turn into a trend," if the fall of the dollar ke pt eating into the value of those investments. ""It seems persuasive that", giv en the size of the US current account deficit, a diminished appetite for adding to dollar balances must occur at some point," he said.

business 274.txt Google shares fall as staff sell Shares in Google have fallen 6.7% after employees and early investors in the web searc h took advantage of the first chance to sell their holdings. Restrictions were imposed ahead of its flotation in August, to prevent shares being dumped quickl y onto the market. In one of the most closely-watched initial public offerings in stock market history, the US-based company sold 19.6 million shares at \$85 e ach. Google shares have risen since but fell \$12.33 on Tuesday to close at \$17 2.55. The restriction - known as a lockup - is being eased piecemeal: in all, s ome 227 million additional shares will become free to trade by February 2005. S elling the shares could turn many of Google's workers into millionaires. There were fears that the potential increase of shares in circulation from Tuesday wo uld ease demand for stock. However, analysts say they expected most shareholder s would be holding back from selling all their shares immediately, as Google's good performance and future growth potential means demand will hold. In its fi rst earnings report since floating on the stock market, Google said it made a n et profit of \$52m in the three months ending 30 September. Sales surged to \$80 5.9m in the third quarter, up from \$393.9m a year earlier. Google's main servic e - its internet search - is free to users, so the firm makes much of its money from selling advertising space linked to the words for which its users search. It also sells the use of its technology to companies who need to make either th eir websites, or their internal information systems, searchable.

business 275.txt Five million Germans out of work German y's unemployment figure rose above the psychologically important level of five million last month. On Wednesday, the German Federal Labour Agency said the jo bless total had reached 5.037 million in January, which takes the jobless rate to 12.1%. Yes", we have effectively more than five million people unemployed,"

a government minister said earlier on ZDF public television. Unemployment has not been this high in Germany since the 1930s. Changes to the way the statistics are compiled partly explain the jump of 572,900 in the numbers. But the figures are embarrassing for the government. With the figures apparently the worst we've seen in the post-war period", these numbers are very charged politically," said Christian Jasperneite, an economist with MM Warburg. They could well put an end to the recent renaissance we've seen by the SPD [the ruling Social Democrats] in the polls", and with state elections due in Schleswig-Holstein and North Rhine-Westphalia," they may have an adverse effect on the government's chances there."" The opposition also made political capital from the figures. It said there are a further 1.5 million-2 million people on subsidised employment schemes who are", in fact, looking for real jobs. It added that government reforms, including unpopular benefit cuts," do not go far enough. Under the government's controversial ""Hartz IV"" reforms", which came into effect at the beginning of the year, both those on unemployment benefits and welfare support and those who are long-term unemployed are officially classified as looking for work. The bad winter weather also took its toll, as key sectors such as the construction sector laid off workers. Adjusted for the seasonal factors, the German jobless total rose by 227,000 in January from December.

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"business 276.txt India power shares jump on debut Shares in India's largest power producer", National Thermal Power Corp (NTPC) have risen 13% on their stock market debut. The government's partial sell-off of NTPC is part of a controversial programme to privatisate state-run firms. The 865 million share offer, a mix of new shares and sales by the government, raised 54bn rupees(\$1.2bn). It was India's second \$1bn stock debut in three months," coming after the flotation by software firm Tata. The share offer was eleven times oversubscribed. ""It is a good investment bet",," said Suhas Naik, an investment analyst from ING Mutual Fund. Power needs in India are set to rise and NTPC will benefit from that." Analysists say the success of the NTPC flotation would encourage the government to reduce stakes in more power companies. NTPC has said it will use the money from the share sale to feed the growing needs of the country's energy-starved economy. The firm is the largest utility company in India", and the sixth largest power producer in the world.

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"business 277.txt Turkey turns on the economic charm Three years after a gruelling economic crisis", Turkey has dressed its economy to impress. As part of a charm offensive - ahead of 17 December, when the European Union will decide whether to start entry talks - Turkey's economic leaders have been banging the drum to draw attention to recent achievements. The economy is growing fast, they insist. Education levels among its young and large population are rising. Unemployment levels, in percentage terms, are heading fast towards single digits. Inflation is under control. A new law to govern its turbulent banking system is on the cards. The tourism industry is booming and revenues from visitors should more than double to \$21bn (£10.8bn) in three years. Moreover, government spending is set to be frozen and a burdensome social security deficit is being tackled. Income and corporate taxes will be cut next year in order to attract \$15bn of foreign investment over the next three years. A loan restructuring deal with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is pretty much in the can. And following recent macroeconomic restructuring efforts, its currency is floating freely and its central bank is independent. The point of all this has been to convince Europe's decision makers that rather than being a phenomenally

costly exercise for the EU," allowing Turkey in would in fact bring masses of economic benefits. ""The cake will be bigger for everybody",," said Deputy Prime Minister Abdullatif Sener earlier this month. Turkey will not be a burden for the EU budget." If admitted into the EU", Turkey would contribute almost 6bn euros (\$8bn; £6bn) to its budget by 2014, according to a recent impact study by the country's State Planning Organisation. As Turkey's gross domestic output (GDP) is set to grow by 6% per year on average," its contribution would rise from less than 5bn euros in 2014 to almost 9bn euros by 2020. Turkey could also help alleviate a labour shortage in ""Old Europe"" once its population comes of age. By 2014",," one in four Turks - or about 18 million people - will be aged 14 or less. ""A literate and qualified Turkish population",," insisted Mr Sener, will make a positive impact on the EU." This runs contrary to the popular view that Turkey is getting ready to dig deep into EU taxpayers' wallets. However", Turkey's assertions are confirmed by Brussels' own impact studies, which indeed say that Turkish membership would be good news for the EU economy. But only over time. Costs are projected to be vast during the early years of Turkey's membership, with subsidies alone estimated to exceed 16.5bn euros and, according to some predictions, balloon to 33.5bn euros. This would include vast agricultural subsidies and regional aid, though such payments should decline as the country's farm sector, which currently employs one in three Turks, would employ just one in five by 2020. Such high initial expenses would be coupled with risks that the benefits flagged up by Turkey's government would never be delivered, say those who feel the Turkish project should be shunned. Some fear that rather than providing an educated, sophisticated labour force for Europe at large, the people who will leave Turkey to seek work abroad will be poor, uneducated - and plentiful. More recently, less palatable concerns - at least in liberal European circles - have been voiced," with senior EU or member state officials talking darkly of a ""river of Islam""", an ""oriental"" culture and a threat to Europe's ""cultural richness"". Of course", many opponents are politically motivated - their views ranging from xenophobic prejudices about the country's Muslim traditions to well-documented concerns about the government's human rights record. Yet their economic arguments should not be dismissed out of hand. Critics insist that much of the optimism about Turkey's economic roadmap has been overegged - an argument amplified by a 134% rise in the country's current account deficit to \$10.7bn during the first 10 months of this year. The country's massive debt - which includes \$23bn owed to the IMF and billions borrowed via the international bond markets - also remains a major obstacle to its ambition of joining the EU. ""In the new member states of the European Union", gross public debt is typically about 40% of gross domestic product," says Reza Moghadam, assistant director of the IMF's European Department. At about 80% of GDP", Turkey's gross debt is double that figure." Turkey's debts have largely arisen from its efforts to push through banking reform after a run on the banks in 2001 caused the country's devastating recession. ""There is no question that although Turkey is doing much better than in the past", it remains quite vulnerable," says Michael Deppler, director of the IMF's European Department. Its debt is far too high for an emerging economy." A key factor for EU decision makers should be whether or not Turkey has met its economic criteria. But economics is not a science. And although the state of Turkey's economy is important", as is its pace of reform, the final decision on 17 December will be taken by politicians who will, of course, be guided by their political instincts.

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"business 278.txt SBC plans post-takeover job cuts US phone company SBC Communications said it expects to cut around 12,800 jobs follow

ing its \$16bn (£8.5bn) takeover of former parent AT&T. SBC said 5,125 positions would go as a result of network efficiencies. Another 1,700 will go from its sales department, 3,400 from business operations and 2,600 across legal, advertising and public relations. SBC currently employs 163,000 people while AT&T employs 47,000. The takeover was announced on Monday. The deal will be financed with \$15bn of shares as well as a \$1bn special dividend paid to AT&T shareholders. It effectively marks the end of AT&T, which was founded in 1875 by telephone pioneer Alexander Graham Bell and is one of the US's best-known companies. SBC and AT&T said estimated cost savings of at least \$2bn from 2008 were a main driver for the merger. AT&T is a long-distance telecoms firm, while SBC is mainly focused on the local market in the western US. Both also have data network businesses. The takeover is subject to approval by AT&T's shareholders and regulators. The companies said they expected to complete the agreement during the first half of 2006.

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"business 279.txt German bidder in talks with LSE Deutsche Boerse bosses have held "constructive", "professional and friendly" talks with the London Stock Exchange (LSE)", its chief has said. Werner Seifert met LSE chief executive Clara Furse amid rumours the German group may raise its bid to £1.5bn (\$2.9bn) from its initial £1.3bn offer. However, rival suitor Euronext also upped the ante in the bid battle. Ahead of talks with the LSE on Friday, the pan-European bourse said it may be prepared to make its offer in cash. The Paris-based exchange, owner of Liffe in London, is reported to be ready to raise £1.4bn to fund a bid. The news came as Deutsche Boerse held its third meeting with the LSE since its bid approach in December which was turned down by the London exchange for undervaluing the business. However, "the LSE did agree to leave the door open for talks to find out whether a "significantly-improved proposal" would be in the interests of LSE's shareholders and customers. In the meantime", Euronext, which combines the Paris, Amsterdam and Lisbon stock exchanges, also began talks with the LSE. In a statement on Thursday, Euronext said any offer was likely to be solely in cash," but added that: ""There can be no assurances at this stage that any offer will be made." A deal with either bidder would create the biggest stock market operator in Europe and the second biggest in the world after the New York Stock Exchange. However", neither side has made a formal offer for the LSE, with sources claiming such a step may still be weeks away. Deutsche Boerse could also face mounting opposition to a bid at home. Among sweeteners reported to have been discussed by Mr Seifert with Ms Furse were plans to move the management of its cash and Eurex derivatives market to London, as well as two members of its executive board. But, Hans Reckers, a board member of Germany's central bank, the Bundesbank, said that cash trading should also remain in Frankfurt," something Deutsche Boerse could move to the UK. ""It is not just the headquarters of the Boerse but also important market segments that must stay permanently in Frankfurt. This has special importance for the business activities of the banks and the consultants", he said. Local government officials in Frankfurt's state of Hessen have also spoken out against the move. It is our wish that the headquarters stay here to maintain Frankfurt's standing as the number one financial centre in continental Europe," Alois Rhiel, its minister for economic affairs added.

"business 280.txt Amex shares up on spin-off news Shares in American Express surged more than 8% on Tuesday after it said it was to spin off its less profitable financial advisory subsidiary. The US credit card to travel services giant said off-loading American Express Financial Advisors (AEFA) would boost its profitability. AEFA has more than 12,000 advisers selling fi

nancial advice, funds and insurance to 2.5 million customers. Over the years it has delivered poor profits and even some losses. This is an excellent move by American Express to focus on its core businesses", and sell off a laggard division, which has been a problem for quite some time," said Marquis Investment Research analyst Phil Kain. Analysts estimate that a stand-alone AEFA could have a market value of \$10bn (£5.3bn). The unit was acquired by American Express 20 years ago as Investors Diversified Service, of Minneapolis, at a time when firms were amassing one-stop financial empires. However, the business of selling investments was never integrated with the rest of the group.

business 281.txt Axa Sun Life cuts bonus payments Life insurer Axa Sun Life has lowered annual bonus payouts for up to 50,000 with-profits investors. Regular annual bonus rates on former Axa Equity & Law with-profits policies are to be cut from 2% to 1% for 2004. Axa blamed a poor stock market performance for the cut, adding that recent gains have not yet offset the market falls seen in 2001 and 2002. The cut will hit an estimated 3% of Axa's policyholders. The rest will know their fate in March. The cuts on Axa's policies will mean a policyholder who had invested £50 a month into an endowment policy for the past 25 years would see a final maturity payout of £46,998. This equated to a annual investment growth rate of 8% Axa said. With-profits policies are designed to smooth out the peaks and troughs of stock market volatility. However, heavy stock market falls throughout 2001 and 2002 forced most firms to trim bonus rates on their policies. The stock market has grown over the past 18 months", however not enough to undo the damage that occurred during 2001 and 2002," Axa spokesman Mark Hamilton, Axa spokesman, told BBC News. Axa cut payouts for the same investors last January.

business 282.txt Chinese dam firm 'defies Beijing' The China Three Gorges Project Corp is refusing to obey a government order to stop construction of one of its giant dams, the Chinese state press has said. The builder of the Three Gorges Dam is continuing work on the sister Xiluodu dam, said the Beijing News. The Xiluodu dam is one of 30 such large-scale construction projects called to a halt because of a lack of proper environmental checks. The Beijing News said the company may instead choose to pay a fine. The firm has also ignored orders to stop construction at two of its other projects - the Three Gorges Underground Power Plant and the Three Gorges Project Electrical Power Supply Plant. So far, only 22 of the 30 construction projects targeted by China's State Environmental Protection Agency (Sepa) for having not carried out mandatory environmental impact assessments have complied with its shutdown order. The China Three Gorges Project Corp could now face a fine up to 200,000 yuan (\$24,000; £12,700). Last week, it denied that its projects violated regulations. The Three Gorges Corporation has all along abided by the law and have built our projects in accordance with the law", it said. The Sepa order comes as the Chinese government appears to be trying to cool the country's booming economy. Previously it has encouraged construction of new electricity generating capacity to solve chronic energy shortages, which forced many factories into part-time working last year. In 2004, China increased its generating capacity by 12.6% to 440,700 megawatts (MW). The Xiluodu Dam is designed to produce 12,600 MW of electricity, and is being built on the Jinshajiang - or river of golden sand"" as the upper reaches of the Yangtze are known. It is a sister project to the main Three Gorges Dam downstream where more than half a million people have had to be relocated", drawing criticism from environmental groups and overseas human rights activists.

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"business 283.txt Stock market eyes Japan recovery Japane

se shares have ended the year at their highest level since 13 July amidst hopes of an economic recovery during 2005. The Nikkei index of leading shares gained 7.6% during the year to close at 11", "488.76 points. In 2005 it ""will rise toward 13", "000""", predicted Morgan Stanley equity strategist Naoki Kamiyama. The optimism in the financial markets contrast sharply with pessimism in the Japanese business community. Earlier this month, the quarterly Tankan survey of Japanese manufacturers found that business confidence had weakened for the first time since March 2003. Slower economic growth, rising oil prices, a stronger yen and weaker exports were blamed for the fall in confidence. Despite this, traders expect strength in the global economy to benefit Japan, which has been close to sliding into recession in recent months. Structural reform within Japan and an anticipated end to the banking sector's bad debt problems should also help, they say.

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"business 284.txt Iraqi voters turn to economic issues Beyond the desperate security situation in Iraq lies an economy in tatters. A vicious cycle of unemployment", " poor social services and poverty has been made worse by a lack of investment. So there is much hope that an elected government will break the deadlock. ""First rule of law", then the economy," says Radwan Hadi, deputy managing director of Aberdeen-based oil and gas consultancy Blackwatch Petroleum Services, which entered Iraq in 2003. Mr Hadi's view about what the new government's priorities should be is shared by many Iraqis. The economy has become the second-most dominant issue for many political parties ahead of Sunday's election, according to Bristol University political scientist Anne Alexander, who is working on a project that looks at governance and security in post-war Iraq. Job creation ranks high both on election manifestos and on the Iraqi people's wish list. Nobody knows exactly how many Iraqis are out of work, but it is clear that the situation is dire. Estimates of Iraq's unemployment rate vary", but we estimate it to be between 30-40%, " the Washington-based independent think-tank The Brookings Institution says in its Iraq Index. But some progress has been made, largely thanks to the country's oil revenues which have exceeded \$22bn since June 2003. Iraq's infrastructure is on the mend, with notable improvements having been made in areas such as electricity supply, irrigation, telephone networks and the re-opening of hospitals. But serious problems remain and the growing divide between haves and have-nots is angering voters. One Iraqi woman told Ms Alexander about her frustration as she watched TV adverts for private hospitals soon after having failed to track down basic medicines from Baghdad's pharmacies. Observes Mr Hadi: The economy at present marks a big divide; the rich get richer", " the poor get poorer." An indication of this can be seen in the world of finance where", in contrast with the daily plight of ordinary people, 19 private banks operate, only one of which is run in accordance with Islamic banking principles. Hopes are high for the future of finance, so foreign banks have been buying into the sector. National Bank of Kuwait has bought a majority stake in Credit Bank of Iraq, the Jordanian investment bank Export & Finance Bank has bought 49% of National Bank of Iraq. Foreign firms also hope to cash in on the reconstruction effort. Bechtel's efforts to rebuild schools and restore power have attracted controversy as well as boosting its bottom line while Halliburton has enjoyed a wealth of military contracts. But the involvement of foreign firms in the health and banking sectors and beyond sits uneasily with many Iraqis who are accustomed to the state taking responsibility for functions that are essential to making society work," observes Ms Alexander. ""It is seen as a selling off of Iraq's assets and bringing in multinationals at the expense of Iraqi businesses and Iraqi workers", " she says. Consequently, the tr

ansitional government has been forced to backtrack in recent months over its proposal to allow 100% foreign ownership of Iraqi assets, she explains. In the West, it is easy to forget that the otherwise brutal Baathist regime used to look after the majority of Iraq's citizens rather well in terms of job creation, social security and healthcare. Opinion polls suggest that people still want the state to take a leading role in providing these things""", Ms Alexander says. Yet in some areas of the economy, investment from abroad is still warmly welcomed, insists Mr Hadi," an Iraqi who left the country three decades ago. ""I think the private sector will evolve incredibly fast", Mr Hadi says. Iraq's vast natural resources can support any magnitude of economic growth." Many foreign companies say they are keen to get in on the act", yet few are actually entering the country in any meaningful way. But there are exceptions. Mr Hadi's Blackwatch is just one of many small operators preparing for a much bigger future. Blackwatch's Baghdad-based affiliate Falcon Group has dozens of people working for it across the country in Kirkuk and Baghdad, and its engineers and geo-scientists work with the Iraqi oil ministry to hammer out technology transfer issues," Mr Hadi points out. ""These guys are trying to work. The Iraqi business people will do business at all times. ""Life goes on in Iraq", the people take responsibility," they want to live normal lives.""

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"business 285.txt EU 'too slow' on economic reforms Most EU countries have failed to put in place policies aimed at making Europe the world's most competitive economy by the end of the decade", a report says. The study, undertaken by the European Commission, sought to assess how far the EU has moved towards meeting its economic targets. In 2000, EU leaders at a summit in Lisbon pledged the European economy would outstrip that of the US by 2010. Their economic targets became known as the Lisbon Agenda. But the Commission report says that, in most EU countries, the pace of economic reform has been too slow, and fulfilling the Lisbon ambitions will be difficult - if not impossible. Only the UK, Finland, Belgium, Denmark, Ireland and the Netherlands have actually followed up policy recommendations. Among the biggest laggards, according to the report, are Greece and Italy. The Lisbon Agenda set out to increase the number of people employed in Europe by encouraging more older people and women to stay in the workforce. It also set out to raise the amount the private sector spends on research and development, while bringing about greater discipline over public spending and debt levels. Combined with high environmental standards and efforts to level the playing field for businesses throughout the EU, the plan was for Europe to become the world's most dynamic economy by 2010. Next week, the Commission will present revised proposals to meet the Lisbon goals. Many people expect the 2010 target to be quietly dropped.

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"business 286.txt China continues breakneck growth China's economy has expanded by a breakneck 9.5% during 2004", faster than predicted and well above 2003's 9.1%. The news may mean more limits on investment and lending as Beijing tries to take the economy off the boil. China has sucked in raw materials and energy to feed its expansion, which could have knock-on effects on the rest of the world if it overheats. But officials pointed out that industrial growth had slowed, with services providing much of the impetus. Growth in industrial output - the main target of government efforts to impose curbs on credit and investments - was 11.5% in 2004, down from 17% the previous year. Still, consumer prices - at 2.4% - rose faster than in 2004, adding to concern that a sharp rise in producer prices of 7.1% could stoke inflation. And overall

investment in fixed assets was still high, up 21.3% from the previous year - although some way off the peak of 43% seen in the first quarter of 2004. The result could be higher interest rates. China raised rates by 0.27 percentage points to 5.8% - its first hike in nine years - in October 2004. Despite the apparent rebalancing of the economy the overall growth picture remains strong," economists said. ""There is no sign of a slowdown in 2005", said Tim Congdon, economist at ING Barings. China's economy is not only gathering speed thanks to domestic demand, but also from soaring sales overseas. Figures released earlier this year showed exports at a six-year high in 2004, up 35%. Part of the impetus comes from the relative cheapness of the yuan, China's currency. The government keeps it pegged close to a rate of 8.28 to the US dollar, - much to the chagrin of many US lawmakers who blame China for lost jobs and competitiveness. Despite urging to ease the peg, officials insist they are a long way from ready to make a shift to a more market-set rate. We need a good and feasible plan and formulating such a plan also needs time", National Bureau of Statistics chief Li Deshui told Reuters. Those who hope to make a fortune by speculating on a renminbi revaluation will not succeed in making a profit."

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"business 287.txt Japan's ageing workforce: built to last  
In his twenties he battled tuberculosis for eight years", then went on to run his own clothing business before marrying in his late thirties. And the 101-year-old Torao Toshitsune has eaten raw fish pretty much every day throughout his life. Mr Toshitsune is one of Japan's 23,000 centenarians - a club that is growing by 13% annually, and where the oldest member is 114. At his neat Osaka detached house, where he lives with one of his sexagenarian daughters, Mr Toshitsune keeps a regular routine of copying out Buddhist sutras and preparing the traditional Japanese tea ceremony. Between tasks," this remarkably active senior citizen reveals what his next goal is: ""Well", what's most important for me is to be Japan's number one." Mr Toshitsune wants to outlive everyone. And when it comes to longevity", Japan, as a country, appears to be doing just that. Women can expect to live until 85, men until 78, four years longer than Americans and Europeans. On the outskirts of Kyoto, 83-year-old Yuji Shimizu contemplates this phenomenon during a round of golf with his younger friends," who are in their seventies. ""I think this is because the food industry and the environment have improved", he remarks. On average," we can live longer." Whether it's the diet", or the traditional family structure where roles were clearly defined, or just something in the genes, Japan's elderly are remarkable. But while life may be a game of golf for Mr Shimizu, his grandchildren have huge problems ahead. Japan is the world's least fertile nation with childbirth rates of just two thirds of that in the US. By 2007, Japan's population is expected to peak at 127 million," then shrink to under 100 million by the middle of the century. This means 30 million fewer workers at a time when the number of elderly will have almost doubled. ""In the year 2050", if the birth rate remains the same people over 60 will make up over 30% of the population," explains Shigeo Morioka of the International Longevity Centre in Tokyo. So how will Japan's finances stay on track? After a decade of economic stagnation and huge deficit spending, the public sector debt is already about 140% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP), the highest rate among industrialised countries. The International Monetary Fund predicts that as the falling birth rate takes grip from 2010, the cost of running Japan's welfare state will double to more than 5% of GDP, while current account balances will deteriorate by over 2%. But unfortunately, Japan appears poorly prepared both financially and politically. Glen Wood, Vice President of Deutsche Securities Japan, asks; Who's going to fund the pension fund for th

e next generation and indeed who are going to be the new Japanese worker? ""Who is going to build the economy,"" who are going to be the leaders? Who are going to be the producers of the GDP going forward?"" One option is further welfare reform. Another is immigration", possibly from the Philippines and Indonesia. But so far, any emerging policy appears restricted to a limited number of nursing staff. Standing next to Tokyo harbour is a version of New York's Statue of Liberty. But, as yet," Japan is not ready for an Ellis Island. ""Japan has never really liked that option in its history and I think it's an option that's becoming more and more plausible and necessary",," insists Mr Wood. In Japan, as in Europe which also faces a workforce decline, immigration is a very sensitive subject. But for the Japanese economy, facing 8% fewer consumers by 2050 means slumping domestic sales of cars, hi-tech kit and home appliances, perhaps even another property crash. Of course the Japanese could always have more children. The government is currently considering financial rewards for procreative couples similar to those in operation in Australia. But there would be no pay back until 2030, when today's babies are taxpayers, and the demographic crisis, like in Europe, starts to unfold in 2010. In contrast to Japan - and of course the European Union - the US population is expected to increase by 46% to 420 million by the middle of the century. Although President Bush must re-devise Social Security to take account of a 130% rise in America's over 65s, the IMF foresees a positive contribution to the US current account balance from the combined forces of fertility and immigration. Some voices in Japanese industry are calling for radical changes to the nature of the Japanese labour market. They want a shift towards financial services, though doubts persist over the country's ability, let alone willingness, to move away from manufacturing. Japan still has problems getting a viable banking system", let alone shifting their auto business or their semi-conductor business or the broad based tech manufacturing business overseas," says Mr Wood. Japan can either drive some radical reforms or else run the risk of a vicious ageing recession. Falling demand and a lower tax take could result in soaring budget pressures and a basket case currency. Come 2020, Japan could be more dependent on a shrinking workforce than any other industrialised power. There are fears that the world's number two economy is doomed to a permanent recession. But none of this is Mr Toshitsune's concern anymore. At 101, he chuckles that, he feels fine.

business 288.txt GE sees 'excellent' world economy US behemoth General Electric has posted an 18% jump in quarterly sales, and in profits, and declared itself in great shape"". ""We are benefiting from our growth initiatives and an excellent global economy",," said GE's chief executive Jeff Immelt. GE is the US' biggest firm based on stock market valuation. GE's net profits were \$5.37bn (£2.86bn) for the final three months of 2004, while sales came in at \$43.7bn. The group, whose businesses range from jet engines to the NBC television channel, forecast sustained growth at between 10-15% for this year and next. GE's shares rose 1% on the news before ending Friday 0.24% lower. The industries GE is in are doing very well. The materials", financial and industrial sectors are all picking up," said Steve Roukis, an analyst at fund manager Matrix Asset Advisors, which has shares in GE. GE said orders in the fourth quarter were 15% higher than in the same period of 2003, with growth across the board"". ""In the fourth quarter", nine of our 11 businesses delivered at least double-digit earnings growth," said Mr Immelt. Full year 2004 gains were less spectacular, but still respectable. Net profit was up 6% at \$16.6bn. Last year, GE bought Vivendi Universal, merging it with NBC to form NBC Universal. The success of Universal Studio's film 'Ray', a portrait of jazz musician Ray Charles, has helped boost earnings at the unit.

business 289.txt UK economy facing 'major risks' The UK m

anufacturing sector will continue to face serious challenges"" over the next two years", the British Chamber of Commerce (BCC) has said. The group's quarterly survey of companies found exports had picked up in the last three months of 2004 to their best levels in eight years. The rise came despite exchange rates being cited as a major concern. However," the BCC found the whole UK economy still faced ""major risks"" and warned that growth is set to slow. It recently forecast economic growth will slow from more than 3% in 2004 to a little below 2.5% in both 2005 and 2006. Manufacturers' domestic sales growth fell back slightly in the quarter", the survey of 5,196 firms found. Employment in manufacturing also fell and job expectations were at their lowest level for a year.

"Despite some positive news for the export sector", there are worrying signs for manufacturing," the BCC said. These results reinforce our concern over the sector's persistent inability to sustain recovery." The outlook for the service sector was ""uncertain"" despite an increase in exports and orders over the quarter", the BCC noted. The BCC found confidence increased in the quarter across both the manufacturing and service sectors although overall it failed to reach the levels at the start of 2004. The reduced threat of interest rate increases had contributed to improved confidence," it said. The Bank of England raised interest rates five times between November 2003 and August last year. But rates have been kept on hold since then amid signs of falling consumer confidence and a slowdown in output. ""The pressure on costs and margins", the relentless increase in regulations, and the threat of higher taxes remain serious problems, BCC director general David Frost said. While consumer spending is set to decelerate significantly over the next 12-18 months," it is unlikely that investment and exports will rise sufficiently strongly to pick up the slack.""

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business 290.txt Bank holds interest rate at 4.75% The Bank of England has left interest rates on hold again at 4.75%", in a widely-predicted move. Rates went up five times from November 2003 - as the bank sought to cool the housing market and consumer debt - but have remained unchanged since August. Recent data has indicated a slowdown in manufacturing and consumer spending, as well as in mortgage approvals. And retail sales disappointed over Christmas, with analysts putting the drop down to less consumer confidence. Rising interest rates and the accompanying slowdown in the housing market have knocked consumers' optimism, causing a sharp fall in demand for expensive goods," according to a report earlier this week from the British Retail Consortium. The BRC said Britain's retailers had endured their worst Christmas in a decade.

"Today's no change decision is correct", said David Frost, Director General of the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC). But", if there are clear signs that the economy slows," the MPC should be ready to take quick corrective action and cut rates. ""Dismal reports from the retail trade about Christmas sales are worrying"," if they indicate a more general weakening in consumer spending." Mr Frost added: ""The housing market outlook remains highly uncertain. ""It is widely accepted that", if house prices start falling more sharply," the risks facing the economy will worsen considerably." CBI chief economist Ian McCafferty said the economy had ""slowed in recent months in response to rate rises"" but that it was difficult to gauge from the Christmas period the likely pace of activity through the summer. ""The Bank is having to juggle the emergence of inflationary pressures", driven by a tight labour market and buoyant commodity prices, against the risk of an over-abrupt slowdown in consumer activity," he said. Interest rates are likely to remain on hold for some time." On Thursday there was more gloomy news on the manufacturing front", as the Office for National (ONS) statistics revealed British manufacturing output unexpectedly fell in Novem

ber - for the fifth month in the past six. The ONS said manufacturing output dropped 0.1% in November, matching a similar unrevised fall in October and confounding economists' expectations of a 0.3% rise. Manufacturers' organisation, the EEF," said it expected the hold in interest rates to continue in the near future. It also said there was evidence that manufacturers' confidence may be waning as the outlook for the world economy becomes more uncertain. ""So far the evidence suggests that last year's rate increases have helped to rebalance the economy without damaging the recovery in manufacturing",," said EEF chief economist, Steve Radley. However", should the business outlook start to deteriorate," the Bank should stand ready to cut rates." Some economists have predicted rates will drop later in the year", although others feel the Bank may still think there is a need for a rise to 5% before that happens. The Bank remains concerned about the long-term risks posed by personal debt - which is rising at 15% a year - if economic conditions worsen.

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"business 291.txt Tobacco giants hail court ruling US tobacco companies have welcomed an appeal court's decision to reject the government's \$280bn (£155bn) claim for alleged deceit about smoking dangers. Tobacco stocks rose sharply on Wall Street after the 2-1 decision. The court in Washington found the case - filed by the Clinton administration in 1999 - could not be brought under federal anti-racketeering laws. Anti-smoking groups urge the government to fight on", but the Justice Department has not said if it will appeal. Among the accused were Altria Group, RJ Reynolds Tobacco, Lorillard Tobacco, Liggitt Group and Brown and Williamson. They were delighted by the decision, which sent Reynolds shares up 4.5% and Altria shares up 5.11%. Charles A Blixt, executive vice-president of RJ Reynolds Tobacco," said the ruling ""dramatically transforms"" the government's lawsuit. Altria Group said", in a statement," the government now ""must not only prove that the companies have engaged in fraudulent behaviour in the past",," but that they are likely to do so in the future." The government had claimed tobacco firms - manipulated nicotine levels to increase addiction - targeted teenagers with multi-billion dollar advertising campaigns - lied about the dangers of smoking and ignored research to the contrary. Prosecutors wanted the cigarette firms to ""disgorge"" \$280bn in profits accumulated over the past 50 years and impose tougher rules on marketing their products. They brought the case under racketeering laws", which were passed to deny mafia gangs the profits of their crimes. But the tobacco companies denied that they illegally conspired to promote smoking and defraud the public. They also said they had already met many of the government's demands in a landmark \$206bn settlement reached with 46 states in 1998. The three-judge panel in the District of Columbia's Court of Appeals ruled on Friday that the US government could not sue the firms under the anti-racketeering laws. Judge David Sentelle, in his ruling," said such laws were aimed at putting an end to illegal conduct going forward. ""We hold that the language of (the law) and the comprehensive remedial scheme of (the law) preclude disgorgement as a possible remedy in this case", he wrote. The Justice Department refused to say if it would appeal. All we're saying today is that we have received the ruling and are reviewing it, a spokeswoman said on Friday. But William Corr of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids urged the government to continue pressing its case. Today's ruling should not be an excuse for this administration to seek a weak settlement that lets the tobacco industry off the hook," he said.

"business 292.txt Steady job growth continues in US The US created fewer jobs than expected in December, but analysts said that the dip in hiring was not enough to derail the world's biggest economy. According to Labo

r Department figures, 157,000 new jobs were added last month. That took 2004's total to 2.2 million, the best showing in five years. Job creation was one of last year's main concerns for the US economy. While worries still remain, the conditions are set for steady growth in 2005, analysts said. The unemployment rate stayed at 5.4% in December, and about 200,000 jobs will need to be created each month if that figure is to drop. It was a respectable report", said Michael Moran, analyst at Daiwa Securities. Payroll growth in December was a little lighter than the consensus forecast", but we had upward revisions to the prior two months and an increase in manufacturing employment." "Manufacturing is a cyclical area of the economy and if it's showing job growth", it's a good indication that the economy is on a solid growth track." "That means that the Federal Reserve is likely to continue its policy of raising interest rates. The Fed lifted borrowing costs five times last year to 2.25%", citing evidence the US economic recovery was becoming more robust. Job creation was one of last year's main concerns for the US economy, and proved to be a main topic of debate in the US presidential election. While demand for workers is far from booming," the conditions are set for steady growth. "Overall", compared to the previous year it looks great," it just keeps going stronger and stronger and I expect that to be the case" in 2005", said Kurt Karl, economist at Swiss Re in New York. Meanwhile, economists cautioned against reading too much into data from the Federal Reserve showing an unexpected \$8.7bn drop in consumer debt in November. A fall in consumer spending, which makes up about two-thirds of all US economic activity, could help limit the extent of any future interest rate rises. But economists said there could be a number of reasons for a fall in the borrowing, which include credit cards and personal loans, while noting that such figures can vary on a month-to-month basis.

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"business 293.txt Glazer makes new Man Utd approach Malcom Glazer has made a fresh approach to buy Manchester United", which could lead to a bid valuing the Premiership club at £800m. The US tycoon, who has been wooing the club for the last 12 months," has approached the United board with ""detailed proposals""", it has confirmed. Mr Glazer, who owns the Tampa Bay Buccaneers team, hopes this will lead to a formal bid being accepted. His new offer is expected to contain substantially less debt. Mr Glazer has already had one takeover attempt turned down by the Red Devils and responded by using his 28.1% shareholding to vote off three board members last November. Man United had turned down the bid because it was based on a high level of borrowing. But newspapers have speculated recently that the tycoon had gained the support of leading banks to come up with a stronger and less debt-laden bid. Last week, however, Mr Glazer issued a statement to the Stock Exchange distancing himself from a new bid. Meanwhile," United's chief executive David Gill said in December that talks would not resume unless Glazer came up with ""definitive proposals""". Now the board has confirmed that the US bidder is back", with a statement issued on Sunday reading: ""The board can confirm it has now received a detailed proposal subject to various preconditions which may form the basis of an offer. ""A further announcement will be made in due course." To succeed Malcolm Glazer will still need the approval of major shareholders John Magnier and JP McManus", who own 28.9% of the club. But the Irish duo have cut off talks with Glazer over the proposed sale of their stake and have so far made no comment on his latest approach. United fans have reacted with anger at the announcement. They have vehemently opposed any proposed takeover by Glazer since he first showed interest in the club in September 2003 and after Sunday's announcement they vowed to fight on. ""We will fight tooth and nail to stop him whatever his offer says. We d

o not want him or anybody else taking over United", " said Mark Longden of the Independent Manchester United Supporters' Association. The campaign against this proposed takeover will continue as it has done since Glazer first showed interest in the club." "

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"business 294.txt Wall Street cheers Bush victory The US stock market has closed higher in response to George W Bush's victory in the presidential elections. The benchmark Dow Jones share index closed more than 1% higher at 10",137, while the Nasdaq rose 0.9% to 2,004. Many investors believe that Mr Bush's policies are more business-friendly than those of his Democrat challenger, John Kerry. The higher share prices also reflect relief that a clear winner has emerged from what proved to be a tight poll. Investors had worried that the outcome of the poll would be inconclusive, paving the way for a repeat of the legal wrangling that marred the 2000 election. The Dow lost 5% of its value in the three weeks immediately after that election, when it was unclear who would occupy the White House. Mr Kerry conceded defeat on Wednesday," abandoning last-ditch hopes of carrying the vote in the swing state of Ohio. ""The relief for the markets may be that we have a decision and can move forward", " said Tim Ghriskey, chief investment officer of Solaris Asset Management. Some analysts predicted that the jump in share prices would be short-lived, saying investors would quickly focus once again on the health of the US economy. I would look at the stock market rally for Bush as kind of a one-day event", " said Ken Mayland at Clearview Economics. The US' recent economic performance has been mixed, with solid growth offset by disappointingly low job creation figures, and mounting worries over a record budget deficit. Elsewhere in the financial markets on Wednesday, the dollar dipped slightly against the euro and climbed against the yen, while US oil prices closed up \$1.26 at \$50.88 a barrel in New York. The rise in oil prices partly reflects the view that President Bush is less likely than Mr Kerry to release supplies from the US' strategic oil reserve. Share prices in London, Frankfurt and Paris also closed higher. Successive polls in the run-up to Tuesday's election had shown the two candidates running neck and neck. Economic issues, as well as the war in Iraq, were the forefront of the campaign. In key swing states such as Ohio, which has suffered substantial job losses in the past four years, President Bush's handling of the economy became a crucial election issue. Senator Kerry attacked President Bush's economic record during his campaign, hammering home the fact that a net 800,000 jobs were lost during his term in office. President Bush focused on the fact that two million jobs have been created in the past year, claiming that it has vindicated his tax-cutting agenda. As for future policies, both candidates pledged to bring America's \$422bn federal budget deficit under control. Senator Kerry planned to increase taxes on those earning more than \$200,000 a year. President Bush has placed reform of the pensions system at the heart of his economic agenda for a second term. However, economists have said both candidates' economic programmes rested on questionable assumptions about future growth.

business 295.txt Business confidence dips in Japan Business confidence among Japanese manufacturers has weakened for the first time since March 2003, the quarterly Tankan survey has found. Slower economic growth, rising oil prices, a stronger yen and weaker exports were blamed for the fall. December's confidence level was below that seen in September, the Bank of Japan said. However, September's reading was the strongest for 13 years. The economy is at a pause but unlikely to fall""", " the economy minister said. ""It will feel a bit slower (next year) than this year", and growth may be a bit more gentle but the situation is that the recovery will continue," said economy minister

Heizo Takenaka. In the Bank of Japan's December survey, the balance of big manufacturers saying business conditions are better, minus those saying they are worse, was 22, down from 26 in September. Japan's economy grew by just 0.1% in the three months to September, according revised data issued this month. With the recovery slowing, the world's second biggest economy is now expected grow by 0.2% in 2004. The Tankan index is based on a survey of 10,227 firms. Big manufacturers were even more pessimistic about the first quarter of 2005; their views suggest the March reading could go as low as 15 - still in positive territory, but weaker. The dollar's decline has strengthened the yen, making Japanese exports more expensive in the US. China's attempts to cool down its fast-growing economy have also hit Japanese industry's sales abroad. Confidence among non-manufacturers was unchanged in the final quarter of 2004, but it is forecast to drop one point in the March survey. Nonetheless, Japanese firms have been stepping up capital investment, and the survey found the pace is quickening. Companies reported they expect to invest 7.7% more in the year to March 2005 than the previous year - up from expectations of 6.1% increase in the September Tankan.

business 296.txt Millions 'to lose textile jobs' Millions of the world's poorest textile trade workers will lose their jobs under new trade rules to be introduced in the new year, a charity has warned. The World Trade Organisation (WTO) is to end its Multi-Fibre Agreement (MFA) on midnight of 31 December. Christian Aid condemned the move, saying it would see almost a million jobs in Bangladesh alone being axed. However, supporters of the change claim it will mean increased efficiency and lower costs for Western consumers. It will also see more jobs created in India and China, advocates argue. The WTO said that many developing countries support the end of quotas and stressed that funding was available to countries such as Bangladesh to help them make the transition to a fully liberalised market. There will be a period of adjustment required", said WTO spokesman Keith Rockwell. Some countries will do better than others but there is no one who is suggesting that no developing country will do well out of this. "Some countries where it may appear that orders will dry up have seen orders surging and there are many companies who will continue with existing trading relationships." Christian Aid has called on British firms not to simply "cut and run" but look after their workers", in a new report called Rags To Riches To Rags. It added that with few employment alternatives available many sacked garment workers could end up in far worse jobs - with some of the mainly female workers forced into the sex trade. The WTO itself has warned that as many as 27 million jobs could be lost as a result of liberalisation in the textile industry. Some of the world's fastest developing countries which rely on textile exports to build growth - for example in Bangladesh textiles account for almost 85% of the country's exports and the industry employs around 1.5 million people. The MFA pact has helped developing countries get a bigger share of the world market. "The losers in this new trade landscape will be some of the most vulnerable workers in countries such as Bangladesh", Cambodia, Sri Lanka and Nepal," Andrew Pendleton, Christian Aid's head of Trade Policy, said. They will be hard-pressed to cope when garment industries there lose their protection. "We are deeply concerned that the New Year will spell misery for huge numbers of garment workers." The WTO said there was no consensus among its members to retain the quotas and emphasised that funding was available to countries such as Bangladesh to help them adjust to the liberalised market. It added that the impact of the changes for workers most affected by the shake-up had not been considered", adding such seismic changes to policy should "put the interests of poor people first - rather than simply aiming to liberalise markets at any cost". While the current MFA was not perfect", its did allow Third World countries like Bangladesh to get onto the first rung of industrial development," Chri

stian Aid said. ""International trade must not be governed by a 'race to the bottom' that pitches one set of poor people against another", Mr Pendleton added.

business 297.txt Dutch bank to lay off 2,850 staff ABN Amro, the Netherlands' largest bank, is to cut 2,850 jobs as a result of falling profits. The cuts - amounting to 3% of the bank's workforce - will result in a one-off charge of 790m euros (\$1.1bn). About 1,100 jobs will go in investment banking while 1,200 and 550 will go in IT and human resources respectively. ABN Amro is the third large European bank to announce cutbacks in the past month following Deutsche Bank and Credit Suisse Group. Its profitability has been hit by a fall in mortgage lending in the United States - the bank's largest single market - following recent interest rate rises. ABN Amro's operations in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom will be hardest hit. Jobs will also be lost in the US - which accounted for 46% of profit in the first half of 2004 - and across its operations in the Americas and Asia-Pacific regions. The restructuring is designed to improve efficiency by reducing administrative costs and increasing focus on client service. The bank said it was on course for a 10% rise in net income this year but operating profits are set to fall because of a fall in US revenues. ABN Amro currently has more than 100,000 staff. To get any profit growth in the coming years", they will have to lower costs, so shedding jobs makes total sense," Ivo Geijzen, an analyst with Bank Oyens & Van Eeghen, told Bloomberg. Europe's leading banks seem set for a period of retrenchment. Deutsche Bank said earlier this month it would reduce its German workforce by 1,920 while as many as 300 jobs will be lost at Credit Suisse First Boston.

business 298.txt Fannie Mae 'should restate books' US mortgage company Fannie Mae should restate its earnings, a move that is likely to put a billion-dollar dent in its accounts, watchdogs have said. The Securities & Exchange Commission accused Fannie Mae of using techniques that did not comply in material respects"" with accounting standards. Fannie Mae last month warned that some records were incorrect. The other main US mortgage firm Freddie Mac restated earnings by \$5bn (£2.6bn) last year after a probe of its books. The SEC's comments are likely to increase pressure on Congress to strengthen supervision of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. The two firms are key parts of the US financial system and effectively underwrite the mortgage market", financing nearly half of all American house purchases and dealing actively in bonds and other financial instruments. The investigation of Freddie Mac in June 2003 sparked concerns about the wider health of the industry and raised questionmarks over the role of the Office of Federal Housing Enterprise Oversight (OFHEO), the industry's main regulator. Having been pricked into action," the OFHEO turned its attention to Fannie May and in September this year said that the firm had tweaked its books to spread earnings more smoothly across quarters and play down the amount of risk it had taken on. The SEC found similar problems. The watchdog's chief accountant Donald Nicolaisen said that ""Fannie Mae's methodology of assessing", " measuring and documenting hedge ineffectiveness was inadequate and was not supported"" by generally accepted accounting principles.

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"business 299.txt US to rule on Yukos refuge call Yukos has said a US bankruptcy court will decide whether to block Russia's impending auction of its main production arm on Thursday. The Russian oil firm has filed for bankruptcy protection in the US in an attempt to halt the forced sale. However", Judge Letitia Clark said the hearing would continue on Thursday when arguments in the case would be heard. Russian authorities are due to auction off Yuganskneftegas on 19 December to pay a huge tax bill sent to Yukos. Russian pro

secutors are forcing the sale of the firm's most lucrative asset Yuganskneftegas to help pay a \$27bn (£14bn) back tax bill," which they claim is owed by Yukos. Filing for bankruptcy protection in the US was ""a last resort to preserve the rights of our shareholders", employees and customers," said Yukos chief executive Steven Theede. The company added it had opted to take action through American courts as US bankruptcy law gives worldwide jurisdiction over a debtor company's property and because it was seeking a judiciary willing to protect the value of shareholders' investments. However, as the firm is based in Russia and has no significant US assets, lawyers are unsure of the outcome of the case. We are here to stop 60% of our body from being cut off on Sunday"," Zack Clement, a lawyer for Yukos, told Judge Clark in an emergency hearing in Houston, Texas, on Wednesday. As well as the bid to get Chapter 11 bankruptcy - which protects firms from creditors, allowing them to continue trading as they restructure their finances - the group also made a claim for damages against the Russian government. Yukos asked the Houston court to order Russia to arbitration so that it can press claims for billions of dollars in damages over a campaign of illegal, "discriminatory and disproportionate" tax claims. Mr Clement said that under Russian law, "the Russian government was obliged to enter into arbitration as set out in international law. He added that the opening bid for the firm's Yuganskneftegas unit was \$8bn - less than half of the \$20bn that Yukos advisers say it is worth. "We believe the only significant bidder at the auction on Sunday is Gazprom", he said, referring to Russia's natural gas giant. Yukos maintains that the forced auction is illegal and will cause the company to suffer immediate and irreparable harm." Many commentators believe the Russian government's aggressive pursuit of Yukos is a politically-motivated response to the political ambitions of its former chief executive", Mikhail Khodorkovsky. Mr Khodorkovsky, who had funded liberal opposition groups, was arrested in October last year on fraud and tax evasion charges and is still in jail. Analysts believe that if its production unit is auctioned off, it is likely to be bought up by a government-backed firm, like Gazprom, effectively bringing a large chunk of Russia's lucrative oil and gas industry back under state control.

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"business 300.txt J&J agrees \$25bn Guidant deal Pharmaceutical giant Johnson & Johnson has agreed to buy medical technology firm Guidant for \$25.4bn (£13bn). Guidant is a key producer of equipment that combats heart problems such as implant defibrillators and pacemakers. Analysts said that the deal is aimed at offsetting Johnson & Johnson's reliance on a slowing drug business. They also pointed out that more mergers are likely because the drug and healthcare industries are fragmented and are under pressure to cut costs. A number of Johnson & Johnson's products are facing patent expirations", while the company is also battling fierce competition from generic products. Meanwhile, demand for defibrillators, which give the heart a small electric shock when an irregular heartbeat or rhythm is detected, is expected to increase, analysts said. The move by Johnson & Johnson has been widely expected and the firm will pay \$76 for each Guidant share, 6% more than Wednesday's closing price. Analysts say that US antitrust regulators could force the firms to shed some overlapping stent operations. Stents are tubes that are used to keep an artery open after it has been unblocked.

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"business 301.txt Libya takes \$1bn in unfrozen funds Libya has withdrawn \$1bn in assets from the US", assets which had previously been frozen for almost 20 years, the Libyan central bank has said. The move came aft

er the US lifted a trade ban to reward Tripoli for giving up weapons of mass destruction and vowing to compensate Lockerbie victims. The original size of Libya's funds was \$400m, the central bank told Reuters. However, the withdrawal did not mean that Libya had cut its ties with the US," he added. ""We are in the process of opening accounts in banks in the United States"," the central bank's vice president Farhat Omar Ben Gadaravice said. The previously frozen assets had been invested in various countries and are believed to have included equity holdings in banks. The US ban on trade and economic activity with Tripoli - imposed by then president Ronald Regan in 1986 after a series of what the US deemed terrorist acts, including the 1988 Lockerbie air crash - was suspended in April. Bankers from the two country's had been working on how to unfreeze Libya's assets.

business 302.txt Cactus diet deal for Phytopharm A slimming aid made from a southern African cactus is set to be developed by UK firm Phytopharm and Unilever. Anglo-Dutch food giant Unilever will help the pharmaceutical firm develop the snacks containing Hoodia extract. Phytopharm shares jumped 10.7% on the news, with analysts saying sales of \$600m (£300m) a year were possible. The plant, licensed to Phytopharm in 1997, has been used for thousands of years by the San bushmen of the Kalahari desert to stave off hunger. Studies have reportedly shown the plant curbs appetite instead of reducing calorific intake like many existing products. Phytopharm will receive an initial fee of £6.5m from Unilever - out of a potential total of £21m - as well as future royalties on product sales. Under the deal, production of the Hoodia cactus at Phytopharm's nursery in South Africa will also rise from eight million plants to potentially hundreds of millions, said Phytopharm chief executive Richard Dixey. The firm had initially hoped to market a slimming drug from Hoodia with Pfizer. But the research collaboration came to an end in 2003. Analysts said Unilever could launch the new products in 2007. This deal goes a long way to restoring the market faith in Phytopharm's pipeline after the Pfizer exit"," said analyst Erling Refsum at Nomura.

business 303.txt Brazil plays down Varig rescue The Brazilian government has played down claims that it could step in to save the country's biggest airline. Brazil's airport authority chief Carlos Wilson had claimed the government was on the brink of stepping in to save Varig, Brazil's flagship airline. However, the country's vice president Jose Alencar has said the government still is looking for a solution. Varig is struggling under a huge debt burden of an estimated debt of 6.5 billion reais (\$2.3bn or £1.2bn). Asked whether a rescue was on the cards following a meeting of the country's Congress to discuss the airline's crisis, Mr Alencar replied: No"," I don't think so. We will see." "Earlier"," Mr Wilson had said that president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has decided to step in and a decree of some kind of intervention could be signed this week. "In practice", it will be an intervention," although this is not the technical name used""", he said. An intervention means that the government would take administrative control of the company and its finances. For that to happen Varig's main shareholder, the non-profit Ruben Berta Foundation which represents the airline's employees, would have to be removed, Mr Wilson said. However, no jobs would be lost and the airline would keep on flying, he added. Varig, which operates in 18 countries apart from Brazil, has been driven to the brink of collapse because of the country's economic downturn. The depreciation of Brazil's currency has had a direct impact on the airline's dollar debt as well as some of its costs. Business has improved recently with demand for air travel increasing and a recovery in the Brazilian economy. The airline could also win a sizeable windfall from a compensation claim against the government. On Tuesday the courts awarded Varig 2bn reais (\$725m), after ruling in favour of its

compensation claim against the government for freezing tariffs from 1985 to 1992. But the government can appeal the decision.

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"business 304.txt Bombardier chief to leave company Share s in train and plane-making giant Bombardier have fallen to a 10-year low following the departure of its chief executive and two members of the board. Paul Tellier", who was also Bombardier's president, left the company amid an ongoing restructuring. Laurent Beaudoin, part of the family that controls the Montreal-based firm, will take on the role of CEO under a newly created management structure. Analysts said the resignations seem to have stemmed from a boardroom dispute. Under Mr Tellier's tenure at the company, which began in January 2003, plans to cut the worldwide workforce of 75,000 by almost a third by 2006 were announced. The firm's snowmobile division and defence services unit were also sold and Bombardier started the development of a new aircraft seating 110 to 135 passengers. Mr Tellier had indicated he wanted to stay at the world's top train maker and third largest manufacturer of civil aircraft until the restructuring was complete. But Bombardier has been faced with a declining share price and profits. Earlier this month the firm said it earned \$10m (£19.2m) in the third quarter," down from a profit of \$133m a year ago. ""I understand the board's concern that I would not be there for the long-term and the need to develop and execute strategies", and the need to reshape the management structure at this time," Mr Tellier said in a statement on Monday. Bombardier said restructuring plans drawn up by Mr Tellier's would continue to be implemented. Shares in Bombardier lost 65 Canadian cents or 25% on the news to 1.90 Canadian dollars before rallying to 2.20 Canadian dollars.

business 305.txt Brazil approves bankruptcy reform A major reform of Brazil's bankruptcy laws has been approved by the country's Congress, in a move which it is hoped will cut the cost of borrowing. The bill, proposed in 1993, has finally been approved by the leadership of President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. The old law, dating from 1945, gave priority first to workers, second to tax revenue and finally to creditors. The new legislation changes this, giving priority to creditors and limiting payments to workers. The new regulations will limit payments to workers to 150 times the minimum monthly salary, which is currently \$94. The law also makes it more difficult for a company to declare bankruptcy. However, when a firm is declared bankrupt it will gain protection from creditors for 180 days while a recovery plan is worked out. The proposals were opposed in the past by leftist parties, including Mr Lula's Worker Party. They considered that they undermined workers' rights. But President Lula became a defender of the reforms, arguing that the country's bank lending margins were among the highest in the world and were damaging the economy. According to Andreas Adriano of Latin Trade Magazine, the new bankruptcy law will help in reducing the spread - difference between the interest rates of the banks and federal bonds. Nevertheless, Mr Adriano said to reduce the basic interest rate the Central Bank needs to change its policy, focusing not only on inflation but also on economic growth.

business 306.txt Retail sales show festive fervour UK retail sales were better than expected in November as Christmas shoppers began their seasonal flock to the High Street, figures show. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) said retail sales rose 0.6% on the month and 6.1% on the year. But the figures, along with this week's inflation report, could trigger another interest rate rise in the New Year. However, recent data from the British Retail Consortium showed a 0.2% slip in High Street sales during November. The ONS data confounded analyst expectations. Many had expected sales to fall slightly

in November as shoppers put off buying Christmas presents until December. However, retailers' attempts to draw in the crowds may be behind November's unexpected rise in sales, they say. Aggressive tactics, such as one-day discount sales adopted by stores such as Marks & Spencer, appear to have paid off. Price discounting has certainly accounted for much of this because the value of retail sales hasn't grown as much as volumes", " said Investec economist David Page. The figures sparked a rally for sterling as the data supported the view that it is too early to assume that base rates have peaked.

business 307.txt Cairn shares slump on oil setback Shares in Cairn Energy, a UK oil firm, have closed down 18% after a disappointing drilling update and a warning over possible tax demands. The company said tests had shown no significant finds in one of its Indian oil fields, but was upbeat about the potential of other areas. It also said the Indian government had told it to pay a production tax, for which Cairn argues it is not liable. Cairn's shares have jumped by almost 400% this year. Investors had piled into Cairn after the company announced significant oil finds in India this year. Chief executive Bill Gammell said on Friday he was disappointed"" with exploration in the so-called N-C extension area in Rajasthan. Investors had held high hopes of major oil finds in this area. But Cairn said estimates had been revised in what was a ""significant downgrade of the initial expectation"". Cairn also said that the government believed the company was liable to pay taxes under its production-sharing contract. The company said the rate would be about 900 rupees (\$20.40; £1 0.50) per tonne", or seven barrels," of oil. A spokesman for the firm said that the tax would wipe 5% of the field's current value. ""Cairn refutes the government's position", Mr Gammell said. He insisted that the contract made it clear that the tax should be shouldered by the licensee - India's state-run Oil & Natural Gas Corp (ONGC) - and not the contractor. We have a pretty strong legal case here," he added, saying it would only become an issue once the firm started production. Investors took a dim view of the statements though. The shares closed down 247p, or 18%, at 1115 pence. I think people were slightly over-ambitious for how quickly Cairn would be able to develop and potentially offload these reserves", said analyst Jason Kenney at ING. The disappointments overshadowed increased production targets for Cairn's existing oilfields. The company raised targets for its Mangala and Aishwariya fields in India from 60,000 barrels a day to between 80,000 and 100,000 barrels a day. Its Mangala field, thought to contain a billion barrels, is its biggest find to date. These two fields will provide the core of the future developments in Rajasthan", Mr Gammell said. Cairn added that it would be appraising another field early next year. Mr Gammell set up the company in the 1980s and has successfully switched its focus to South Asia from interests in the US and Europe. Cairn, which also operates in Nepal and Bangladesh, was catapulted into the FTSE 100 index of leading UK shares earlier this year after the sharp rise in its share price.

business 308.txt French boss to leave EADS The French co-head of European defence and aerospace group EADS Philippe Camus is to leave his post. Mr Camus said in a statement that he has accepted the invitation to return full-time to the Lagardere group, which owns 30% of EADS. I will give up my role as soon as the board of directors asks me to do so", he said. Airbus head Noel Forgeard is now set to replace Mr Camus, bringing the company's power struggle to an end. Fighting between Mr Camus and Mr Forgeard has hit the headlines in France and analysts feared that this fighting could destabilise the defence and aerospace group. French finance minister Herve Gaymard is on record as saying that he deplored"" the infighting at the company. The company should now be able put this dispute behind it", with the departure of Mr Camus and with the clear support given to Mr Forgeard by the Lagardere group, the main French sh

areholder of EADS. The other main shareholders of EADS are the French government (15%) , who also support Mr Forgeard, and Germany's DaimlerChrysler (30%). Rainer Hertrich, the German co-head of EADS will also step down when his contract expires next year. Mr Camus recently came under pressure as it became clear that the A380 superjumbo was running over budget. EADS - Airbus' majority owner - admitted earlier this week that the project was running 1.45bn euros (£1bn; \$1.9bn) over budget. But Mr Forgeard has denied this," telling French media that there is no current overrun in the budget. ""But for the sake of transparency", we told our shareholders last week that if we look at the forecast for total costs of the project up to 2010, there is a risk that we will go over by around 10%, which is about 1bn euros (£686m; \$1.32bn)," he told France's LCI Television. Due to enter service in 2006, the A380 will replace the Boeing 747 jumbo as the world's biggest passenger aircraft.

business 309.txt AstraZeneca hit by drug failure Shares in Anglo-Swedish drug have closed down 8% in UK trade after the failure of its Iressa drug in a major clinical trial. The lung cancer drug did not significantly prolong survival in patients with the disease. This setback for the group follows the rejection by the US in October of its anti-coagulant pill Exanta. Meanwhile, another of its major money spinners - cholesterol drug Crestor - is facing mounting safety concerns. This would be two of the three blockbuster drugs that were meant to power the company forward failing... and we've got risks on Crestor", said Nick Turner, analyst at brokers Jefferies. AstraZeneca had hoped to pitch its Iressa drug against rival medicine Tarceva. But Iressa proved no better than a placebo in extending lives in the trial involving 1,692 patients. Tarceva - made by OSI Pharmaceuticals, Genentech and Roche - has already proved to be successful in helping prolong the life of lung cancer patients. AstraZeneca has now appointed a new executive director to the board. John Patterson will be in charge of drug development. The company said Mr Patterson would make substantial changes to the clinical organisation and its processes"". ""I am determined to improve our development and regulatory performance", restore confidence in the company and value to shareholders," said chief executive Tom McKillop.

business 310.txt Strong quarterly growth for Nike Nike has reported its best second-quarter earnings, helped by strong demand for its athletic shoes and Converse sneakers. The global sports giant said it posted a profit of \$261.9m (£135.6m), for the three months to 30 November, up from \$179.1m in the same period last year. Revenues increased 11% to \$3.1bn, from \$2.8bn for the same period in 2003. Nike, whose products are endorsed by Tiger Woods among other sports stars, said demand continues to grow"". The results came after a strong first quarter of the year for the firm based in Beaverton", Oregon. Philip Knight, chairman and chief executive," said: ""Nike's second-quarter revenues and earnings per share reached all-time high levels as a result of solid performance across our global portfolio. ""Our businesses in the United States and emerging markets such as China", Russia and Turkey, combined with favourable European exchange rates," helped drive much of this growth." He added: ""With the first half of our fiscal year in the books", we remain confident that our business strategy and consistent execution will allow us to deliver on our goals of healthy," profitable growth." The firm reported worldwide futures orders for athletic footwear and gear", scheduled for delivery from December 2004 to April 2005, of \$4.9bn. That is 9.1% higher than such orders reported for the same period last year.

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"business 311.txt Stormy year for property insurers A str

ing of storms", typhoons and earthquakes has made 2004 the most expensive year on record for property insurers," according to Swiss Re. The world's second biggest insurer said disasters around the globe have seen property claims reach \$42bn (£21.5bn). "2004 reinforces the trend towards higher losses", said Swiss Re. Tightly packed populations in the areas involved in natural and man-made disasters were to partly to blame for the rise in claims, it said. Some 95% of insurance claims were for natural catastrophes, with the rest attributed to man-made events. The largest claims came from the US, which was struck by four hurricanes, and Japan, which suffered the highest concentration of typhoons for decades plus a major earthquake. Europe suffered fewer natural disasters, but 191 people were killed and more than 2,000 injured in March after the terrorist attack on train stations in Madrid. The damages claimed in 2004 eclipsed previous years, including 2001 when the 11 September attacks pushed claims up to \$37bn. Swiss Re said it had registered about 300 natural and man-made disasters around the world in 2004. Twenty-one thousand people lost their lives in the catastrophes with a cost to the global economy of around \$105bn (£54bn).

business 312.txt Parmalat sues 45 banks over crash Parmalat has sued 45 banks as it tries to reclaim money paid to banks before the scandal-hit Italian dairy company went bust last year. The firm collapsed with debts of about 14bn euros (\$19bn; £10bn) and new boss Enrico Bondi has already taken legal action against a number of lenders. He claims the banks were aware of the problems but continued to work with the company so they could earn commissions. Parmalat has not identified which banks it has gone after this time. Under Italian law, administrators can seek to get back money paid to financial institutions prior to insolvency, if there is a suspicion that the institutions knew that the company was in financial trouble. The firm also said it is preparing further law suits. According to the Reuters news agency, 35 of the companies sued on Thursday are Italian while the remaining 10 are international. The unidentified Parmalat source also told Reuters that the company was planning to take action against a total of 80 financial institutions. Among those already targeted are Bank of America, UBS, Credit Suisse First Boston, Deutsche Bank and Citi group. It has also gone after auditors Grant Thornton. They have all denied any wrongdoing. Parmalat was declared insolvent in December 2003 after it emerged that 4bn euros thought to be held in an offshore account did not in fact exist. In the investigation that followed it became apparent that the company, among other things, had been billing clients twice in order to boost sales and bolster the balance sheet. That enabled Parmalat to borrow heavily and expand overseas, allowing it to become a darling of the Italian stock exchange.

business 313.txt Irish company hit by Iraqi report Shares in Irish oil company Petrel Resources have lost more than 50% of their value on a report that the firm has failed to win a contract in Iraq. Reuters news agency reported that Iraq's Oil Ministry has awarded the first post-war oilfield contracts to a Canadian and a Turkish company. By 1700 GMT, Petrel's shares fell from 97p (\$1.87) to 44p (\$0.85). Petrel said that it has not received any information from Iraqi authorities to confirm or deny the report. Iraq is seeking to award contracts for three projects, valued at \$500m (£258.5m). Turkey's Eurasia is reported by Reuters to have won a contract to develop the Khurmala Dome field in the north of the country. A Canadian company, named IOG, is reported to have won the contract to run the Himirin field. Ironhorse Oil and Gas has denied to Reuters that it is the company in question. These two projects aim to develop Khurmala field to produce 100,000 barrels per day and raise the output of Himirin. The winners of the contract are to build new flow lines and build gas separation stations. The contract to develop the Suba-Luhais field has not yet been awarded as Iraq's Oil Ministry is studying the offers. If Iraq's cabinet ap

proves the oil ministry's choice of companies, then this will be the first deal that Iraq has signed with a foreign oil company. Iraq is still trying to boost its production capacity to match levels last seen in the eighties, before the war with Iran. Oil officials hope to double Iraq's output by the end of the decade.

business 314.txt Yukos unit fetches \$9bn at auction A little-known Russian company has bought the main production unit of oil giant Yukos at auction in Moscow. Baikal Finance Group outbid favourite Gazprom, the state-controlled gas monopoly, to buy Yuganskneftegas. Baikal paid 260.75bn roubles (\$9.37bn: £4.8bn) for Yugansk - nowhere near the \$27bn Russia says Yukos owes in taxes. Yukos reacted immediately by repeating its view that the auction was illegal in international and Russian law, and said Baikal had bought itself trouble. The company considers that the victor of today's auction has bought itself a serious \$9bn headache", said Yukos spokesman Alexander Shadrin. He said the company would continue to make every lawful move"" to protect tens of thousands of shareholders in Yukos from ""this forcible and illegitimate removal of their property"". Meanwhile", Tim Osborne, head of Yukos main shareholders' group Menatep, said that Yukos may have to declare itself bankrupt, and that legal action would be taken, outside Russia, against the auction winners. Reports from Russia say Baikal has paid a deposit of nearly \$1.7bn from a Sberbank (Saving's Bank) account to the Russian Federal Property Fund, for Yugansk. The sale came despite a restraining order issued by a US court dealing with the firm's bankruptcy application for Chapter 11 protection. Yukos has always insisted the auction was state-sponsored theft but Russian authorities argued they were imposing the law, trying to recover billions in unpaid taxes. There were originally four registered bidders, and with its close ties to the Kremlin, state-backed gas monopoly Gazprom had been seen as favourite. But just two companies turned up for the auction, Gazprom and the unknown Baikal Finance Group, named after a large freshwater lake in Siberia. And, according to Tass news agency, Gazprom did not make a single bid, leaving the way open for Baikal, which paid above the auction start price of 246.75bn roubles. Mystery firm Baikal Finance Group is officially registered in the central Russian region of Tver, but many analysts believe it may be linked to Gazprom. Kaha Kiknanelidze, analyst at Troika Dialog," said: ""I think a decision that Yugansk should end up with Gazprom was taken a long time ago. So the main question was how to structure this transaction. ""I would not exclude that the structure of the deal has slightly changed and Gazprom now has a partner. ""I would also not exclude that Baikal will decline to pay in 14 days", that are given by law," and Gazprom is then recognised as the winner. This would give Gazprom an extra 14 days to accumulate the needed funds. ""Another surprise was that the winner paid a significant premium above the starting price." However", Gazprom has announced it is not linked to Baikal in any way. And Paul Collison, chief analyst at Brunswick UBS," said: ""I see no plausible explanation for the theory that Baikal was representing competing interests. ""Yugansk will most likely end up with Gazprom but could still end up with the government. There is still potential for surprises."" Yugansk is at the heart of Yukos - pumping close to a million barrels of oil a day. The unit was seized by the government which claims the oil giant owes more than \$27bn in taxes and fines. Yukos says those tax demands are exorbitant", and had sought refuge in US courts. The US bankruptcy court's initial order on Thursday - to temporarily block the sale - in response to Yukos filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection, was upheld in a second ruling on Saturday. The protection, if recognised by the Russian authorities, would have allowed Yukos' current management to retain control of the business and block the sale of any company assets. Yukos has said the sale amounts to expropriation - punishment for the political am

bitions of its founder, Mikhail Khodorkovsky. Mr Khodorkovsky is now in jail, on separate fraud charges. But President Vladimir Putin has described the affair as a crackdown on corruption - and the BBC's Sarah Rainsford in Moscow says most Russians believe the destruction of Yukos is now inevitable. Hours before the auction lawyers for Menatep, a group through which Mr Khodorkovsky and his associates control Yukos, said they would take legal action in other countries. Menatep lawyers, who were excluded from observing the auction, said they would retaliate by seeking injunctions in foreign courts to impound Russian oil and gas exports.

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"business 315.txt S&N extends Indian beer venture The U  
K's biggest brewer", Scottish and Newcastle (S&N), is to buy 37.5% of India's United Breweries in a deal worth 4.66bn rupees (\$106m:f54.6m). S&N will buy a 17.5% equity stake in United, maker of the well-known Kingfisher lager brand, and make a public offer to buy another 20% stake. A similar holding will be controlled by Vijay Mallya," chair of the Indian firm. The deal was a ""natural development"" of its joint venture with United", said Tony Froggatt, S&N's chief executive. Its top brands include Newcastle Brown Ale, Foster's, John Smith's, Strongbow and Kronenbourg. In 2002 S&N and United agreed to form a strategic partnership, one that would include a joint venture business and a UK investment in the Indian brewer. The joint venture was established in May 2003. with both parties having a 40% stake in the venture - Millennium Alcobelv. Millennium Alcobelv will now be merged with United, which expects post-merger to have about half of India's beer market. India, with a population of more than one billion, consumes about 1.2 billion bottles of beer every year. Kingfisher has market share of about 29%. In addition to the equity stake S&N is to invest 2.47bn rupees in United through non-convertible redeemable preference shares. Meanwhile, United's budget airline, Kingfisher Airlines, is to buy 10 A320 aircraft from Airbus and has the option to buy 20 more aircraft in a deal worth up to \$1.8bn. The airline, the brainchild of Mr Mallya, expects to start its operations by the end of April. The new airline would break even in the very first year of operation, Mr Mallya said.

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"business 316.txt Euronext 'poised to make LSE bid' Pan-E  
uropean group Euronext is poised to launch a bid for the London Stock Exchange", UK media reports say. Last week, the LSE rejected a takeover proposal from German rival Deutsche Boerse - the 530 pence-a-share offer valued the exchange at about f1.35bn. The LSE, which saw its shares rise 25%, said the bid undervalued the business. Euronext - formed after the Brussels, Paris and Amsterdam exchanges merged - is reportedly working with three investment banks on a possible offer. The LSE, Europe's biggest stock market, is a key prize, listing stocks with a total capitalisation of f1.4 trillion. Euronext already has a presence in London due to its 2001 acquisition of London-based options and futures exchange Liffe. Trades on the LSE are cleared via Clearnet, in which Euronext has a quarter stake. Euronext, which also operates an exchange in Lisbon, last week appointed UBS and ABN Amro as additional advisors. It is also working with Morgan Stanley. Despite the rejection of the Deutsche Boerse bid last week, Werner Seifert, chief executive of the Frankfurt-based exchange, may well come back with an improved offer. It has long wanted to link up with London, and the two tried and failed to seal a merger in 2000. Responding to the LSE's rebuff, Deutsche Boerse - whose market capitalisation is more than f3bn - said it believed it could show its proposal offered benefits, and that it still hoped to make a cas

h bid. Last week the LSE said not only was the bid undervalued," but that it had ""been advised that there can be no assurance that any transaction could be successfully implemented"". However", it has indicated it is open for further talks. Meanwhile, German magazine Der Spiegel said part of Mr Seifert's negotiations with the LSE were about where to base the future board of any merged exchange. While Mr Seifert has suggested a merged company would be run out of London, the mayor of Frankfurt has raised concerns that such a move could cost German jobs. Many analysts believe German Boerse has more financial firepower than Euronext if it came to a bidding war.

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"business 317.txt Christmas shoppers flock to tills Shops all over the UK reported strong sales on the last Saturday before Christmas with some claiming record-breaking numbers of festive shoppers. A spokesman for Manchester's Trafford Centre said it was ""the biggest Christmas to date"" with sales up 5%. And the Regent Street Association said shops in central London were also expecting the ""best Christmas ever"". That picture comes despite reports of disappointing festive sales in the last couple of weeks. The Trafford Centre spokeswoman said about 8","500 thousand vehicles had arrived at the centre on Saturday before 1130 GMT. ""We predict that the next week will continue the same trend," she added. It was a similar story at Bluewater in Kent. Spokesman Alan Jones said he expected 150,000 shoppers to have visited by the end of Saturday and a further 100,000 on Sunday. Our sales so far have been 2% up on the same time last year", he said. We're very busy," it's really strong and people will be shopping right up until Christmas. ""Over the Christmas period we're expecting people to spend in excess of £200m at the centre."" On Saturday afternoon", a spokeswoman for the St David's Shopping Centre in Cardiff said it looked like being its busiest day of the year with about 200,000 shoppers expected to have visited by the close of play. At the St Enoch's Shopping Centre in Glasgow, more than 140,"000 shoppers - an all-time record - were expected to have passed through the doors by its closing time of 1900 GMT. Senior business manager Jon Walton said: ""It has been phenomenal - absolutely mobbed. ""Every week footfall has been showing strong growth and at the weekends it has been going mad." Regent Street Association director Annie Walker said on Saturday: ""The stores were heaving today and a lot of people are going to be doing last minute shopping as many people finished work on Friday and can go in the week."" She said reports of a slump in pre-Christmas sales were related to the growing popularity of internet sales. ""I do think this has had a lot to do with reports of lower sales figures", she said. Internet shopping has gone up enormously and not all stores have websites.""

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"business 318.txt Mystery surrounds new Yukos owner The fate of Russia's Yuganskneftegas - the oil firm sold to a little-known buyer on Sunday - is the subject of frantic speculation in Moscow. Baikal Finance Group emerged as the auction winner", agreeing to pay 260.75bn roubles (£4.8bn; \$9.4bn). Russia's newspapers claimed that Baikal was a front for gas monopoly Gazprom, which had been expected to win. The sale has destroyed Yukos, once the owner of Yuganskneftegas," said founder Mikhail Khodorkovsky. ""Yuganskneftegas has been sold in the best traditions of the 90s. The authorities have made themselves a wonderful Christmas present - Russia's most efficient oil company has been destroyed", the Interfax news agency quoted Mr Khodorkovsky as saying via his lawyers. Gazprom had been expected to win the auction but is thought to have failed to get finance for the deal after a US court injunction barred it from ta

king part. Last week, Yukos filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in the US in a last-ditch attempt to hang on to Yuganskneftegas, which accounts for 60% of its output. A US judge banned Gazprom from taking part in the auction and barred international banks from providing the firm with cash. They screwed up the financing," said Ronald Smith, an analyst at Renaissance Capital in Moscow. And Gazprom doesn't have this sort of money lying around."" Gazprom has denied that it is behind the purchase. ""It is a front for somebody but not necessarily for Gazprom," said Oleg Maximov, an analyst at Troika Dialog in Moscow. We don't know if this company is linked 100% to Gazprom. ""We tried to find it", but we couldn't and as far as I know," the papers had the same result." The sale has however bought time for Gazprom to raise the money needed for the purchase", analysts said. One scenario is that Baikal will not pay when it is supposed to in two weeks time, putting Yuganskneftegas back in the hands of bailiffs and back within the reach of Gazprom. Yukos is not planning on letting go of its unit without a fight and has threatened legal action against any buyer. Menatep, Yukos main shareholders' group, has also threatened legal action. Yukos claims that it is being punished for the political ambitions of its founder, Mikhail Kholodkovsky, who is now in jail facing separate fraud charges. It has been hit with more than \$27bn in taxes and fines and many observers now say that the break up of the firm that accounts for 20% of Russia's oil output is inevitable.

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"business 319.txt Euronext joins bid battle for LSE Pan-European stock market Euronext has approached the London Stock Exchange (LSE) about a possible takeover bid. ""The approach is at an early stage and therefore does not require a response at this point," LSE said. Talks with the European stock market and with rival bidder Deutsche Boerse will continue, the LSE said. Last week, the group rejected a £1.3bn (\$2.5bn) takeover offer from Deutsche Boerse, claiming that it undervalued the business. LSE saw its shares surge 4.9% to a new high of 583p in early trade, following the announcement on Monday. The offer follows widespread media speculation that Euronext would make an offer for LSE. Experts now widely expect a bidding war for Europe's biggest stock market, which lists stocks with a total capitalisation of £1.4 trillion, to break out. Commentators say that a deal with Euronext, which owns the Liffe derivatives exchange in London and combines the Paris, Amsterdam and Lisbon stock exchanges, could potentially offer the LSE more cost savings than a deal with Deutsche Boerse. A weekend report in the Telegraph had quoted an unnamed executive at Euronext as saying the group would make a cash bid to trump Deutsche Boerse's offer. Because we already own Liffe in London", the cost savings available to us from a merger are far greater than for Deutsche Boerse," the newspaper quoted the executive as saying. Euronext chief executive Jean-Francois Theodore is reported to have already held private talks with LSE's chief executive Clara Furse. Further reports had suggested that Euronext could make an offer in excess of the LSE's 533p a share closing price on Friday. However, Euronext said it could not guarantee at this stage"" that a firm offer would be made for LSE. There has been extensive speculation about a possible takeover of the company since an attempted merger with Deutsche Boerse failed in 2000.

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''' "business 320.txt Iraq and Afghanistan in WTO talks The World Trade Organisation (WTO) is to hold membership talks with both Iraq and Afghanistan. But Iran's bid to join the trade body has been refused after the US blocked its application for the 21st time. The countries stand to reap huge ben

efits from membership of the group", whose purpose is to promote free trade. Joining, however, is a lengthy process. China's admission in 2001 took 15 years and talks with Russia and Saudi Arabia have been taking place for 10 years. Membership of the Geneva-based WTO helps guarantee a country's goods receives equal treatment in the markets of other member states - a policy which has seen it become closely associated with globalisation. Iraq's Trade Minister Mohammed Mустafa al-Jibouri welcomed the move, describing it as significant as November's decision by the Paris Club of creditor nations to write off 80% of the country's debts. Assad Omar, Afghanistan's envoy to the United Nations in Geneva," said a concession would contribute to ""regional prosperity and global security"". There are now 27 countries seeking membership of the WTO. Prospective members need to enter into negotiations with potential trading countries and change domestic laws to bring them in line with WTO regulations. Before the process gets under way", all 148 WTO members must give their backing to applicant countries. The US said it could not approve Iran's application because it is currently reviewing relations. But several nations criticised the approach, and European Union ambassador to the WTO, Carlo Trojan," said Iran's application ""must be treated independently of political issues"".

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business 321.txt Diageo to buy US wine firm Diageo", the world's biggest spirits company, has agreed to buy Californian wine company Chalone for \$260m (£134m) in an all-cash deal. Although Diageo's best-known brands include Smirnoff vodka and Guinness stout," it already has a US winemaking arm - Diageo Chateau & Estate Wines. Diageo said it expects to get US regulatory approval for the deal during the first quarter of 2005. It said Chalone would be integrated into its existing US wine business. ""The US wine market represents a growth opportunity for Diageo", with favourable demographic and consumption trends," said Diageo North America president Ivan Menezes. In July, Diageo, which is listed on the London Stock Exchange, reported an annual turnover of £8.89bn, down from £9.28bn a year earlier. It blamed a weaker dollar for its lower turnover. In the year ending 31 December 2003, Chalone reported revenues of \$69.4m.

business 322.txt Tokyo says deflation 'controlled' The Japanese government has forecast that the country's economic growth will slow to 1.6% in the next fiscal year starting in April 2005. While it predicts this fall from the current 2.1% level, it said it was making progress on ending deflation. The figures were given by economics minister Heizo Takenaka who said the economy would grow by 2% in 2006/07. He said the consumer price index (CPI) would rise 0.1% in the next fiscal year, the first gain since 2000/01. We are attempting to make real economic conditions better and to overcome deflation. I think we are on track", " said Mr Takenaka. Deflation - or falling consumer prices - has plagued Japan for more than five years. To ease the problem the Bank of Japan has regularly flooded the money market with excess cash to keep short term interest rates at 0% in an attempt to spur economic activity.

business 323.txt No seasonal lift for house market A slate of figures have provided further evidence of a slowdown in the UK property market. The Council of Mortgage Lenders (CML), British Bankers Association (BBA) and Building Societies Association (BSA) all said mortgage lending was slowing. CML figures showed gross lending fell by 4% in November as the number of people buying new homes fell. Elsewhere, the BBA added underlying mortgage lending rose by £4m in November, compared to October's £4.29m. The CML said that loans for new property purchases fell 25% year-on-year to 85,000 - the lowest total seen since February 2003. Data from the CML showed lending fell to just over

£25bn in November, from £25.5bn a year earlier. Separate figures from the Building Societies Association showed the value of mortgage approvals -- loans agreed but not yet made -- stood 32% lower than at the same time last year, at a seasonally-adjusted £2.98bn. The figures come hot on the heels of new data from property website Rightmove which suggested owners must indulge in a winter sale"" and slash prices by up to 8%. Miles Shipside", commercial director at Rightmove," said sellers would have to be ""more realistic with their asking prices"" to tempt buyers. The average asking price of a home fell by more than £600 from £190",329 in November to £189,733 in December," while the length of time it takes to sell a home rose to 81 days from 53 in the summer. Rightmove said estate agents were set to enter 2005 with a third more properties on their books than a year ago. ""Even once the quieter holiday period is over", sellers will find themselves competing with a lot of other properties on the market. In any business, excess supply and low demand means one thing - cut prices, Mr Shipside said. The proof is that some properties that have been appropriately discounted are selling," even in the current market." Overall", asking prices have fallen 3.3% from their July peaks as the equivalent of £6,"500 has been cut from an average property. A host of mortgage lenders and economists have predicted that property prices will either fall or stagnate in 2005. ""What is apparent is a picture of a slowing market", but one that should remain stable as we return to more normal volumes of lending over 2005 as a whole, CML director general Michael Coogan said. It's a fairly consistent picture, showing that mortgage demand has fallen back again, which is consistent with a continuing correction in the housing market, Investec economist Philip Shaw said. However, the figures do suggest only a modest weakening, and we stand by our view that the property market will remain in the doldrums for some time," though a collapse is still unlikely."

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"business 324.txt Yukos seeks court action on sale Yukos will return to a US court on Wednesday to seek sanctions against Baikal Finance Group", the little-known firm which has bought its main asset. Yukos has said it will sue Baikal and others involved in the sale of Yuganskneftegas for \$20bn in damages. Yukos' US lawyers will attempt to have Baikal assets frozen after the Russian government ignored a US court order last week blocking the sale. Baikal's background and its motives for buying the unit are still unclear. Russian newspapers have claimed that Baikal - which bought the Yuganskneftegas production unit for \$9.4bn (261bn roubles, £4.8bn) on Sunday at a state provoked auction - has strong links with Surgutneftegas, Russia's fourth-biggest oil producer. Many observers believe that the unit, which produces 60% of Yukos' oil output, could ultimately fall into the hands of Surgutneftegas or even Gazprom, the state gas firm which opted out of the auction. The Russian government forced the sale of Yukos' most lucrative asset as part of its action to enforce a \$27bn back tax bill it says the company owes. Yukos' US lawyers claim the auction was illegal because the firm had filed for bankruptcy and therefore its assets were now under the protection of US bankruptcy law which has worldwide jurisdiction. On Wednesday," Yukos will also seek further legal remedies to prevent the break-up of the group. ""We believe the auction was illegal and we intend to pursue all legal recourses available to us", Yukos spokesman Mike Lake told Agence France Press. If it exports that oil, it will be marketing a stolen product," he added. The future ownership of Yuganskneftegas remains unclear amid widespread suggestions that Baikal was established as a front for other interests. Speaking on Tuesday, President Putin said Baikal was owned by individual investors who planned to build relationships with other Russian energy firms interested in th

e development of Yuganskneftegas. President Putin also suggested that China's National Petroleum Corporation could play a role in the unit's future after signing a commercial agreement with Gazprom to work on joint energy projects. Yukos has claimed that the sale of its main asset will lead to the collapse of the company. Commentators and Yukos itself claim the firm is the target of a government campaign to destroy it because of the political ambitions of its founder, Mikhail Khodorkovsky.

business 325.txt Indy buys into India paper Irish publishing group Independent News & Media is buying up a 26% stake in Indian newspaper company Jagran in a deal worth 25m euros (\$34.1m). Jagran publishes India's top-selling daily newspaper, the Hindi-language Dainik Jagran, which has been in circulation for 62 years. News of the deal came as the group announced that its results would meet market forecasts. The company reported strong revenue growth across all its major markets. Group advertising revenues were up over 10% year-on-year, the group said, with overall circulation revenues are expected to increase almost 10% year-on-year. This was helped by the positive impact of compact"" newspaper editions in Ireland and the UK", " it said. ""2004 has proven to be an important year for Independent News & Media", " said chief executive Sir Anthony O'Reilly. Our simple aim at Independent is to be the low cost producer in every region in which we operate. I am confident that we will show a meaningful increase in earnings for 2005." " Meanwhile", the group made no comment about the future of the Independent newspaper despite recent speculation that Sir Anthony had held talks with potential buyers over a stake in the daily publication. He has consistently denied suggestions that the Independent and the Independent on Sunday are up for sale. Buy it is understood that the recent success of the smaller edition of the Independent, which has pushed circulation up by 20% to 260,000, has prompted interest from industry rivals, with Daily Mail & General Trust tipped as the most likely suitor. The loss-making newspaper is not expected to reach break-even until 2006.

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"business 326.txt Senior Fannie Mae bosses resign The two most senior executives at US mortgage giant Fannie Mae have resigned after accounting irregularities were uncovered at the company. Chief executive Franklin Raines", a former senior official in the Clinton administration, and chief financial officer Tim Howard have left the firm. Fannie Mae was criticised by financial regulators and could have to restate its earnings by up to \$9bn (£4.6bn). It is America's second largest financial institution. Recent investigations have exposed extensive accounting errors at Fannie Mae, which supplies funds to America's \$8 trillion mortgage market. Last week, the firm was admonished by the Securities and Exchange Commission which said it had made major errors in its financial reporting. The financial regulator said Fannie Mae would have to raise substantial new capital to restore its balance sheet. Analysts said the SEC's criticism made it impossible for Fannie Mae's senior executives to remain. Mr Raines, head of the Office of Management and Budget under President Clinton, has taken early retirement while Mr Howard has also stepped down, the company said on Tuesday. KPMG, Fannie Mae's independent auditor," will also be replaced. ""By my early retirement", I have held myself accountable," Mr Raines said in a statement. Fannie Mae was found to have violated accounting rules relating to derivatives - financial instruments used to hedge against fluctuations in interest rates - and some pre-paid loans. As a result, it could be forced to restate \$9bn in earnings over the past four years, effectively wiping out a third of the company's profits since 2001. Although not making loans directly to buyers, Fannie Mae is the largest single player in the mortgage market, underwriting hal

f of all US house purchases. The firm operates under charter from the US Congress. It has faced stinging criticism from Congressional leaders who held hearings into its finances earlier this year and from government regulator, the Office of Federal Housing Enterprise Oversight (OFHEO). We are encouraged that the board's announcement signals a new culture and a new direction for Fannie Mae", "A  
rmindo Falcon, OFHEO director said. The problems afflicting Fannie Mae are just the latest to hit the US mortgage industry. Freddie Mac, the country's other largest mortgage firm, was forced to restate its earnings by \$4.4bn last year and pay a \$125m fine after an investigation of its books.

business 327.txt Cannabis hopes for drug firm A prescription cannabis drug made by UK biotech firm GW Pharmaceuticals is set to be approved in Canada. The drug is used to treat the central nervous system and alleviate the symptoms of multiple sclerosis (MS). A few weeks ago, shares in GW Pharma lost a third of their value after UK regulators said they wanted more evidence about the drug's benefits. But now Canadian authorities have said the Sativex drug will be considered for approval. Approximately 50,000 people in Canada have been diagnosed with MS and 85,000 people are suffering from the condition in the UK. Many patients already smoke cannabis to relieve their symptoms. Now, GW Pharma's Sativex mouth spray could be legally available to MS sufferers in Canada within the next few months. This will be the first time a cannabis-based drug has been approved anywhere in the world, representing a landmark for GW Pharma and for patients with MS. Final approval in Canada should now be little more than a formality, analysts said, and the company expects full approval for Sativex early in 2005. We are delighted to receive this qualifying notice from Health Canada and look forward to receiving regulatory approval for Sativex in Canada in the early part of 2005", " said GW Pharma executive chairman Dr Geoffrey Guy. The UK government granted GW Pharma a licence to grow the cannabis plant for medical research purposes. Satifex consists of a cannabis extract containing tetrahydrocannabinol and cannabidiol, a cocktail that has also proved effective in treating patients with arthritis. Thousands of plants are grown at a secret location somewhere in the English countryside. Despite hopes of regulatory approval last year, a series of delays has put back Sativex's launch in the UK. The latest news sent shares in GW Pharma up 8.5p, or 8.1%, to 113.5p.

business 328.txt Bush to get 'tough' on deficit US president George W Bush has pledged to introduce a tough"" federal budget next February in a bid to halve the country's deficit in five years. The US budget and its trade deficit are both deep in the red", " helping to push the dollar to lows against the euro and fuelling fears about the economy. Mr Bush indicated there would be ""strict discipline"" on non-defence spending in the budget. The vow to cut the deficit had been one of his re-election declarations. The federal budget deficit hit a record \$412bn (£211.6bn) in the 12 months to 30 September and \$377bn in the previous year. ""We will submit a budget that fits the times", Mr Bush said. It will provide every tool and resource to the military, will protect the homeland," and meet other priorities of the government." The US has said it is committed to a strong dollar. But the dollar's weakness has hit European and Asian exporters and lead to calls for US intervention to boost the currency. Mr Bush", however," has said the best way to halt the dollar's slide is to deal with the US deficit. ""It's a budget that I think will send the right signal to the financial markets and to those concerned about our short-term deficit", Mr Bush added. As well," we've got to deal with the long-term deficit issue s." "

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"business 329.txt House prices drop as sales slow House p

rices fell further in November and property sale times lengthened as rate rises took their toll", "the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors found. A total of 48% of chartered surveyor estate agents reported lower prices in the three months to November - the highest level in 12 years. Meanwhile the number of sales dropped 32% to an average of 22 per surveyor. The amount of unsold properties on their books rose for the sixth month in a row to an average of 67 properties. "The slowdown occurring in the market has given buyers more power to negotiate", but this time of year is traditionally a quiet one," RICS housing spokesman Ian Perry said. The decision by the Bank of England not to increase interest rates further and the healthy economy is allowing confidence to consolidate." The figures support recent data from the government and other bodies which all point to a slowdown in the housing market. On Monday", the Council of Mortgage Lenders, British Bankers Association and Building Societies Association all said mortgage lending was slowing. The figures were published as another survey by property website Rightmove said the average asking price of a home fell by more than £600 from £190,329 in November to £189,733 in December. Around the UK, the Midlands and South saw the biggest price falls, while London prices fell but at less than the national rate. In Scotland, where prices have remained on an upward path," increases were more "moderate""", RICS added. But the news failed to dent confidence that sales will recover in future," with surveyors at their most optimistic in a year - as new purchase inquiries stabilised despite holding at lower levels. "Sales usually pick up in the New Year and I am confident this year will be no exception", Mr Perry added. Looking ahead, the group is anticipating a quiet start to 2005 with the market picking up in the second half - prompting a 3% rise in prices over the coming 12 months.

business 330.txt Fresh hope after Argentine crisis Three years after Argentina was hit by a deadly economic crisis, there is fresh hope. The country's economy is set to grow about 8% this year after seeing 9% growth last year, a sharp turnaround from 2002 when output fell 11%. The unemployment rate is improving, too: It is set to slip below 13% by the end of the year, down from 20% in May 2002. True, problems remain, but the overall picture is one of vast improvement. Even the International Monetary Fund (IMF) admits this. The Argentine authorities are proud", should be proud, of the strong performance of the economy," Thomas Dawson, an IMF director, said earlier this month. Argentina has made a remarkable recovery from a hideous and lengthy recession which in 2001 culminated in the government halting debt repayments to its private creditors. The debt default sparked a deep and prolonged economic crisis which, at least initially, was made worse by the government's decisions. Pension payments were halted and bank accounts frozen as part of austerity measures introduced by the government to deal with the country's massive debts. In response, angry crowds of ordinary Argentines took to the streets where dozens of lives were lost in clashes with the police. Two presidents and at least three finance minister resigned in less than a month. Argentina was on the brink of collapse. The fix was found in the currency markets with the abandonment of the peso's decade-long peg to the US dollar in February 2002. The subsequent devaluation saw thousands of people's life savings disappear. Scathes of companies went bust. Three years ago", every sector [of the economy] was hit by the crisis," said entrepreneur Drayton Valentine. It really was dire. But since then, the general mood on the ground has improved dramatically, in part because the devaluation helped attract fresh direct investment from abroad and stimulate business within Brazil. Agriculture and tourism are helping", said entrepreneur Drayton Valentine. Mr Valentine, who was born in the United States but grew up in Argentina, was fortunate: At the time of the crisis, his savings were held in dollar accounts abroad. But now he is using his money to help with the start-up a trading company.

He explained that initially, his firm is going to export building materials to Spain and United States. Then, he would like to diversify to other areas, depending on the market. Locally there is a sense of recovery", many companies are exporting now," he said, noting that a lot of firms, which were closed during the crisis, are re-opening. But not all that shines is gold. Argentina is still burdened by its failure to pay private creditors at the end of 2001. President Nestor Kirchner's administration is still trying to hammer out an agreement with the creditors, but with the debts' nominal value standing at around \$100bn it is not proving easy. Debt defaults make further lending agreements both difficult and expensive to negotiate. Argentina's current offer implies that the creditors would get just 25 cents for each dollar they are owed, according to the creditors. Understandably, they want more and until they do, both they and others are loath to continue lending. For President Kirchner, this proves a hopeless challenge. Real losses have been suffered and somebody has to pay, observed Jack Boorman, adviser to IMF's managing director, Rodrigo Rato. Everyone needs to keep in mind the enormous cost on the part of both creditors and the Argentine society and people that will have been endured by the time a settlement is reached", he said. The cost is enormous, and continues to be paid," and will not be reversed by any restructuring." With the international negotiations being troubled", it is of little help to President Kirchner that the domestic situation remains strained as well. This is partly because there are still bank account holders who are waiting to recover some of their deposits. ""The situation is bad for those who had previously chosen to save in Argentina", "" said Carlos Baez Silva", president of AARA, an association that represents bank account and bond holders. Few people have recovered more than about half their savings, Mr Baez Silva estimated, pointing out that many of the savers who have lost out are pensioners or others who once trusted the government," people who set aside money for the future in the belief that their investment would be safe. ""A lot of them invested in good faith", he said. The Argentine state responded by taking most of their investments." The affair has made Mr Baez Silva disillusioned with the country's legal system. On occasion", the Supreme Court has ruled against the interests of the people he represents, he says," insisting that the system cannot be trusted. ""People have to deposit their money in the banks", not necessarily because they trust them but because crime is so high that people cannot have their money in their homes beneath their mattresses." Mr Valente", who was born in the United States but grew up in Argentina," agreed. ""If I have to save pesos [the local currency] there is not much problem", but I will think twice before I deposit dollars in a bank"".

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"business 331.txt Disney settles disclosure charges Walt Disney has settled charges from US federal regulators that it failed to disclose how family members of directors were employed by the company. The media giant was not fined by the Securities and Exchange Commission", but has agreed to refrain from any future violations of securities law. Disney failed to tell investors that between 1999 and 2001 it employed three adult children of three then directors. The firm has neither admitted nor denied wrongdoing in the settlement. The three Disney directors in question in the central matter of the SEC's investigation - Reveta Bowers, Stanley Gold and Raymond Watson - have all since left the company, with Ms Bowers and Mr Watson both retiring, and Mr Gold quitting in 2003. Their children were paid between \$60,000 (£30,800) and \$150,000 a year, with shareholders not being informed. The SEC also found that Disney did not disclose that a 50% Disney-owned subsidiary company - Lifetime - employed the wife of current Disney director John Bryson, and that she earned more than

\$1m a year. Louise Bryson remains with Lifetime. Disney also failed to disclose payments to Air Shamrock, an airline owned by Mr Gold and fellow former Disney directors Roy Disney. Finally, Disney also did not reveal that it provided more than \$200,000 annually for office space, secretarial services," and a leased car and driver to former director Thomas Murphy. ""Shareholders have a significant interest in information regarding relationships between the company and its directors," said SEC deputy enforcement director Linda Thomsen. Failure to comply with the SEC's disclosure rules in this area impedes shareholders' ability to evaluate the objectivity and independence of directors.""

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"business 332.txt Putin backs state grab for Yukos Russia's president has defended the purchase of Yukos' key production unit by state-owned oil firm Rosneft", saying it followed free market principles. Vladimir Putin said it was quite within the rights of a state-owned company to ensure its interests were met. Rosneft bought 100% of Baikal Finance Group, in a move that amounts to the renationalisation of a major chunk of Russia's booming oil industry. Rosneft will now control about 16% of Russia's total crude oil output. Yukos share jumped in Moscow, climbing as much as 50% before being suspended. Rosneft is already in the process of merging with Gazprom, the world's biggest gas company," a move that will see Gazprom return to majority state-ownership. Baikal was the surprise buyer of oil and gas giant Yukos's main production division at a forced auction on Sunday. ""Everything was done by market methods", Mr Putin said at his year-end press conference in Moscow. Shedding some light on the Kremlin's motivation, Mr Putin referred to a period of so-called cowboy capitalism"" that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. He said privatisation carried out in the early 1990s had involved trickery", including law breaking," by people seeking to acquire valuable state property. ""Now the state", using market methods, is safeguarding its interests. I think this is quite normal, the Russian president said. A Rosneft spokesman has said the acquisition is part of its plan to build a balanced," national energy corporation." The latest announcement comes after more than a year of wrangling that has pushed Yukos", one of Russia's biggest companies to the brink of collapse. The Russian government put Yukos's Yuganskneftegas subsidiary up for sale last week after hitting the company with a \$27bn (£14bn) bill for back taxes and fines. Analysts say that Yukos's legal attempts to block the auction by filing for bankruptcy protection in the US are probably what caused this week's cloak-and-dagger dealings. Gazprom, the company originally tipped to buy Yuganskneftegas, was banned from taking part in the auction by a US court injunction. By selling the Yukos unit to little-known Baikal and then to Rosneft, Russia is able to circumvent a host of tricky legal landmines," analysts said. ""You cannot sue the Russian government", said Eric Kraus, a strategist at Moscow's Sovlink Securities. The Russian government has sovereign immunity." "The government is renationalising Yuganskneftegas." Even so", analysts reckon that the saga still has a long way to go. The Rosneft announcement came just hours after Yukos accused Gazprom of illegally taking part in Sunday's auction. It has said it will be seeking damages of \$20bn. The claim was made at the latest hearing in the US bankruptcy court in Houston, Texas, where Yukos, had filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection. If found in contempt of the US court order blocking the auction, Gazprom could face having foreign assets seized. Yukos' lawyers had also been expected to try to have Baikal's assets frozen. Lawyers claimed the auction was illegal because Yukos - with an office in Houston - had filed for bankruptcy and therefore its assets were under the protection of US law which has worldwide jurisdiction. Further muddying the waters is a merger between Rosneft and Gazprom which authori

ties have said will go ahead as planned.

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"business 333.txt Troubled Marsh under SEC scrutiny The US stock market regulator is investigating troubled insurance broker Marsh & McLennan's shareholder transactions", the firm has said. The Securities and Exchange Commission has asked for information about transactions involving holders of 5% or more of the firm's shares. Marsh has said it is co-operating fully with the SEC investigation. Marsh is also the focus of an inquiry by the New York attorney-general into whether insurers rigged the market. Since that inquiry was launched in October, Marsh has replaced its chief executive and held a boardroom shake-out to meet criticism by lessening the number of company executives on the board. Prosecutors allege that Marsh - the world's biggest insurance broker - and other US insurance firms may have fixed bids for corporate cover. This is the issue at the heart of the inquiry by New York's top law officer, Eliot Spitzer, and a separate prosecution of five insurers by the State of California. The SEC's investigation into so-called related party transactions includes dealings in the Trident Funds, managed by MMC Capital, the company's private equity firm. Marsh's new chief executive, Michael Cherkasky, is trying to negotiate a settlement with Mr Spitzer. Mr Spitzer has built up a reputation as a fierce critic and campaigner against corporate America's misdeeds. The uncertainty unleashed by the scandal has prompted three credit rating agencies - Standard & Poor's, Moody's and Fitch - to downgrade Marsh in recent weeks. According to the Financial Times, insurance analysts are now questioning whether Marsh will be able to maintain its strong record of earning growth as they draw up forecasts for the first quarter of next year. Doubts also exist over how much the company may have to pay regulators and lawyers to put the scandal behind.

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"business 334.txt US firm pulls out of Iraq A US company has pulled out of a major contract to rebuild Iraq's transport system after attacks on reconstruction efforts", Pentagon officials have said. Contrack International, of Arlington, Virginia, "heads a coalition of firms working on a series of schemes. Its withdrawal from the \$325m (£170m) contract in November is thought to be the largest cancellation to date. Contrack said ""the original scope of work that was envisioned could not be executed in a cost-effective manner"". But the firm denied reports it was withdrawing completely from Iraq. ""Members of the joint venture including Contrack are committed to the ongoing reconstruction efforts", are actively working in Iraq and continue to look for new construction opportunities in the country," it said in a statement. The Pentagon's Project and Contract Office (PCO) in Baghdad said it had taken over Contrack's management of the subcontractors working on the transportation projects. US firms and their workers have been targets of attacks, and security concerns are said to be a major reason for the slow pace of reconstruction in Iraq. Of the \$18.4bn in reconstruction funds approved by Congress, less than \$2bn has been spent. Lt Col Eric Schnable of the PCO told the Associated Press news agency Contrack's withdrawal from the transportation contract was a mutually agreed-to separation"" and did not indicate a movement by US companies to leave Iraq. ""Some parts of the country are a whole lot more permissive than others", he added. Where we can get the work done," good things are happening.""

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"business 335.txt Boeing secures giant Japan order Boeing is to supply Japan Airlines with up to 50 of its forthcoming 7E7 planes in a de

al that could be worth as much as \$6bn (£3.1bn) for the US giant. Japan Airlines has made a firm order for 30 of the aircraft", at \$120m each, with the option to buy 20 more. Asia's biggest airline joins Japanese rival All Nippon as one of the first carriers to order the mid-size 7E7, which Boeing says is super-economical. Airbus this week announced the first pre-sale of its 7E7 rival - the A350. Boeing's great European competitor is to sell 10 of its forthcoming A350 to Spanish carrier Air Europa, which has the option to buy two more in a deal that could be worth more than \$1.8bn. Both the 7E7 and the A350 are being designed to be as fuel-efficient as possible in the 200- to 300-seat sector, and each will be available in both short and long range versions. Japan Airlines said it had looked at both aircraft before choosing the 7E7," also known as the Dreamliner. ""We chose the 7E7 after carefully considering both it and Airbus' aircraft", said a Japan Airlines spokesman. The 7E7 fits better for what we needed and it could be delivered when we hoped to get it."" Boeing continues to enjoy a dominance over Airbus in Japan", and Japanese companies are taking key roles in building the 7E7. The first 7E7s will be delivered to Japan Airlines in April 2008. Boeing has set itself a target of getting 200 firm commitments for the 7E7 by the end of this year, and has orders for 56 so far. Airbus hopes to have 50 orders in place for the A350 by mid-2005.

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"business 336.txt Banker loses sexism claim A former executive at the London offices of Merrill Lynch has lost her £7.5m (\$14.6m) sex discrimination case against the US investment bank. An employment tribunal dismissed Stephanie Villalba's allegations of sexual discrimination and unequal pay. But the 42-year-old won her claim of unfair dismissal", resulting from her sacking in August 2003. Her partial victory is likely to cap her compensation to about £55,000, a tiny fraction of what she asked for. The extent of damages will be assessed in the New Year. The action - the biggest claim heard by an employment tribunal in the UK - had been viewed as something of a test case. The tribunal decided that Ms Villalba had been unfairly dismissed because, having been removed from a senior post, she was entitled to wait to see if a suitable alternative position could be found in the organisation. Ms Villalba, the former head of Merrill's private client business in Europe," has made no decision on whether to appeal. A spokesman for her lawyers described the decision as ""very disappointing""", but pointed to some criticism of Merrill's procedures within the lengthy judgement. The tribunal upheld Ms Villalba's claim of victimisation on certain specific issues, including bullying e-mails in connection with a contract," but said it found no evidence of ""laddish culture"" at the bank. ""We said from the start that this case was about performance not gender", Merrill said in a statement. Ms Villalba was removed by the very same person who had promoted her into the position and who then replaced her with another woman. ""Merrill Lynch is dedicated to creating a true meritocracy where every employee has the opportunity to advance based on their skills and hard work." Based in London's financial district", Ms Villalba worked for Merrill's global private client business in Europe, investing funds for some of Merrill's most important customers. But in 2003 her employers told her she had no future after 17 years with the company, and she was made redundant. Merrill Lynch denied Ms Villalba's claims and said she was removed from her post because of the extensive losses the firm was suffering on the continent. The firm had told the tribunal that Ms Villalba's division had been losing about \$1m a week. Merrill said Ms Villalba lacked the leadership skills to turn around the unit.

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"business 337.txt Building giant in asbestos payout Austr alian building products group James Hardie has agreed to pay \$1.1bn (£568m) to victims of asbestos-related diseases. The landmark deal could see thousands of people suffering from lung diseases - caused by asbestos the company once made - receive compensation. The move follows angry protests after the firm said a previous compensation fund was running out of money. A subsequent New South Wales state inquiry criticised Hardie's actions. In September", the inquiry found that the company had misled the public about the amount of money set aside to cover its asbestos-related liabilities, sparking the resignation of its then chief executive," Peter MacDonald. Campaigners welcomed news of the preliminary agreement. ""This is a momentous day in the fight for victims and their families"," said asbestosis sufferer Bernie Banton, who leads a victims' association. There is still a long way to go"," but we are getting there." "James Hardie chairwoman", Meredith Hellicar," said the deal provided for a funding arrangement ""that is affordable"," sensible and workable"". ""At the end of the day we are dealing with compensation for people who are terminally ill. We don't know exactly how many of them there will be", we don't know over what exact period they will fall ill," she said. However, the deal still has to receive the approval of Hardie's shareholders. Hardie, which currently makes more than 80% of its revenues in the US, was once Australia's biggest supplier of asbestos building materials. In 2001, the company set up a fund to compensate asbestos victims, but it later admitted the fund was running short of money. A decision by Hardie to move its headquarters to the Netherlands - while remaining a listed company in Australia - provoked a damaging public outcry. Victims groups accusing it of trying to escape its responsibilities by moving abroad, a charge the company denies. Australia's securities watchdog is currently investigating Hardie's former chief executive and former chief financial officer over allegations of misleading investors and the general public.

business 338.txt Police detain Chinese milk bosses Chines e police have detained three top executives at milk firm Yili, with reports suggesting that they are being investigated for embezzlement. Yili - full name Inner Mongolia Yili Industrial - confirmed its chairman, chief financial officer and securities representative were all in custody. The company, China's third-largest milk producer, is to hold an emergency meeting to debate the issue. A Yili spokesman said it may now move to oust chairman Zheng Junhuai. The spokesman did not say why the three had been detained by the police. The official Xinhua News Agency said the arrest was linked to alleged embezzlement. Yili has recently been the subject of intense media speculation over its financial operations. Executives are suspected of wrongly using 417m yuan (\$50.4m; £26m) of company funds to support a management buyout back in July 2003. Yili's shares were suspended on Tuesday, having fallen by 10% on Monday. The company and its two main rivals - market leader Mengniu Dairy and second place Bright Dairy - dominate a Chinese milk market that has grown by almost 30% over the past five years. Analysts wondered if the scandal at Yili - the latest to befall Chinese companies this year - could be followed by further revelations of corporate wrongdoing. Investors wonder if Yili's scandal", one of a slew to be uncovered this year, is n't just the tip of the iceberg," said Chen Huiqin, an analyst at Huatai Securities.

business 339.txt India's Deccan seals \$1.8bn deal Air Deccan has ordered 30 Airbus A320 planes in a \$1.8bn (£931m) deal as India's first low-cost airline expands in the fast-growing domestic market. Air Deccan was set up last year and wants to lure travellers away from the railway network and pricier rivals. The potential of the Indian market has attracted attention at home and abroad. Beer magnate Vijay Mallya recently set up Kingfisher Airlines,

while UK entrepreneur Richard Branson has said he is keen to start a local operation. The country has a population of more than a billion people and many observers feel that it is underserved by airlines. Recently however, the booming economy has boosted personal spending power and helped swell the middle classes and the corporate sector. India's government has given its backing to cheaper and more accessible air travel. The days of flying being a symbol of only maharajas or the rich are over", "the minister for civil aviation Praful Patel said earlier. Infrastructure is being built to handle the expected increase in demand and on Tuesday, Agence France Presse reported that a group led by Germany's Siemens won the contract to build a private airport near Bangalore. India's airports authority and the state government will own 13% each of the finished transport hub. For its part, Air Deccan, set up by army officer and silk farmer Gorur Gopinath, plans to increase its fleet to 60 aircraft within five years. To help finance the expansion the company may sell a 25% stake to an investor for about \$50m. When it was set up the firm offered tickets that were 50% cheaper than other Indian airlines. It said it was basing its business model on European firms such as Ireland's Ryanair.

business 340.txt Venezuela and China sign oil deal Venezuela president Hugo Chavez has offered China wide-ranging access to the country's oil reserves. The offer, made as part of a trade deal between the two countries, will allow China to operate oil fields in Venezuela and invest in new refineries. Venezuela has also offered to supply 120,000 barrels of fuel oil a month to China. Venezuela - the world's fifth largest oil exporter - sells about 60% of its output to the United States. Mr Chavez's administration, which has a strained relationship with the US, is trying to diversify sales to reduce its dependence on its largest export market. China's quick-growing economy's need for oil has contributed to record-high oil prices this year, along with political unrest in the Middle East and supply bottlenecks. Oil prices are finishing the year roughly 30% higher than they were in January 2004. In 2004, according to forecasts from the Ministry of Commerce, China's oil imports will be 110m tons, up 21% on the previous year. China has been a net importer of oil since the mid 1990's with more than a third of the oil and gas it consumes coming from abroad. A lack of sufficient domestic production and the need to lessen its dependence on imports from the Middle East has meant that China is looking to invest in other potential markets such as Latin America. Mr Chavez, who is visiting China, said his country would put its many of its oil facilities at the disposal of China. Chinese firms would be allowed to operate 15 mature oil fields in the east of Venezuela, which could produce more than one billion barrels, he confirmed. The two countries will also continue a joint venture agreement to produce stocks of the boiler fuel orimulsion. Mr Chavez has also invited Chinese firms to bid for gas exploration contracts which his government will offer next year in the western Gulf of Venezuela. The two countries also signed a number of other agreements covering other industries including mining.

business 341.txt Jarvis sells Tube stake to Spain Shares in engineering group Jarvis have soared more than 16% on news that it is offloading its stake in London underground consortium Tube Lines. The sale of the 33% stake to Spain's Ferrovial for £146m (\$281m) is a lifeline to Jarvis, which was weighed down by debts of more than £230m. The company recently warned it could go under if it did not secure a refinancing deal by mid-January 2005. But now its banks have agreed to extend its credit facilities until March 2006. The company also said it had agreed terms over the completion of 14 of its biggest construction projects under the government's Private Finance Initiative (PFI). Jarvis wants to scale back the division, which has proved too costly and has been blamed for many of its problems. Instead, it plans to focus on UK rail renew

al, roads and plant hire work. Madrid-based Ferrovial already holds a 33% stake in Tube Lines, which maintains the Jubilee, Northern and Piccadilly lines. The Spanish group has been keen to snap up more UK infrastructure assets, having bought Amey in 2003. Jarvis said the sale, which raked in more than the £100m analysts had expected, would substantially "enhance its financial position. ""I am now confident that we can now move forward in 2005 towards rebuilding Jarvis and return it to growth as a profitable business," said chief executive Alan Lovell. Shares in Jarvis were up more than 16% to 18 pence by the close of trade on Friday.

business 342.txt Honda wins China copyright ruling Japan's Honda has won a copyright case in Beijing, further evidence that China is taking a tougher line on protecting intellectual property rights. A court ruled that Chongqing Lifan Industry Group must stop selling Honda brand motorbikes and said it must pay 1.47m yuan (\$177,600) in compensation. Internationally recognized regulation is now a key part of China's plans for developing its economy, analysts said. Beijing also has been threatened with sanctions if it fails to clamp down. Chinese firms copy products ranging from computer software and spark plugs to baby milk and compact discs. Despite the fact that product piracy is a major problem, foreign companies have only occasionally won cases and the compensation awarded has usually been small. Still, recent rulings and announcements will have boosted optimism that attitudes are changing. Earlier this week China said that in future it will punish violators of intellectual property rights with up to seven years in jail. And on Tuesday, Paws Incorporated - the owner of the rights to Garfield the cat - won a court battle against a publishing house that violated its copyright. Other firms that have taken legal action in China, with varying degrees of success, include Yamaha, General Motors and Toyota. The problem of piracy is not limited to China, however, and the potential for profit is huge. The European Union estimates that the global trade in pirated wares is worth more than 200bn euros a year (£140bn; \$258bn), or about 5% of total world trade. And it is growing. Between 1998 and 2002, the number of counterfeit or pirated goods intercepted at the EU's external borders increased by more than 800%, it said. Last month the EU said it will start monitoring China, Ukraine and Russia to ensure they are going after pirated goods. Other countries on the EU's hit list include Thailand, Brazil, South Korea and Indonesia. Any countries that are not making enough of an effort could be dragged to the World Trade Organisation (WTO), a step that could trigger economic sanctions, the EU warned.

business 343.txt Air Jamaica back in state control The Jamaican government is regaining control of Air Jamaica in an bid to help the ailing company out of its financial difficulties. The firm has failed to make money since the state sold a majority stake to hotel tycoon Gordon Stewart in 1994. In common with many carriers, Air Jamaica, with debts of \$560m (£291m), has been hit by high fuel costs and the impact of the 11 September attacks. The company will be restructured with the aim of finding a new buyer. The administration is committed to a viable national airline that will serve as a major catalyst for our economy", said Finance Minister Omar Davies. The 35-year-old airline transports about 55% of all passengers to the island and its pilots are reportedly among the best paid in the industry, with senior members of staff earning in excess of \$234,000 a year.

business 344.txt Battered dollar hits another low The dollar has fallen to a new record low against the euro after data fuelled fresh concerns about the US economy. The greenback hit \$1.3516 in thin New York trade, before rallying to \$1.3509. The dollar has weakened sharply since September when it traded about \$1.20, amid continuing worries over the levels of the US trad

e and budget deficits. Meanwhile, France's finance minister has said the world faced economic catastrophe"" unless the US worked with Europe and Asia on currency controls. Herve Gaymard said he would seek action on the issue at the next meeting of G7 countries in February. Ministers from European and Asian governments have recently called on the US to strengthen the dollar", " saying the excessively high value of the euro was starting to hurt their export-driven economies. ""It's absolutely essential that at the meeting of the G7 our American friends understand that we need coordinated management at the world level", " said Mr Gaymard. Thursday's new low for the dollar came after data was released showing year-on-year sales of new homes in the US had fallen 12% in November - with some analysts saying this could indicate problems ahead for consumer activity. Commerce Department data also showed consumer spending - which drives two thirds of the US economy - grew just 0.2% last month. The figure was weaker than forecast - and fell short of the 0.8% rise in October. The official US policy is that it supports a strong dollar but many market observers believe it is happy to let the dollar fall because of the boost to its exporters. The US government has faced pressure from exporter organisations which have publicly stated the currency still has further to fall from abnormal and dangerous heights"" set in 2002. The US says it will let market forces determine the dollar's strength rather than intervene directly. Statements from President Bush in recent weeks highlighting his aim to cut the twin US deficits have prompted slight upturns in the currency. But while some observers said the quiet trade on Thursday had exacerbated small moves in the market", most agree the underlying trend remains downwards. The dollar has now fallen for a third consecutive year and analysts are forecasting a further, albeit less dramatic weakening," in 2005. ""I can see it finishing the year around \$1.35 and we can see that it's going to be a steady track upward for the euro/dollar in 2005", finishing the year around \$1.40," said Adrian Hughes, currency strategist with HSBC in London.

business 345.txt Quake's economic costs emerging Asian governments and international agencies are reeling at the potential economic devastation left by the Asian tsunami and floods. World Bank president James Wolfensohn has said his agency is only beginning to grasp the magnitude of the disaster"" and its economic impact. The tragedy has left at least 25",000 people dead, with Sri Lanka, Thailand, India and Indonesia worst hit. Some early estimates of reconstruction costs are starting to emerge. Millions have been left homeless, while businesses and infrastructure have been washed away. Economists believe several of the 10 countries hit by the giant waves could see a slowdown in growth. In Sri Lanka, some observers have said that as much as 1% of annual growth may be lost. For Thailand, that figure is much lower at 0.1%. Governments are expected to take steps, such as cutting taxes and increasing spending," to facilitate a recovery. ""With the enormous displacement of people...there will be a serious relaxation of fiscal policy", " Glenn Maguire, chief economist for the region at Societe Generale, told Agence France Presse. The economic impact of it will certainly be large", but it should not be enough to derail the momentum of the region in 2005," he said. First and foremost this is a human tragedy." India's economy", however, is less likely to slow because the areas hit are some of the least developed. The regional giant has enjoyed strong growth in 2004. But India now faces other problems, with aid workers under pressure to ensure a clean supply of water and sanitation to prevent an outbreak of disease. Thailand's Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra has estimated the destruction at 2 0bn baht (\$510m). Analysts said that figure is likely to rise and the country's tourist industry is likely to be hardest hit. Thailand's fishing and real estate sectors also will be affected by Sunday's 9.0 magnitude earthquake, which sent huge waves from Malaysia to Africa. Malaysia said as many as 1,"000 fishermen

will be affected and that damage to the industry will be ""significant""," Agence France Presse reported. Rapid rebuilding will be key to limiting the impact of the tragedy. ""In three months", we should rebuild 70% of the damage in the three worst hit provinces," said Juthamas Siriwan, governor of the Tourism Authority of Thailand. The outlook for Sri Lanka is less optimistic, with analysts predicting that the country's tourist industry will struggle to recover quickly. Tourism is a vital to many developing countries, providing jobs for 19 million people in the south east Asian region, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC).

business 346.txt Disaster claims 'less than \$10bn' Insure rs have sought to calm fears that they face huge losses after an earthquake and giant waves killed at least 38,000 people in southern Asia. Munich Re and Swiss Re, the world's two biggest reinsurers, have said exposure will be less than for other disasters. Rebuilding costs are likely to be cheaper than in developed countries, and many of those affected will not have insurance, analysts said. Swiss Re has said total claims are likely to be less than \$10bn (£5.17bn). Swiss Re believes that the cost would be substantial but that it is unlikely to be in double-digit billions, the Financial Times reported. Munich Re, the world's largest reinsurance company, said that its exposure is less than 100m euros (£7 0m; \$136m). At least 10 countries have been affected, with Sri Lanka, Indonesia, India and Thailand among the worst hit. The region's resorts and Western tourists are expected to be among the main claimants. Lloyds of London told the Financial Times it expected its exposure to be limited to holiday resorts", personal accident," travel insurance and marine risks"". A spokeswoman for Hanover Re", Europe's fifth-largest reinsurance firm," estimated tsunami-related damage claims would be in the low double-digit millions of euros. The company has paid out about 300 million euros (£281m; \$400m) to cover damage caused recently by four major hurricanes in the US. But insurers have not had long to assess the economic impact of the damage and reports of more casualties and destruction are still coming through. ""So many things are unclear", it is just too early to tell," said Serge Troeber, deputy head of Swiss Re's natural disasters department. You need very complicated processes to estimate damages. Unlike the hurricanes", "you can't just run a model." He anticipated that his own company's total claims would be less than those from the hurricanes", which the company put at \$640m. Allianz, a leading German insurer, said it did not know yet what its exposure would be. However," it said the tidal waves were unlikely to have a ""significant"" impact on its business. Zurich Financial said they could not yet assess the cost of the disaster. The impact on US insurance companies is not expected to be heavy", analysts said. Most US insurers have relatively little exposure to Asia and those that do," pass on a lot of the risk to reinsurance companies or special catastrophe funds. Insured damage could be a fraction of the ""billions of dollars worth of destruction in Sri Lanka", India, Thailand, Indonesia, the Maldives and Malaysia, said Prudential Equity Group insurance analyst Jay Gelb. US insurers are likely to have only minimal to no exposure. It's more likely the Bermuda-based reinsurance [companies] might have some exposure," said Paul Newsome, an insurance analyst at AG Edwards & Co. Many of the affected countries, such as Indonesia, Sri Lanka or the Maldives, do not usually buy insurance for these kinds of disasters, said a US-based insurance expert. Early estimates from the World Bank put the amount of aid needed for the worst affected countries including Sri Lanka, India, Indonesia and Thailand, at about \$5bn (£2.6bn), similar to the cash offered to Central America after Hurricane Mitch. Mitch killed about 10,000 people and caused damage of about \$10bn in 1998. But the cost of the tsunamis on the individuals involved is incalculable. We cannot fathom the cost of these poor societies and the nameless fishermen and f

ishing villages ... that have just been wiped out. Hundreds of thousands of livelihoods have gone", " said Jan Egeland, head of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Tourists cutting short their holidays in affected areas may suffer a financial impact too. The Association of British insurers warned that travel insurance does not normally cover cutting short a holiday. It said loss of possessions will usually be covered, but the Association stressed the importance of checking the wording of travel policies.

business 347.txt India-Pakistan peace boosts trade Calmer relations between India and Pakistan are paying economic dividends, with new figures showing bilateral trade up threefold in the summer. The value of trade in April-July rose to \$186.3m (£97m) from \$64.4m in the same period in 2003, the Indian Government said. Nonetheless, the figures represent less than 1% of India's overall exports. But business is expected to be boosted further from 2006 when the South Asian Free Trade Area Agreement starts. Both countries eased travel and other restrictions as part of the peace process aimed at ending nearly six decades of hostilities. Sugar, plastics, pharmaceutical products and tea are among the major exports from India to its neighbour, while firms in Pakistani have been selling fabrics, fruit and spices. If the positive trend continues", two-way trade could well cross half a billion dollars this fiscal year," India's federal commerce Minister Kamal Nath said. According to official data, the value of India's overall exports in the current fiscal year is expected to reach more than \$60bn, while in Pakistan's case it is set to hit more than \$12bn. Meanwhile, the Indian Government said the prospects for the country's booming economy remained very bright"" despite a ""temporary aberration"" this year. Its mid-year economic review forecasts growth of 6-6.5% in 2004", compared with 8.2% in 2003. Higher oil prices, the level of tax collections, and an unfavourable monsoon season affecting the farm sector had hurt the economy in April-September, it said.

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"business 348.txt US to probe airline travel chaos The US government is to investigate two airlines- US Airways and Delta Air Lines' Comair subsidiary - after travel chaos over the Christmas weekend. Staff calling in sick at US Airways and computer failures at Comair left 30",000 passengers stranded and 10,000 pieces of baggage undelivered. US Airways is in Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection for the second time in two years," and battling to cut costs. It is currently trying to negotiate pay cuts with flight and baggage staff. Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta said he was ""deeply concerned"" at the disruption to passengers", and ordered a thorough investigation. Comair's computer breakdown plunged its flight-crew scheduling system into disarray. Altogether, some 1,"100 flights were cancelled over the holiday long weekend. Mr Mineta said it was important to understand ""what happened"", why it happened and whether the carriers properly planned for the holiday travel period and responded appropriately to consumer needs in the aftermath"". Adding to the atmosphere of chaos were mountains of luggage left to pile up when a third of US Airways' baggage handling staff called in sick. There was also a shortage of US Airways flight attendants", with nearly a fifth saying they were too sick to work, leading to many flight cancellations. However," union officials denied there had been a deliberate ""sickout"". They said that many people have flu at this time of year and that the airline is chronically understaffed. US Airways ended up cancelling over 100 flights on Christmas Day", stranding passengers in as many as 119 airports. Ground crews at US Airways, the seventh-largest US airline, which is now in Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection," face a court-imposed pay cut next month. The airline needs to negotiate other paycuts if it is to find a route out o

f bankruptcy. It is looking for paycuts totalling \$800m. ""US Airways has a full-scale employee mutiny on its hands", " commented Michael Boyd, an industry consultant. Disruptions to flight schedules could discourage customers from flying with US Airways, reducing revenues. US Airways had to cancel approximately 65 flights on Thursday, 180 on Friday, 140 on Saturday, 43 on Sunday and 15 on Monday, said industry officials. The airline said it was embarrassed by the situation"" and ""deeply regrets any inconvenience caused to customers", " The probe will focus on the industry's compliance with a 1999 agreement aimed at improving the quality of passenger service that has so far allowed airlines to avoid congressionally-mandated standards. Analysts said the Christmas chaos cast doubt on US Airway's ability to emerge from bankruptcy - and was likely to worsen the finances of troubled Delta, parent of Comair. Comair deeply regrets the inconvenience to all of our customers caused by the severe winter storm in the Ohio River Valley during the busy holiday season", exacerbated by problems with the airline's crew scheduling system, causing additional flight delays and cancellations," the Delta subsidiary said in a statement.

business 349.txt S Korean lender faces liquidation Creditors of South Korea's top credit card firm have said they will put the company into liquidation if its ex-parent firm fails to back a bail-out. LG Card's creditors have given LG group until Wednesday to sign up to a \$1.1bn rescue package. The firm avoided bankruptcy thanks to a \$4.5bn bail-out in January 2004, which gave control to the creditors. LG Group has said any package should reflect the firm's new ownership, and it will not accept an unfair burden. At least seven million people in South Korea use LG Card's plastic for purchases. LG Card's creditors have threatened parent group LG Group with penalties if it fails to respond to their demands. Creditors would seek strong financial sanctions against LG Group if LG Card is liquidated", " said Yoo Ji-chang, governor of Korean Development Bank (KDB) - one of the card firm's major creditors. LG Group has said providing further help to the credit card issuer could hurt its corporate credibility and could spark shareholder lawsuits. It says it wants fair and reasonable guidelines"" on splitting the financial burden with the creditors", who now own 99.3% of LG Card. The creditors have asked the government to mediate to avoid any risk to the stability of financial markets," KDB said. Analysts believe a compromise is likely. ""LG Group knows the impact on consumer demand and the national economy from a liquidation of LG Card", " said Kim Yungmin, an equity strategist at Dongwon Investment Trust Management. LG Card almost collapsed in 2003 due to an increase in overdue credit card bills after the bursting of a credit bubble. The firm returned to profit in September 2004, but now needs a capital injection to avoid being delisted from the Korea Stock Exchange. The exchange can delist a company if its debt exceeds its assets for two years running. LG card's creditors fear that such a move would trigger massive debt redemption requests that could bankrupt the firm, which owes about \$12.05bn. Eventually", LG Group will have to participate, but they have been stalling to try to earn better concessions," said Mr Kim.

business 350.txt Dollar hits new low versus euro The US dollar has continued its record-breaking slide and has tumbled to a new low against the euro. Investors are betting that the European Central Bank (ECB) will not do anything to weaken the euro, while the US is thought to favour a declining dollar. The US is struggling with a ballooning trade deficit and analysts said one of the easiest ways to fund it was by allowing a depreciation of the dollar. They have predicted that the dollar is likely to fall even further. The US currency was trading at \$1.364 per euro at 1800 GMT on Monday. This compares with \$1.354 to the euro in late trading in New York on Friday, which was then a record low. The dollar has weakened sharply since September when it traded abo

ut \$1.20 against the euro. It has lost 7% this year, while against the Japanese yen it is down 3.2%. Traders said that thin trading levels had amplified Monday's move. It's not going to take much to push [the dollar] one way or the other," said Grant Wilson of Mellon Bank. Liquidity - a measure of the number of parties willing to trade in the market - was about half that of a normal working day, traders said.

business 351.txt Mild winter drives US oil down 6% US oil prices have fallen by 6%, driven down by forecasts of a mild winter in the densely populated northeast. Light crude oil futures fell \$2.86 to \$41.32 a barrel on the New York Mercantile Exchange (Nymex), and have now lost \$4 in five days. Nonetheless, US crude is still 30% more expensive than at the beginning of 2004, boosted by growing demand and bottlenecks at refineries. Traders ignored the possible effects of Asia's tidal waves on global supplies. Instead, the focus is now on US consumption, which is heavily influenced in the short term by the weather. With the revised milder temperatures... I'm more inclined to think we'll push lower and test the \$40-40.25 range", said John Brady of ABN AMRO. The market definitely feels to be on the defensive." Statistics released last week showed that stockpiles of oil products in the US had risen", an indication that severe supply disruptions may not arise this winter, barring any serious incident. Oil prices have broken records in 2004, topping \$50 a barrel at one point, driven up by a welter of worries about unrest in Iraq and Saudi Arabia, rising demand and supply bottlenecks. London's International Petroleum Exchange remained closed for the Christmas holiday.

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business 352.txt Share boost for feud-hit Reliance The board of Indian conglomerate Reliance has agreed a share buy-back", to counter the effects of a power struggle in the controlling family. The buy-back is a victory for chairman Mukesh Ambani, whose idea it was. His brother Anil, the vice-chairman," said had not been consulted and that the buy-back was ""completely inappropriate and unnecessary"". The board hopes the move will reverse a 13% fall in Reliance's shares since the feud became public last month. The company has been fractious since founder Dhirubhai Ambani died in 2002", leaving no will. "Today's round has gone to [Mukesh]", there is no doubt about it," said Nanik Rupani, president of the Indian Merchants Chamber, a Bombay-based traders' body. The company plans to buy back 52 million shares at 570 rupees (£6.80; \$13) apiece, a premium of more than 10% to its current market price.

business 353.txt Giant waves damage S Asia economy Governments, aid agencies, insurers and travel firms are among those counting the cost of the massive earthquake and waves that hammered southern Asia. The worst-hit areas are Sri Lanka, India, Indonesia and Thailand, with at least 23,000 people killed. Early estimates from the World Bank put the amount of aid needed at about \$5bn (£2.6bn), similar to the cash offered Central America after Hurricane Mitch. Mitch killed about 10,000 people and caused damage of about \$10bn in 1998. World Bank spokesman Damien Milverton told the Wall Street Journal that he expected an aid package of financing and debt relief. Tourism is a vital part of the economies of the stricken countries, providing jobs for 19 million people in the south east Asian region, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC). In the Maldives islands, in the Indian ocean, two-thirds of all jobs depend on tourism. But the damage covers fishing, farming and businesses too, with hundreds of thousands of buildings and small boats destroyed by the waves. International agencies have pledged their support; most say it is impossible to gauge the extent of the damage yet. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has promised rapid action to help the governments of the stricken countries cope

e. The IMF stands ready to do its part to assist these nations with appropriate support in their time of need", " said managing director Rodrigo Rato. Only Sri Lanka and Bangladesh currently receive IMF support, while Indonesia, the quake's epicentre, has recently graduated from IMF assistance. It is up to governments to decide if they want IMF help. Other agencies, such as the Asian Development Bank, have said that it is too early to comment on the amount of aid needed. There is no underestimating the size of the problem, however. The United Nations' emergency relief coordinator, Jan Egeland, said that this may be the worst national disaster in recent history because it is affecting so many heavily populated coastal areas... so many vulnerable communities. ""Many people will have [had] their livelihoods", " their whole future destroyed in a few seconds." He warned that ""the longer term effects may be as devastating as the tidal wave or the tsunami itself"" because of the risks of epidemics from polluted drinking water. Insurers are also struggling to assess the cost of the damage", " but several big players believe the final bill is likely to be less than the \$27 bn cost of the hurricanes that battered the US earlier this year. ""The region that's affected is very big so we have to check country-by-country what the situation is"", said Serge Troeber, deputy head of the natural disasters department at Swiss Re," the world's second biggest reinsurance firm. ""I should assume", however, that the overall dimension of insured damages is below the storm damages of the US," he said. Munich Re, the world's biggest reinsurer, said: This is primarily a human tragedy. It is too early for us to state what our financial burden will be." Allianz has said it sees no significant impact on its profitability. However", a low insurance bill may simply reflect the general poverty of much of the region," rather than the level of economic devastation for those who live there. The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies told the Reuters news agency that it was seeking \$6.5m for emergency aid. ""The biggest health challenges we face is the spread of waterborne diseases", particularly malaria and diarrhoea," the aid agency was quoted as saying. The European Union has said it will deliver 3m euros (£2.1m; \$4.1m) of aid, according to the Wall Street Journal. The EU's Humanitarian Aid Commissioner, Louis Michel, was quoted as saying that it was key to bring aid in those vital hours and days immediately after the disaster"". Other countries also are reported to have pledged cash", while the US State Department said it was examining what aid was needed in the region. Getting companies and business up and running also may play a vital role in helping communities recover from the weekend's events. Many of the worst-hit areas, such as Sri Lanka, Thailand's Phuket island and the Maldives, are popular tourist resorts that are key to local economies. December and January are two of the busiest months for the travel in southern Asia and the damage will be even more keenly felt as the industry was only just beginning to emerge from a post 9/11 slump. Growth has been rapid in Southeast Asia," with the World Tourism Organisation figures showing a 45% increase in tourist revenues in the region during the first 10 months of 2004. In southern Asia that expansion is 23%. ""India continues to post excellent results thanks to increased promotion and product development", but also to the upsurge in business travel driven by the rapid economic development of the country," the WTO said. Arrivals to other destinations such as... Maldives and Sri Lanka also thrived." In Thailand", tourism accounts for about 6% of the country's annual gross domestic product, or about \$8bn. In Singapore the figure is close to 5%. Tourism also brings in much needed foreign currency. In the short-term, however, travel companies are cancelling flights and trips. That has hit shares across Asia and Europe, with investors saying that earnings and economic growth are likely to slow.

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"/"business 354.txt Asia shares defy post-quake gloom Thail and has become the first of the 10 southern Asian nations battered by giant waves at the weekend to cut its economic forecast. Thailand's economy is now expected to grow by 5.7% in 2005", rather than 6% as forecast before tsunamis hit six tourist provinces. The full economic costs of the disaster remain unclear. In part, this is because of its scale, and because delivering aid and recovering the dead remain priorities. But Indonesian, Indian and Hong Kong stock markets reached record highs on Wednesday, suggesting that investors do not fear a major economic impact. The highs showed the gap in outlook between investors in large firms and individuals who have lost their livelihoods. Investors seemed to feel that some of the worst-affected areas - such as Aceh in Indonesia - were so under-developed that the tragedy would little impact on Asia's listed companies," according to analysts. ""Obviously with a lot of loss of life", a lot of time is needed to clean up the mess, bury the people and find the missing. But it's not necessarily a really big thing in the economic sense," said ABN Amro chief Asian strategist Eddie Wong. India's Bombay Stock Exchange inched slightly above its previous record close on Wednesday. Expectations of strong corporate earnings in 2005 drove the Indonesian stock exchange in Jakarta to a record high on Wednesday. In Hong Kong, the Hang Seng index may be benefiting in part from the potential for its listed property companies to gain from rebuilding contracts in the tsunami-affected regions of South East Asia. In Sri Lanka, some economists have said that as much as 1% of annual growth may be lost. Sri Lanka's stock market has fallen about 5% since the weekend, but it is still 40% higher than at the start of 2004. Thailand may lose 30bn baht (£398m; \$768m) in earnings from tourism over the next three months, according to tourism minister Sontaya Kunplome. In the affected provinces, he expects the loss of tourism revenue to be offset by government reconstruction spending. Thailand intends to spend a similar sum - around 30bn baht - on the rebuilding work. It will take until the fourth quarter of next year before tourist visitors in Phuket and five other provinces return to their normal level"," said Naris Chaiyasoot, director general at the ministry's fiscal policy office. In the Maldives the cost of reconstruction could wipe out economic growth, according to a government spokesman. Our nation is in peril here"," said Ahmed Shaheed, the chief government spokesman. He estimated the economic cost of the disaster at hundreds of millions of dollars. The Maldives has gross domestic product of \$660m. It won't be surprising if the cost exceeds our GDP", he said. In the last few years, we made great progress in our standard of living - the United Nations recognised this. Now we see this can disappear in a few days," a few minutes." Shaheed noted that investment in a single tourist resort - the economic mainstay - could run to \$40m. Between 10 and 12 of the 80-odd resorts have been severely damaged", and a similar number have suffered significant damage. However, many experts, including the World Bank, have pointed out that it is still difficult to assess the magnitude of the disaster and its likely economic impact.

"/"business 355.txt Israeli economy picking up pace Israel's economy is forecast to grow by 4.2% in 2004 as it continues to emerge from a three-year recession. The main driver of the faster-than-expected expansion has been exports", with tourism seeing a strong rebound, the statistical office said. The economy is benefiting from a quieter period in Palestinian-Israeli violence and a pick-up in global demand for technology products. The outlook is better than it has been for a number of years, analysts said. Many companies have focused on cost cutting and greater efficiency, while the government has bee

n trying to trim public spending and push through reforms. The growth figures come about despite a strike earlier this year by about 400,000 public sector worker which closed banks, hospitals, postal services and transport facilities. Growth did slow in the second half, but only slightly. Exports for the year rose by 14%, while tourist revenues were up by 30%. Imports gained by 13%, signalling that domestic demand has picked up again. In 2003, imports declined by 1.8%. In 2003, the economy expanded by 1.3%

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"business 356.txt S Korea spending boost to economy South Korea will boost state spending next year in an effort to create jobs and kick start its sputtering economy. It has earmarked 100 trillion won (\$96bn) for the first six months of 2005," 60% of its total annual budget. The government's main problems are ""slumping consumption and a contraction in the construction industry"". It aims to create 400",000 jobs and will focus on infrastructure and home building," as well as providing public firms with money to hire new workers. The government has set an economic growth rate target of 5% for next year and hinted that would be in danger unless it took action. ""Internal and external economic conditions are likely to remain unfavourable in 2005," the Finance and Economy Ministry said in a statement. It blamed continuing uncertainties such as fluctuating oil prices and foreign exchange rates and stagnant domestic demand that has shown few signs of a quick rebound"". In 2004", growth will be between 4.7% and 4.8%, the ministry said. Not everyone is convinced the plan will work. ""Our primary worry centres on the what we believe is the government's overly optimistic view that its front loading of the budget will be enough to turn the economy around"", consultancy 4Cast said in a report. The problem facing South Korea is that many consumers are reeling from the effects of a credit bubble that only recently burst. Millions of South Koreans are defaulting on their credit card bills, and the country's biggest card lender has been hovering on the verge of bankruptcy for months. As part of its spending plans, the government said it will ask firms to roll over mortgage loans that come due in the first half of 2005"" . It also pledged to look at ways of helping families on low incomes. The government voiced concern about the effect of redundancies in the building trade. ""Given the economic spill over and employment effect in the construction sector", a sharp downturn in the construction industry could have other adverse effects," the ministry said. As a result, South Korea will give private companies also will be given the chance to build schools, hospitals, houses and other public buildings. It also will look at real estate tax system. Other plans on the table include promoting new industries such as bio-technology and nano-technology, as well as offering increased support to small and medium sized businesses. The focus will be on job creation and economic recovery", given that unfavourable domestic and global conditions are likely to dog the Korean economy in 2005," the ministry said.

business 357.txt Soros group warns of Kazakh close The Open Society Institute (OSI), financed by billionaire George Soros, has accused Kazakhstan officials of trying to close down its local office. A demand for unpaid taxes and fines of \$600,000 (£425,000) is politically motivated, the OSI claimed, adding that it paid the money in October. The organisation has found itself in trouble after being accused of helping to topple Georgia's former president. It denies having any role, but offices have had to close across the region. The OSI shut its office in Moscow last year and has withdrawn from Uzbekistan and Belarus. In the Ukraine earlier this year, Mr Soros - who took on the Bank of England in the 1990s - and won, was pelted by protestors. This legal prosecution can be considered an attempt by the government to force Soros Foundation

n-Kazakhstan to cease its activities in Kazakhstan and shut its doors for Kazakh citizens and organisations", " the OSI said. The OSI aims to promote democratic and open, market-based societies. Since the break up of the Soviet Union in 1991, Kazakhstan has been dominated by its president Nursultan Abishuly Nazarbayev. He has powers for life, while insulting the president and officials has been made a criminal offence. The government controls the printing presses and most radio and TV transmission facilities. It operates the country's national radio and TV networks. Recent elections were criticised as flawed and the opposition claimed there was widespread vote rigging. Supporters, however, say he brings much needed stability to a region where Islamic militancy is on the rise. They also credit him with promoting inter-ethnic accord and pushing through harsh reforms.

business 358.txt Deutsche attacks Yukos case German investment bank Deutsche Bank has challenged the right of Yukos to claim bankruptcy protection in the US. In a court filing on Tuesday, it said the Russian oil giant has few Texas ties beyond bank accounts and a Texas-based finance chief. Deutsche Bank claimed Yukos had artificially manufactured a legal case to stop the sale of its main asset. It had wanted to help fund Gazprom's plans for a \$10bn (£5.18bn) bid for Yukos unit Yuganskneftegas. Deutsche Bank would have earned large fees from the deal, which could not be carried out because US chapter 11 bankruptcy rules made the Kremlin's auction of Yuganskneftegas on 19 December illegal under US law. But the US bankruptcy court judge in Texas granted Yukos an injunction that barred Gazprom and its lenders from taking part. Yuganskneftegas will ultimately end up with Gazprom. The winning bidder at the auction was a previously unknown firm, Baikal Finance Group, which was snapped up days later by Rosneft, a Russian oil firm that is in the process of merging with Gazprom. The effect of these transactions is to renationalise Yuganskneftegas. Deutsche Bank contends Yukos filed for bankruptcy earlier this month in Texas in a desperate and unsuccessful bid to stave off the 19 December auction of its top unit by the Russian government, which was in a tax dispute with Yukos. This blatant attempt to artificially manufacture a basis for jurisdiction constitutes cause to dismiss this case", " Deutsche Bank said in its court filing. Mike Lake, a spokesman for Yukos' lawyers, said on Tuesday that the company stands by its legal action. Yukos is confident of its right to US bankruptcy protection, and we are prepared to be back in court defending that position again", " he said. Yukos has said it intends to seek \$20bn in damages from the buyer of Yuganskneftegas once the sale finally goes through. In its filing, Deutsche Bank said Houston was a jurisdiction in which Yukos owns no real or personal property and conducts no business operations." " It also said the US bankruptcy court should not become involved in " "a tax dispute between the Federation and one of its corporate citizens" ". It suggested the European Court or an international arbitration tribunal were more appropriate jurisdictions for the legal fight between Russia and Yukos. The next hearing in the bankruptcy is expected on 6 January. Analysts believe the tax dispute between the Russian government and Yukos is partly driven by Russian president Vladimir Putin's hostility to the political ambitions of ex-Yukos boss Mikhail Khodorkovsky. Mr Khodorkovsky is in jail", and on trial for fraud and tax evasion.

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"business 359.txt GM in crunch talks on Fiat future Fiat will meet car giant General Motors (GM) on Tuesday in an attempt to reach agreement over the future of the Italian firm's loss-making auto group. Fiat claims that GM is legally obliged to buy the 90% of the car unit it does not already own; GM says the contract", signed in 2000, is no longer valid. Press reports ha

ve speculated that Fiat may be willing to accept a cash payment in return for dropping its claim. Both companies want to cut costs as the car industry adjusts to waning demand. The meeting between Fiat boss Sergio Marchionne and GM's Rick Wagoner is due to take place at 1330 GMT in Zurich, according to the Reuters news agency. Mr Marchionne is confident of his firm's legal position," saying in an interview with the Financial Times that GM's argument ""has no legs"". The agreement in question dates back to GM's decision to buy 20% of Fiat's auto division in 2000. At the time", it gave the Italian firm the right, via a 'put option', to sell the remaining stake to GM. In recent weeks, Fiat has reiterated its claims that this 'put' is still valid and legally binding. However, GM argues that a Fiat share sale made last year, which cut GM's holding to 10%, together with asset sales made by Fiat have terminated the agreement. Selling the Fiat's car-making unit may not prove so simple, analysts say," especially as it is a company that is so closely linked to Italy's industrial heritage. Political and public pressure may well push the two firms to reach a compromise. ""We are not expecting Fiat to exercise its put of the auto business against an unwilling GM at this point",," brokerage Merrill Lynch said in a note to investors, adding that any legal battle would be protracted and damaging to the business. As far as we are aware", the Agnelli family, which indirectly controls at least 30% of Fiat," has not given a firm public indication that it wants to sell the auto business. ""Fiat may be willing to cancel the 'put' in exchange for money.""  
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"business 360.txt Record year for Chilean copper Chile's copper industry has registered record earnings of \$14.2bn in 2004", the government Chilean Copper Commission (Cochilco) has reported. Strong demand from China's fast-growing economy and high prices have fuelled production," said Cochilco vice president Patricio Cartagena. He added that the boom has allowed the government to collect \$950m in taxes. Mr Cartagena said the industry expects to see investment worth \$10bn over the next three years. ""With these investments", clearly we are going to continue being the principle actor in the mining of copper. It's a consolidation of the industry with new projects and expansions that will support greater production." Australia's BHP Billiton - which operates La Escondida", the world's largest open pit copper mine - is planning to invest \$1.9bn between now and 2007, while state-owned Codelco will spend about \$1bn on various projects. Chile, the biggest copper producer in the world, is now analyzing ways of to keep prices stable at their current high levels, without killing off demand or leading customers to look for substitutes for copper. The copper price reached a 16-year high in October 2004. Production in Chile is expected rise 3.5% in 2005 to 5.5 million tonnes, said Mr Cartagena. Cochilco expects for 2005 a slight reduction on copper prices and forecasts export earnings will fall 10.7%.  
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"business 361.txt US consumer confidence up Consumers' confidence in the state of the US economy is at its highest for five months and they are optimistic about 2005", an influential survey says. The feel-good factor among US consumers rose in December for the first time since July according to new data. The Conference Board survey of 5,000 households pointed to renewed optimism about job creation and economic growth. US retailers have reported strong sales over the past 10 days after a slow start to the crucial festive season. According to figures also released on Tuesday, sales in shopping malls in the week to 25 December were 4.3% higher than in 2003 following a last minute rush. Wal-Mart, the largest US retailer," has said its December sales are expecte

d to be better than previously forecast because of strong post-Christmas sales. It is expecting annual sales growth of between 1% and 3% for the month. Consumer confidence figures are considered a key economic indicator because consumers' pending accounts for about two thirds of all economic activity in the United States. ""The continuing economic expansion", combined with job growth, has consumers ending this year on a high note," said Lynn Franco, director of the Conference Board's consumer research centre. And consumers' outlook suggests that the economy will continue to expand in the first half of next year." "The overall US economy has performed strongly in recent months", prompting the Federal Reserve to increase interest rates five times since June.

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"business 362.txt Cash gives way to flexible friend Spend  
ing on credit and debit cards has overtaken cash spending in the UK for the first time. The moment that plastic finally toppled cash happened at 10.38am on Wednesday", according to the Association for Payment Clearing Services (Apacs). A pacs chose school teacher Helen Carroll, from Portsmouth," to make the historic transaction. The switch over took place as she paid for her groceries in the supermarket chain Tesco's Cromwell Road branch. Mrs Carroll was born in the same year that plastic cards first appeared in the UK. ""I pay for most things with my debit card", with occasional purchases on one of my credit cards," said Mrs Carroll, who teaches at Peel Common Infants School in Gosport. Spending patterns for the year and estimates for December led Apacs to conclude that 10.38am was the time that plastic would finally rule the roost. Shoppers in the UK are expected to put £269bn on plastic cards during the whole of 2004, compared with £268bn paid with cash, Apacs said. When the first plastic cards appeared in the UK in June 1966, issued by Barclaycard, but only a handful of retailers accepted them and very few customers held them. But in less than 40 years", plastic has become our most popular way to pay, due to the added security and flexibility it offers, said Apacs spokeswoman Jemma Smith. The key driver has been the introduction of debit cards," which now account for two-thirds of plastic card transactions and are used by millions of us every day."

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"business 363.txt Go-ahead for Balkan oil pipeline Albania", Bulgaria and Macedonia has given the go ahead for the construction of a \$1.2bn oil pipeline that will pass through the Balkan peninsula. The project aims to allow alternative ports for the shipping of Russian and Caspian oil, that normally goes through Turkish ports. It aims to transport 750,000 daily barrels of oil. The pipeline will be built by the US-registered Albanian Macedonian Bulgarian Oil Corporation (AMBO). The 912km pipeline will run from the Bulgarian port of Burgas, over the Black Sea to the Albanian city of Vlore on the Adriatic coast, crossing Macedonia. The project was conceived in 1994 but it was delayed because of the lack of political support. By signing the agreement on Tuesday, the prime ministers of Bulgaria," Albania and Macedonia have overcome the problem. ""This is one of the most important infrastructure projects for regional", EU, and Euro-Atlantic integration for the western Balkans," said Albanian Prime Minister Fatos Nano. According to Pat Ferguson, President of AMBO, work on the pipeline will begin in 2005 and it is expected to be ready in three or four years. He added that the company had already raised about \$900m from the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) - a US development agency - the Eximbank and Credit Suisse First Boston, among others. The project has also the support of the European Union. Analysts have said that oil companies like Chevron Texaco, Exxon Mobil and British Petroleum would be happy to find alternative routes

utes to the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits.

business 364.txt Durex maker SSL awaits firm bid UK condo  
m maker SSL International has refused to comment on reports it may be subject t  
o a takeover early in 2005. A Financial Times report said business intelligenc  
e firm GPW was understood to be starting due diligence work on SSL Internationa  
l, for a corporate client. An spokesman for SSL, which makes the famous Durex b  
rand of condom, would not to comment on market speculation"". However the news  
sent shares in SSL", which also makes Scholl footwear, up more than 6%, or 16.7  
5 pence to 293.5p. The FT said most the high-profile firm that might woo SSL w  
as Anglo-Dutch household products group Reckitt Benckiser. Eighteen months ago  
Reckitt Benckiser was at the centre of a rumoured takeover bid for SSL - but th  
at came to nothing. Other firms that have been seen as would-be suitors include  
Kimberly-Clark, Johnson & Johnson, and private equity investors. Analysts have  
seen SSL as a takeover target for years. It sold off its surgical gloves and an  
tiseptics businesses for £173m to a management team in May. SSL was formed by a  
three-way merger between Seton Healthcare, footwear specialists Scholl and cond  
om-maker London International Group. Its other brands include Syndol analgesic,  
Meltus cough medicine, Sauber compression hosiery and deodorant products, and M  
ister Baby.

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"business 365.txt Nasdaq planning \$100m-share sale The ow  
ner of the technology-dominated Nasdaq stock index plans to sell shares to the  
public and list itself on the market it operates. According to a registration  
document filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission", Nasdaq Stock Marke  
t plans to raise \$100m (£52m) from the sale. Some observers see this as another  
step closer to a full public listing. However Nasdaq, an icon of the 1990s tech  
nology boom, recently poured cold water on those suggestions. The company firs  
t sold shares in private placements during 2000 and 2001. It technically went p  
ublic in 2002 when the stock started trading on the OTC Bulletin Board, which l  
ists equities that trade only occasionally. Nasdaq will not make money from the  
sale, only investors who bought shares in the private placings, the filing docu  
ments said. The Nasdaq is made up shares in technology firms and other companie  
s with high growth potential. It was the most potent symbol of the 1990s intern  
et and telecoms boom, nose-diving after the bubble burst. A recovery in the for  
tunes of tech giants such as Intel, and dot.com survivors such as Amazon has he  
lped revive its fortunes.

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"business 366.txt WMC says Xstrata bid is too low Austral  
ian mining firm WMC Resources has said it is worth up to 30% more than a hostil  
e 7.4bn Australian dollar (\$5.8bn; £3bn) bid by rival Xstrata. There is now pr  
essure on Swiss-based Xstrata to increase its takeover offer. A report from inv  
estment firm Grant Samuel in WMC defence documents values WMC shares at A\$7.17  
to A\$8.24", against Xstrata's bid of A\$6.35 a share. Analysts said the defence  
documents provided more details on WMC," and may trigger a possible rival bid.  
""If a bid is going to emerge it is probably likely in the next one to two week  
s," said Daiwa Securities analyst Mark Pervan. He said the valuation would put  
increased pressure on Xstrata to look at sweetening"" its offer. Marc Gonsalve  
s", an executive at Xstrata," said: ""We will review the information contained  
in the target's statement over the next week or so."" He added: ""While we will  
review the assumptions made by Grant Samuel in detail", we are extremely scepti  
cal of their conclusion," and suggest that WMC shareholders take extreme care i  
n presuming that these optimistic assumptions are capable of being realised.""

Last month Australia's competition watchdog said it would not oppose the purchase of WMC by Zurich and London-based Xstrata. On Tuesday", " WMC chairman Tommie Bergman said in a statement the directors believed it was in shareholders' best interest to reject the offer. He said WMC would pursue ""value-creating options"" provided by a portfolio of ""world class assets"". And WMC chief executive Andrew Michelmore claimed the Xstrata offer was aimed at creating value for Xstrata's shareholders", and was not being made for the benefit of WMC's shareholders. Grant Samuel said its valuation of WMC was based on lower average prices for nickel," copper and uranium than current market levels. ""Any longer term commodity price improvements would only improve our outlook", " Mr Michelmore said. In 2003 Xstrata acquired Australia's largest copper miner - MIM Holdings. WMC Resources is the world's third-largest producer of concentrated nickel, and also a miner of copper and uranium. It owns the Olympic Dam mine in South Australia, which contains about one-third of the world's known uranium resources and is also the world's fourth largest copper mine. Xstrata is a global mining giant with operations in Australia, South Africa, Spain, Germany, Argentina and the UK. Its core products are copper, coking coal, thermal coal, ferrochrome, vanadium and zinc. It also has growing businesses in gold, lead and silver.

business 367.txt Takeover offer for Sunderland FC Bob Murray, chairman of Sunderland FC, has launched a £1.5m (\$2.8m) bid for the club after buying broadcaster BSkyB's stake in the business. Mr Murray is already Sunderland's leading shareholder, holding a 37.6% stake, and now hopes to take full control of the Championship side. Mr Murray said the club would find it easier to attract more investment by having a single majority owner. Sunderland delisted its shares from the stock market in August. A lifetime Sunderland supporter and board director since 1984, Mr Murray agreed to buy BSkyB's 4.76% holding in the Wearside club on Tuesday - taking his stake to 42.3%. Under stock market rules, Mr Murray is required to make an offer for the remaining shares that he does not already own at the same price paid for the BSkyB holding of 31p a share. Should the offer be fully accepted, Mr Murray said he expected to pay a maximum of £1.53m for the remaining shares. He also stressed that fans who wanted to keep in touch with the club's financial affairs could retain a small number of shares, enabling them to attend annual meetings. The football sector is experiencing significant changes and uncertainty", Mr Murray said in a statement. The recent speculation surrounding Malcolm Glazer and Manchester United has shown the unsettling effect possible where there are a number of disparate interests," he added. I believe that this offer will strengthen the company and remove the potential for that type of uncertainty." " Sunderland were relegated from the Premiership in 2003 but are currently pushing for promotion. The club managed to reduce its losses last year from £20.6m to £1.2m after selling a host of leading players. However", the club's turnover dropped sharply from £42.5m to £28.5m over the same period, because of a fall in broadcast revenues. BSkyB bought its stake in Sunderland in 1999 as part of a five year media partnership deal. The deal expired last month.

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"business 368.txt Warning over US pensions deficit Taxpayers may have to bail out the US agency that protects workers' pension funds", leading economists have warned. With the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation (PBGC) some £23bn (£12m) in deficit, the Financial Economists Roundtable (FER) wants Congress to act. Instead of taxpayers having to pick up the bill, the FER wants Congressmen to change the PBGC's funding rules. The FER says firms should not have been allowed to reduce the insurance premiums they pay into the PBGC fund. The FER blames this on a 2004 law, in a statement signed by several member

s," who include Nobel economics laureate William Sharpe. It said it was ""dismayed"" at the situation and wants Congress to overturn the legislation. Cash-strapped US companies", including those in the airline, car-making and steel industries, had argued in favour of the 2004 rule change," claiming that funding the insurance premiums adequately would force them to have to cut jobs. ""With a little firmer hand on the pensions issues in the US", I think that Congress could avoid having to turn to the taxpayer and instead turn the obligations back onto the companies that deserve to pay them," said Professor Dennis Logue, dean of Price College of Business at the University of Oklahoma. The PBGC was founded in 1974 to protect workers' retirement rights. Its most recent action came last week when it took control of the pilots' pension scheme at United Airlines. With United battling bankruptcy, the carrier had wanted to use the money set aside for pensions to finance running costs. The company has an estimated \$2.9bn hole in its pilots' pension scheme, which the PBGC will now guarantee.

business 369.txt Beer giant swallows Russian firm Brewing giant Inbev has agreed to buy Alfa-Eco's stake in Sun Interbrew, Russia's second-largest brewer, for up to 259.7m euros (\$353.3m; £183.75m). Alfa-Eco, the venture capital arm of Russian conglomerate Alfa Group, has a one-fifth stake in Sun Interbrew. The deal gives Inbev, the world's biggest beermaker, near-total control over the Russian brewer. Inbev bought out another partner in August 2004. Inbev brands include Bass, Stella Artois, Hoegaarden and Staropramen. It employs 77,000 people, running operations in over 30 countries across the Americas, Europe and Asia Pacific. The Leuven-based brewery said it would own 97.3% of the voting shares and 98.8% of the non-voting shares of Sun Interbrew. The deal is expected to be completed in the first quarter of 2005. Inbev was formed in August 2004 when Belgium's Interbrew bought Brazilian brewer Ambev. Sun Interbrew, which employs 8,000 staff, owns breweries in eight Russian cities - Klin, Ivanovo, Saransk, Kursk, Volzhsky, Omsk, Perm and Novocheboksarsk. There are also three breweries in Ukraine, in the cities of Chernigov, Nikolaev and Kharkov.

business 370.txt US manufacturing expands US industrial production increased in December, according to the latest survey from the Institute for Supply Management (ISM). Its index of national manufacturing activity rose to 58.6 last month from 57.8 in November. A reading above 50 indicates a level of growth. The result for December was slightly better than analysts' expectations and the 19th consecutive expansion. The ISM said the growth was driven by a significant"" rise in the new orders. ""This completes a strong year for manufacturing based on the ISM data", said chairman of the ISM's survey committee. While there is continuing upward pressure on prices," the rate of increase is slowing and definitely trending in the right direction." The ISM's index of national manufacturing activity is compiled from monthly responses of purchasing executives at more than 400 industrial companies", ranging from textiles to chemicals to paper, and has now been above 50 since June 2003. Analysts expected December's figure to come in at 58.1. The ISM manufacturing index's main sister survey - the employment index - eased to 52.7 in December from 57.6 in November, while its ""prices paid"" index", measuring the cost to businesses of their inputs," also eased to 72.0 from 74.0. The ISM's ""new orders"" index rose to 67.4 from 61.5.

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"business 371.txt Singapore growth at 8.1% in 2004 Singap ore's economy grew by 8.1% in 2004", its best performance since 2000, figures from the trade ministry show. The advance, the second-fastest in Asia after China, was led by growth of 13.1% in the key manufacturing sector. However, a slow

er-than-expected fourth quarter points to more modest growth for the trade-driven economy in 2005 as global technology demand falls back. Slowdowns in the US and China could hit electronics exports, while the tsunami disaster may effect the service sector. Economic growth is set to halve in Singapore this year to between 3% and 5%. In the fourth quarter, the city state's gross domestic product (GDP) rose at an annual rate of 2.4%. That was up from the third quarter, when it fell 3.0%, " but was well below analyst forecasts. ""I am surprised at the weak fourth quarter number. The main drag came from electronics", " said Lian Chia Liang, economist at JP Morgan Chase. Singapore's economy had contracted over the summer, weighed down by soaring oil prices. The economy's poor performance in the July to September period followed four consecutive quarters of double-digit growth as Singapore bounced back strongly from the effects of the deadly Sars virus in 2003.

business 372.txt Madagascar completes currency switch Madagascar has completed the replacement of its Malagasy franc with a new currency, the ariary. From Monday, all prices and contracts will have to be quoted in the ariary, which was trading at 1,893 to the US dollar. The Malagasy franc, which lost almost half its value in 2004, is no longer legal tender but will remain exchangeable at banks until 2009. The phasing out of the franc, begun in July 2003, was intended to distance the country from its past under French colonial rule and address the problem of the large amount of counterfeit francs in circulation. It's above all a question of sovereignty", " Reuters quoted a central bank official as saying. It is symbolic of our independence from the old colonial ways. Since we left the French monetary zone in 1973 we should have our own currency with its own name." " The ariary was the name of a pre-colonial currency in the Indian Ocean island state.

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"business 373.txt Quiksilver moves for Rossignol Shares of Skis Rossignol", the world's largest ski-maker, have jumped as much as 15% on speculation that it will be bought by US surfwear firm Quiksilver. The owners of Rossignol, the Boix-Vives family, are said to be considering an offer from Quiksilver. Analysts believe other sporting goods companies may now take a closer look at Rossignol, prompting an auction and pushing the sale price higher. Nike and K2 have previously been mentioned as possible suitors. Rossignol shares touched 17.70 euros, before falling back to trade 7.8% higher at 16.60 euros. European sporting goods companies have seen foreign revenues squeezed by a slump in the value of the US dollar, making a takeover more attractive, analysts said. Companies such as Quiksilver would be able to cut costs by selling Rossignol skis through their shops, they added. The Boix-Vives family is thought to have spent the past couple of years sounding out possible suitors for Rossignol, which also makes golf equipment, snowboards and sports clothing.

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"business 374.txt Dollar hovers around record lows The US dollar hovered close to record lows against the euro on Friday as concern grows about the size of the US budget deficit. Analysts predict that the dollar will remain weak in 2005 as investors worry about the state of the US economy. The Bush administration's apparent unwillingness to intervene to support the dollar has caused further concern. However", trading has been volatile over the past week because of technical and automated trading and light demand. This has amplified reactions to news, analysts said, adding that they expect markets to become less jumpy in January. The dollar was trading at \$1.3652 versus the euro on Friday morning after hitting a fresh record low of \$1.3667 on Thursday. One dol

lar bought 102.55 yen. Disappointing business figures from Chicago triggered the US currency's weakness on Thursday. The National Association of Purchasing Management-Chicago said its manufacturing index dropped to 61.2, "a bigger fall than expected. ""There are no dollar buyers now", especially after the Chicago data yesterday," said ABN Amro's Paul Mackel. At the same time, German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi voiced concerns about the strength of the euro. Mr Berlusconi said the euro's strength was absolutely worrying" for Italian exports. Mr Schroeder said in a newspaper article that stability in foreign exchange markets required a correction of global economic imbalances. Investors will now look towards February's meeting of finance ministers from the G7 industrialised nations in London for clues as to whether central banks will combine forces to stem the dollar's decline.

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business 375.txt S Korean credit card firm rescued South Korea's largest credit card firm has averted liquidation following a one trillion won (\$960m; £499m) bail-out. LG Card had been threatened with collapse because of its huge debts but the firm's creditors and its former parent have stepped in to rescue it. A consortium of creditors and LG Group", a family owned conglomerate, have each put up \$480m to stabilise the firm. LG Card has seven million customers and its collapse would have sent shockwaves through the country's economy. The firm's creditors - which own 99% of LG Card - have been trying to agree a deal to secure its future for several weeks. They took control of the company in January when it avoided bankruptcy only through a \$4.5bn bail-out. They had threatened to delist the company, a move which would have triggered massive debt redemptions and forced the company into bankruptcy," unless agreement was reached on its future funding. ""LG Card will not need any more financial aid after this", Laah Chong-gyu, executive director of Korea Development Bank - one of the firm's creditors - said. The agreement will see some 12 trillion won of debt converted into equity. The purpose of the capital injection is to avoid delisting and the goal will be met", David Kim, an analyst at Sejong Securities, told Reuters. South Korea's consumer credit market has been slowly recovering from a crisis in 2002 when a credit bubble burst and millions of consumers fell behind on their debt repayments. LG Card returned to profit in September but needed further capital to avoid being thrown off the market. South Korea's stock exchange can delist any firm if its debt exceeds its assets two years running.

business 376.txt Dollar slides ahead of New Year The US dollar has hit a new record low against the euro and analysts predict that more declines are likely in 2005. Disappointing economic reports dented the currency, which had been rallying after European policy makers said they were worried about the euro's strength. Earlier on Thursday, the Japanese yen touched its lowest versus the euro on concerns about economic growth in Asia. Currency markets have been volatile over the past week because of technical and automated trading and light demand. This has amplified reactions, analysts said, adding that they expect markets to become less jumpy in January. People want to go into the weekend and the New Year positioned for a weaker buck", said Tim Mazanec, director of foreign exchange at Investors Bank and Trust. The dollar slid to a record \$1.3666 versus the euro on Thursday, before bouncing back to \$1.3636. Against the yen the dollar was trading down at \$103.05. The yen, meanwhile, dropped to 141.60 per euro in afternoon trading. It later strengthened to 140.55. Investors are concerned about the size of the US trade and budget deficits and are betting that George W Bush's administration will allow the dollar to weaken despite saying they favour a strong currency. Also playing on investors' minds are

mixed reports about the state of the US economy. On Thursday, disappointing business figures from Chicago brought a sudden end to a rally in the value of the dollar. The National Association of Purchasing Management-Chicago said its index dropped to 61.2, more than analysts had expected. German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi voiced concerns about the strength of the euro. Mr Berlusconi said the euro's strength was absolutely worrying"" for Italian exports. Mr Schroeder said in a newspaper article that stability in foreign exchange markets required a correction of global economic imbalances.

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"business 377.txt VW considers opening Indian plant Volks  
wagen is considering building a car factory in India", but said it had yet to make a final decision. The German giant said it was studying the possibility of opening an assembly plant in the country," but that it remained only a ""potent ial"" idea. Its comments came after the industry minister of India's Andhra Pradesh state said a team of VW officials were due to visit to discuss the plans. B. Satyanarayana said he expected VW to co-sign a memorandum of agreement. Several foreign carmakers", including Hyundai, Toyota, Suzuki and Ford, already have Indian production facilities to meet demand for automobiles in Asia's fourth-largest economy. VW's proposed plant would be set up in the port city of Visakhapatnam on India's eastern coast. An Andhra Pradesh official added that VW had already approved a factory site measuring 250 acres.

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"business 378.txt Ukraine strikes Turkmen gas deal Ukraine  
e has agreed to pay 30% more for natural gas supplied by Turkmenistan. The deal was sealed three days after Turkmenistan cut off gas supplies in a price dispute that threatened the Ukrainian economy. Supplies from Turkmenistan account for 45% of all natural gas imported by Ukraine", which has large coal deposits but no gas fields. Turkmenistan is also trying to strike a similar deal with Russia, which is not so dependent on its gas. Turkmen President Saparmurat Niyazov, who signed the contract, said the Turkmen side agreed to lower the price demanded by \$2 per 1,000 cubic metres, bringing it down to \$58. But the new price is still \$14 higher than the price fixed in the contract for 2004. The head of the Ukrainian state-owned Naftohaz company, Yury Boyko," said he was ""fully happy"" with the deal. On Friday", Turkmenistan acted on a threat and shut off gas supplies to Ukraine in attempt to bring the price dispute to a head. Mr Niyazov said that his government would insist on the same price for supplies to Russia. Analysts say they may not happen as Russia, the world's leading gas producer, needs the cheap Turkmen gas only to relieve its state-owned Gazprom from costly investment in the exploration of oil fields in Siberia. Turkmenistan is the second-largest gas producer in the world.

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"business 379.txt Reliance unit loses Anil Ambani Anil Ambani", the younger of the two brothers in charge of India's largest private company, has resigned from running its petrochemicals subsidiary. The move is likely to be seen as the latest twist in a feud between Mr Ambani and his brother Mukesh. Anil, 45, has stepped down as director and vice-chairman of Indian Petrochemicals Corporation (IPC). The company was not available for comment. IPC is 46%-owned by Reliance Industries which in turn is run by Mukesh. Mukesh has spoken of ownership issues between the two brothers, who took over control of the Reliance empire following the death of their father in July, 2002. Reliance's

operations have massive reach, covering textiles, telecommunications, petrochemicals, petroleum refining and marketing, as well as oil and gas exploration, insurance and financial services. The brothers' spat has hogged headlines in India during recent weeks, despite a denial from the family that there was anything wrong. Speculation has been rife about what has triggered the stand-off, with some observers blaming Anil's political ambitions, others the heavy investment by Mukesh and Reliance in a mobile phone venture. Shares of IPC dipped on the news in Mumbai, but recovered to trade almost 6% higher. Reliance shares added 1.7%, while Reliance Energy, headed by Anil, jumped 7%.

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"business 380.txt India opens skies to competition India will allow domestic commercial airlines to fly long haul international routes", a move it hopes will stoke competition and drive down prices. However, only state controlled carriers will be able to fly the lucrative Gulf routes, to countries such as Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, for at least three years. Jet Airways and Air Sahara are the two companies that will benefit initially. India is looking to develop its airline industry as booming economic growth drives demand for travel. Monica Chadha, BBC Delhi reporter, said air travel in India had increased by almost 20% from the previous year and was expected to rise even further. Infrastructure development is lagging demand, however," and will have to improve. ""Most international airports in the country are shabby and ill-equipped to handle heavy air traffic", Ms Chada said, adding that while the Civil Aviation minister has promised to modernise and privatise airports little progress has been made. Steps have been taken to move things forward and the government recently changed legislation that limited foreign investment in domestic airlines. It raised the maximum stake holding allowed to 49% from 40%. Local press, meanwhile, have reported that the US and India will start negotiations about adding more routes in January. Jet Airways is India's premier private domestic carrier; Air Sahara is ranked third in the category.

business 381.txt Oil rebounds from weather effect Oil prices recovered in Asian trade on Tuesday, after falling in New York on milder winter weather across the US. With winter temperatures staying relatively high in the northern US, a barrel of light crude ended Monday down \$1.33 to \$42.12. However crude prices have rebounded in Asia, rising to \$42.30 a barrel for February delivery. In London, trading of Brent crude was suspended for a public holiday, but the price fell to \$39.20 in the Far East. With milder temperatures expected to continue in the northern parts of the US over the next few days at least, analysts have said the price of oil may fall further - even if the decline was only temporary. Weather has been the Achilles' heel of this market", said ABN AMRO analyst John Brady. But it is winter in the northeast. Eventually we'll get another cold blast." "Despite a fall of more than \$12 a barrel from the record highs reached in late October", the price of crude oil remains almost 30% higher than year-ago levels. Prices rose last week after militant attacks in Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia," briefly renewed fears that the supply chain might be broken in the world's leading crude exporter. ""The market was panicked but fears essentially evaporated... since there was no follow-up", said Deborah White, senior economist for energy at SG Securities in Paris.

business 382.txt Ban on forced retirement under 65 Employers will no longer be able to force workers to retire before 65, unless they can justify it. The government has announced that firms will be barred from 2006 from imposing arbitrary retirement ages. Under new European age discrimination rules, a default retirement age of 65 will be introduced. Workers will be permitted to request staying on beyond this compulsory retirement age, although empl

oyers will have the right to refuse. Trade and Industry Secretary Patricia Hewitt said people would not be forced to work longer than they wanted, saying the default age was not a statutory, compulsory retirement age. She said employers would be free to continue employing people for as long as they were competent. Under age discrimination proposals from the Department of Trade and Industry last year workers were to be allowed to work on till 70 if they wished. Business leaders had opposed the plan as they said it would be too costly and cumbersome. The British Chambers of Commerce welcomed the latest proposal. This move today is the best of both worlds", "it said. Employers have the ability to define the end point of the employer-employee relationship and employees have flexibility with a right to request to work past the age of 65." "But Age Concern said imposing a retirement age of 65 was ""cowardly"" and a ""complete u-turn""." "This makes a mockery of the Government's so-called commitment to outlawing ageism", leaving the incoming age discrimination law to unravel," said Gordon Lishman, director general of Age Concern England . It is now inevitable that older people will mount legal challenges to the decision using European law." "The decision will have no impact on the age at which workers can collect their state pension", the government has said.

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"business 383.txt Fed warns of more US rate rises The US looks set for a continued boost to interest rates in 2005", according to the Federal Reserve. Minutes of the December meeting which pushed rates up to 2.25% showed that policy-makers at the Fed are worried about accelerating inflation. The clear signal pushed the dollar up to \$1.3270 to the euro by 0400 GMT on Wednesday," but depressed US shares. ""The markets are starting to fear a more aggressive Fed in 2005", said Richard Yamarone of Argus Research. The Dow Jones index dropped almost 100 points on Tuesday, with the Nasdaq also falling as key tech stocks were hit by broker downgrades. The dollar also gained ground against sterling on Tuesday, reaching \$1.8832 to the pound before slipping slightly on Wednesday morning. The release of the minutes just three weeks after the 14 December meeting was much faster than usual, indicating the Fed wants to keep markets more apprised of its thinking. This, too, is being taken in some quarters as a sign of aggressive moves on interest rates to come. The key Fed funds rate has risen 1.25 percentage points during 2004 from the 46-year low of 1% reached not long after the 9/11 attacks in 2001. That long trough might be contributing to signs of potentially excessive risk-taking in financial markets""", said the Federal Open Markets Committee (FOMC), which sets interest rates. The odds now favour a further boost to rates at the next meeting in early February, economists said. But the respite for the dollar, which spent late 2003 being pushed lower against other major currencies by worries about massive US trade and budget deficits," may be short-lived. ""You can't rule out a further correction... but we don't think it's a change in direction in the dollar", said Jason Daw at Merrill Lynch. Nothing fundamental has changed."

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"business 384.txt Weak end-of-year sales hit Next Next has said its annual profit will be £5m lower than previously expected because its end-of-year clearance sale has proved disappointing. ""Clearance rates in our end-of-season sale have been below our expectations", the company said. The High Street retailer said it now expected to report annual profits of between £415m and £425m (\$779m-798m). Next's shares fell more than 3% following the release of the trading statement. Next chief executive Simon Wolfson admitted that festive sales were below where we would expect a normal Christmas to be""", but

said sales should still top analyst expectations. Among areas where Next could have done better," Mr Wolfson said menswear ranges were ""a little bit too similar to the previous year"". Mr Wolfson also said that disappointing pre-Christmas sales were ""more to do with the fact that we went in with too much stock rather than (the fact that) demand wasn't there for the stock""". Next's like-for-like store sales in the five months from 3 August to 24 December were up 2.9% on a year earlier. This figure is for existing Next stores", which were unaffected by new Next store openings. Like-for-like sales growth at the 49 Next stores directly affected by new store openings in their locality was 0.5%. Overall sales across both its retail and mail order divisions were up 12.4%, " Next said. Its Next Directory mail order division saw sales rise 13.4% during the five-month period. ""In terms of all the worries about their trading pre-Christmas", it's a result," said Nick Bubb, an analyst at Evolution Securities. Profits of a round £420m would be well within the comfort zone." However", one dealer, who asked not to be named," told Reuters the seasonal sales performance was ""not what people had hoped for""". ""Christmas has been tough for the whole sector", and this is one of the best retailers," he said. Next's trading statement comes a day after House of Fraser and Woolworths disappointed investors with their figures.

business 385.txt Tate & Lyle boss bags top award Tate & Lyle's chief executive has been named European Businessman of the Year by a leading business magazine. Iain Ferguson was awarded the title by US publication Forbes for returning one of the UK's venerable manufacturers to the country's top 100 companies. The sugar group had been absent from the FTSE 100 for seven years until Mr Ferguson helped it return to growth. Tate's shares have leapt 55% this year", boosted by firming sugar prices and sales of its artificial sweeteners. "After years of a sagging stock price and a seven-year hiatus from the FTSE 100", one of Britain's venerable manufacturers has returned to the vaunted index," Forbes said. Mr Ferguson took the helm at the company in 2003, after spending most of his career at consumer goods giant Unilever. Tate & Lyle, which was an original member of the historic FT-30 index in 1935, operates more than 41 factories and 20 more additional production facilities in 28 countries. Previous winners of the Forbes award include Royal Bank of Scotland chief executive Fred Goodwin and former Vodafone boss Chris Gent.

business 386.txt Krispy Kreme shares hit Shares in Krispy Kreme Doughnuts have taken a dunking on Wall Street after the firm revealed it would have to restate its 2004 financial reports. The company warned the move would cut its profits by \$3.8m to \$4.9m (£2m to £2.6m) - or between 6.6% and 8.6%. Krispy Kreme said accounting errors had forced the move, adding that its board of directors made the decision to restate its accounts on 28 December. However, the company was unavailable to comment on why it had delayed the news. It also warned it might have to further restate results for 2004 and 2005. Shares in Krispy Kreme sank 14.87% - or \$1.83 - to close at \$10.48 on the news. The revelation comes just a month after the firm warned earnings would be cut by as much as 7.6% as a result of accounting errors. Krispy Kreme said the latest adjustments involved the way it accounted for the repurchase of three franchise restaurants. It added it would now be reviewing how it accounts for its leases. In a further blow, the firm said it had been advised that some of its franchise owners were not in compliance with their loan agreements, and warned it might need to borrow extra money if it was required to honour agreements on franchisee debts or operating leases. Krispy Kreme added that it had enough cash to fund its current operations, but it could not borrow any more under its existing agreements. There are many more questions than answers", especially given increased concerns regarding company liquidity," JP Morgan Securities analyst John Ivan

koe said in a research note on the firm. The announcement is the latest blow for the one-time darling of Wall Street, which has lost 80% of its stock value in just over a year. The firm is currently facing Securities and Exchange Commission investigation of its accounts. Shareholders have also launched lawsuits against the group, claiming it made false statements and inflated sales.

business 387.txt Germany nears 1990 jobless level German unemployment rose for the 11th consecutive month in December - making the year's average jobless total the highest since reunification. The seasonally adjusted jobless total rose a higher than expected 17,000 to 4.483 million, the Bundesbank said. Allowing for changes in calculating statistics, the average number of people out of work was the highest since 1990 - or a rate of 10.8%. Bad weather and a sluggish economy were blamed for the rise. The increase was due primarily to the onstart of winter""", labour office chief Frank-Juergen Weise said. Unadjusted, the figures showed unemployment rose 206,"900 to 4.64 million - with many sectors such as construction laying off workers amid bad weather. ""The three years of stagnation in the German economy came to an end in 2004. But the upturn is still not strong enough"" to boost the labour market", Mr Weise added. News of the rise came as government welfare reforms came into force, a move that is expected to see unemployment swell still further in coming months. Under the Hartz IV changes, the previous two tier system of benefits and support for the long term unemployed has been replaced with one flat-rate payout. In turn, that means more people will be classified as looking for work," driving official figures higher. ""Be prepared for a nasty figure for January 2005", about five million unemployed on a non-seasonally adjusted basis," warned HVB Group economist Andreas Rees. But he did add that the numbers should subside"" throughout the year", " to remain near 2004's level of 4.4 million jobless. ""I don't expect a strong and lasting turnaround until 2006", German Economy minister Wolfgang Clement said. By 2010, however, the Hartz IV reforms should help cut the average jobless rate to between 3% and 5%, he added. Europe's biggest economy has been too weak to create work as it struggles to shake off three years of economic stagnation. In recent months companies such as Adam Opel - the German arm of US carmaker General Motors - and retailer KarstadtQuelle have slashed jobs.

business 388.txt Venezuela identifies 'idle' farms Venezuela authorities have identified more than 500 farms, including 56 large estates, as idle as it continues with its controversial land reform policy. Under a 2001 land law, the government can tax or seize unused farm sites. A further 40,000 farms are yet to be inspected, the state's National Land Institute has told Associated Press. Vice president Jose Vicente Rangel has said farmers and ranchers with their titles in order and their lands productive have nothing to fear." Critics of the land reform policy claim president Hugo Chavez is trying to enforce a communist-style economic programme that ignores property rights and will damage the country. Land owners claim the National Land Institute has made mistakes in classifying lands as public or private. But the government - Venezuela's largest land owner - say they are proceeding cautiously to prevent conflicts. In a statement", Mr Rangel said the land reform is not against the constitution, which permits private property," while stressing the efforts are to "" vindicate social and economically"" years of inequality in the country. One property in conflict with the government is the El Charcote cattle ranch", run by Agroflora," a subsidiary of the UK food group Vestey. Agriculture minister Arnoldo Marquez told Reuters news agency the site's documents ""do not guarantee that this is a private land""". Administrators of the ranch", however, have complained that pro-Chavez squatters have taken over 80% of the property in the last four years," and the UK government has asked Venezuelan authorities to resolve the conflict. ""You should ask the company when they are going to put their pap

ers in order and hand over the land that is not theirs", " said Mr Marquez. business 389.txt Egypt to sell off state-owned bank The Egyptian government is reportedly planning to privatise one of the country's big public banks. An Investment Ministry official has told the Reuters news agency that the Bank of Alexandria will be sold sometime in 2005. The move is seen as evidence of a new commitment by the government to reduce the size of public sector. The official said the government has not yet decided whether the sale will take the form of a public flotation. The most important thing to decide now is the method - whether by selling shares to the public or to a strategic investor from abroad", " he said. Analysts say the public-sector banks have suited the government's monetary, credit and exchange policies. Nevertheless, the Egyptian government has spoken for years about privatising one of the big four state banks - Banque Misr, National Bank of Egypt, Banque du Caire and Bank of Alexandria. It had been expected one of the smallest of the four big public banks - Bank of Alexandria or Banque du Caire - would be sold first. The announcement reinforces the hopes of investors and international financial bodies for a revival of Egypt's privatisation programme. About 190 state-run companies and facilities were sold off from the early 1990s to 1997. The appointment of Mahmoud Mohieldin, a reform-minded technocrat, to the new post of investment minister in July was taken as a sign that more sell-offs were on the way. Both the IMF and World Bank have urged Egypt to remove obstacles to the development of the private sector which they say has a vital role to play in reducing poverty by expanding the economy.

business 390.txt Wal-Mart to pay \$14m in gun suit The world's largest retailer, Wal-Mart, has agreed to pay a total of \$14.5m (£7.74m) to settle a lawsuit over gun sales violations in California. The lawsuit alleged Wal-Mart committed thousands of gun sales violations in California between 2000 and 2003. The total payment includes \$5m in fines and more than \$4m to fund state compliance checks with gun laws and prevent ammunition sales to minors. Wal-Mart agreed to suspend firearms sales in its California stores in 2003. The alleged violations included the sale of guns to 23 people who were not allowed to possess them, and delivering 36 guns to customers who acquired them for people not allowed to own firearms. Although Wal-Mart has suspended firearms sales in the state, California attorney general Bill Lockyer said he wanted to be sure the giant supermarket chain would follow state rules in future. Wal-Mart's failure to comply with gun safety laws put the lives of all Californians at risk by placing guns in the hands of criminals and other prohibited persons", said Mr Lockyer. Although Wal-Mart has suspended gun sales in California," this settlement will ensure that it follows state law if it renews sales and will also provide valuable public education about the importance of gun safety." "The world's largest retailer has not yet decided whether to resume firearms sales in California", company spokesman Gus Whitcomb said.

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"business 391.txt Yukos heading back to US courts Russian oil and gas company Yukos is due in a US court on Thursday as it continues to fight for its survival. The firm is in the process of being broken up by Russian authorities in order to pay a \$27bn (£14bn) tax bill. Yukos filed for bankruptcy in the US", hoping to use international business law to halt the forced sale of its key oil production unit, Yuganskneftegas. The unit was however sold for \$9.4bn to state oil firm Rosneft but only after the state auction had been disrupted. Yukos lawyers now say the auction violated US bankruptcy law. The company and its main shareholders have vowed to go after any company that buys its assets, using all and every legal means. The company wants damages of \$20bn, cl

aiming Yuganskneftegas was sold at less than market value. Judge Letitia Clark will hear different motions, including one from Deutsche Bank to throw out the Chapter 11 bankruptcy filing. The German lender is one of six banks that were barred from providing financing to Gazprom, the Russian state-owned company that was expected to win the auction for Yuganskneftegas. Deutsche Bank, which is also an advisor to Gazprom, has called on the US court to overturn its decision to provide Yukos with bankruptcy protection. Lifting the injunction would remove the uncertainty that surrounds the court case and clarify Deutsche Bank's business position, analysts said. Analysts are not optimistic about Yukos' chances in court. Russian President Vladimir Putin and the country's legal authorities have repeatedly said that the US has no jurisdiction over Yukos and its legal wranglings. On top of that, the firm only has limited assets in the US. Yukos has won small victories, however," and is bullish about its chances in court.

"Do we have an ability to influence what happens? We think we do"," said Mike Lake, a Yukos spokesman. The litigation risks are real"," said Credit Suisse First Boston analyst Vadim Mitroshin. The dispute with the Russian authorities is partly driven by President Putin's clampdown on the political ambitions of ex-Yukos boss Mikhail Khodorkovsky. Mr Khodorkovsky is in jail on charges of fraud and tax evasion.

business 392.txt Deutsche Boerse set to 'woo' LSE Bosses of Deutsche Boerse and the London Stock Exchange are to meet amid talk that a takeover bid for the LSE will be raised to £1.5bn (\$2.9bn). Last month, the German exchange tabled a 530 pence-per-share offer for LSE, valuing it at £1.3bn. Paris-based Euronext, owner of Liffe in London, has also said it is interested in bidding for LSE. Euronext is due to hold talks with LSE this week and it is reported to be ready to raise £1.4bn to fund a bid. Euronext chief Jean-Francois Theodore is scheduled to meet his LSE counterpart Clara Furse on Friday. Deutsche Boerse chief Werner Seifert is meeting Ms Furse on Thursday, in the third meeting between the two exchanges since the bid approach in December. The LSE rejected Deutsche Boerse's proposed £1.3bn offer in December, saying it undervalued the business. But it agreed to leave the door open for talks to find out whether a significantly-improved proposal"" would be in the interests of LSE's shareholders and customers. In the meantime", Euronext, which combines the Paris, Amsterdam and Lisbon stock exchanges, also began talks with the LSE. In a statement on Thursday, Euronext said any offer was likely to be solely in cash," but added that: ""There can be no assurances at this stage that any offer will be made." A deal with either bidder would create the biggest stock market operator in Europe and the second biggest in the world after the New York Stock Exchange. According to the FT", in its latest meeting Deutsche Boerse will adopt a charm offensive to woo the London exchange. The newspaper said the German suitor will offer to manage a combined cash and equities market out of London and let Ms Furse take the helm. Other reports this week said the Deutsche Boerse might even consider selling its Luxembourg-based Clearstream unit - the clearing house that processes securities transactions. Its ownership of Clearstream was seen as the main stumbling block to a London-Frankfurt merger. LSE shareholders feared a Deutsche Boerse takeover would force them to use Clearstream, making it difficult for them to negotiate for lower transaction fees.

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"business 393.txt Laura Ashley chief stepping down Laura Ashley is parting company with its chief executive Ainum Mohd-Saad. The clothing and home furnishing retailer said Ms Mohd-Saad had resigned for personal reasons. Her departure will come into effect on 1 February and follows the departure of co-chief executive Rebecca Navarednam on 1 January. Ms Mohd-Saad is to

be replaced by Lillian Tan", presently a non-executive director of the company and head of a Malaysian retailer. In a statement issued on Thursday, Laura Ashley thanked Ms Mohd-Saad for her services to the company. Its shares were down 8.51% to 10.75p in late Thursday morning trading on the London Stock Exchange. Since 2002, Ms Tan has been managing director and chief executive of Metrojaya, one of the largest retail groups in Malaysia. Laura Ashley, which is due to issue its next trading statement in the next few weeks, has in recent months been hit by reports of poor sales. In October last year, it announced the closure of one of its two Welsh factories. In September, "the company had said that its half-year clothing sales had been ""below expectations"". In recent times", it has put renewed focus on home furnishings rather than clothing, but last September it reported that interim six month losses had risen from £1m to £1.2m, while sales had fallen from £138m to £118m. Laura Ashley, which floated on the London Stock Exchange for £200m (\$376m) in 1995, is majority-owned by Malaysian entrepreneur Dr Khoo Kay Peng. In 1996, its share price was more than 200p. It has long been reported that Dr Khoo intends to take the company private," but he has always denied this. ""Laura Ashley is a bit of a shrivelled husk of a company", said retail analyst Nick Bubb of Evolution Securities. It is all pretty odd with its Malaysian owners seemingly just shuffling the deckchairs." Laura Ashley was founded by its late namesake in Kent in 1955", before moving to Mid Wales in 1961 where it still has its main UK factory.

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"business 394.txt US Airways staff agree to pay cut A union representing 5",200 flight attendants at bankrupt US Airways have agreed to a new contract that cuts pay by nearly 10%. The deal will help the carrier, trying to survive by cutting costs by nearly \$1bn (£530m) a year, save about \$94m. More than two thirds of its 28,000 staff have now accepted wage cuts. But talks are still continuing with a union representing mechanics, baggage handlers and cleaners, which has so far failed to negotiate a new contract. The seventh largest carrier in the US sought bankruptcy protection for a second time in two years last September. It had been one of the quickest to deal with difficulties faced by the aviation industry after the 9/11 attacks in 2001. But it emerged from Chapter 11 bankruptcy in March 2003 to face competition from low-cost carriers and higher fuel costs. US Airways management has said it may need to start liquidating assets if it does not receive concessions from all staff by the middle of this month.

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"business 395.txt Delta cuts fares in survival plan Delta Air Lines is cutting domestic fares by as much as 50% as part of a plan to ensure its financial survival. Other US carriers", including United, have sought bankruptcy protection, amid high fuel costs and competition from discount carriers. Delta is restructuring in a bid to fight off insolvency. This latest move to boost business has prompted speculation other firms will be forced to match their fares, hurting revenues in the sector. Delta's new SimpliFares were trialled from August last year on tickets from Cincinnati, its second-largest hub. The airline says no one-way economy fare will now be priced higher than \$499 (£264), and no first-class fare will be priced higher than \$599. It is also eliminating a Saturday-night stay requirement on discount fares and will give further reductions to customers opting for non-refundable tickets, booking in advance and online. Delta, which lost \$646m in the three months to September, was forced to cut 6,900 jobs worldwide as part of its aim to slash \$5bn from its costs. In October, it reached a crucial agreement with pilots on pay and conditions and i

t has also issued new shares to staff in return for wage cuts. Airline shares closed lower on the announcement, with Delta," Continental and American Airlines all falling by more than 7%. ""We believe the whole airline industry will now have to move in this direction; this will likely hurt revenue in the short run but could be beneficial in the long run",," said analyst Ray Neidl at Calyon Securities.

business 396.txt Profits jump at China's top bank Industrial and Commercial Bank (ICBC), China's biggest lender, has seen an 18% jump in profits during 2004. The increase in earnings has allowed the firm to write off bad loans and pave the way for a state bailout and eventual stock-market listing. China is trying to clean up its banking system, which is weighed down by billions of dollars of unpaid loans. It has already pumped \$45bn (£24bn) into two of its largest banks, and has identified ICBC as a recipient of aid. ICBC's profits were 74.7bn yuan (\$9bn; £4.8bn) in 2004, the bank said in a statement. The percentage of non-performing loans dropped to 19.1%, down about 2 percentage points. ICBC was founded in 1984 and had total assets of 5.3 trillion yuan at the end of 2003. China committed to gradually opening up its banking sector when it joined the World Trade Organisation in 2002.

business 397.txt Green reports shun supply chain Nearly 20% more UK top 250 firms produced non-financial reports on social and environmental issues than last year. But of the 145 companies reporting, 76% didn't examine their supply chains, says the annual Directions survey. Green groups say putting pressure on supply chains is a major way companies can reduce their environmental impact. The survey is published by corporate social responsibility firm Context and branding firm SalterBaxter. Blake Lee-Harwood, campaigns director at Greenpeace in the UK, said: It's fairly meaningless to talk about your company's direction in terms of sustainability without having detailed knowledge of your supply chain. ""It's also important to get some kind of independent assessment of your reporting." Less than a quarter of companies (24%) get their corporate social responsibility (CSR) reports independently verified to provide assurances they are accurate and complete", says the survey. To date there are no set standards for non-financial reporting, although the Global Reporting Initiative, an independent pro-sustainability institution, is planning to establish some. The reports surveyed by Directions are published voluntarily. They are usually called corporate social responsibility (CSR) reports, sustainability reports, or social and environmental reports. Peter Knight, director of Context, says 24 UK top 250 companies reported for the first time this year and, in general, the quality of reports has improved. ""The corporate lexicon of homilies", "generalities and soft assurances - fluff - is on its way out. There are less pictures of smiling children and butterflies." The UK government will soon require all quoted companies to report their social and environmental risks in a chapter in their annual reports", called the Operating and Financial Review. The regulation is not expected until 2005 and the first reports under this scheme will not be published before 2006. The US seems to lag Europe in producing corporate social responsibility reports. The majority of European top 50 companies (44) publish them and only 27 of the US top 50.

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"business 398.txt Tsunami to cost Sri Lanka \$1.3bn Sri Lanka faces a \$1.3bn (£691m) bill in 2005 for reconstruction after the tsunami which killed more than 30",000 of its people, its central bank says. This estimate is preliminary, bank governor Sunil Mendis told reporters, and could rise in 2006. The island state is asking for about \$320m from the International Monetary Fund to help pay for relief, he said. The bank has 5bn rupees (\$50m; £27m) se

t aside to lend at a lower interest rate to those who lost property. According to Mr Mendis, half the IMF support could come from a freeze on debt repayments, which would free up resources immediately. The rest could come from a five-year emergency loan. Sri Lanka is hoping for a wider freeze from other creditors. The Paris Club of 19 creditors meets on 12 January to discuss a debt moratorium for the nations hit by the tsunami, which ravaged south and east Asia on 26 December. Some 150,000 people across the region are feared to be dead and millions have been left homeless and destitute. A full reckoning of the economic cost to Sri Lanka of the tsunami will not be clear for some time to come. But already it looks likely that growth in the first half of 2005 will slow, Mr Mendis told reporters, although he would not say by how much. One side-effect of the disaster has been that the value of the rupee has risen as foreign funds have flooded into the country. The currency has strengthened 4% since late December, coming close to 100 rupees to the US dollar for the first time in more than six months.

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"business 399.txt Indian oil firm eyes Yukos assets India's biggest oil exploration firm", Oil & Natural Gas Corp (ONGC), " says it is in talks to buy the former assets of troubled Russian crude producer Yukos. "We are in touch with the concerned Russian entities about the Yukos assets and other opportunities in Russia", said ONGC chairman Subir Raha. Local press had reported that ONGC was looking to buy 15% of Yukos' former key oil production unit for \$2bn (£1bn). Yukos is being broken up by Russian authorities to pay a massive tax bill. It was forced to sell its key production unit Yuganskneftegas (Yugansk) last month after being hit with a bill of \$27bn in unpaid taxes and fines. State-owned Rosneft now owns Yugansk and Russia has said it will turn the oil producer into a stand-alone firm. Indian oil minister Mani Shankar Aiyar discussed ONGC's plans during a trip to Moscow last year, and the topic came up again during Russian president Vladimir Putin's recent visit to New Delhi. It would make great sense for us to build on that", said Mr Aiyar. India's oil production has stagnated over recent years, and it is having to look abroad to secure future supplies. India imports about 70% of its total oil consumption. At the same time, India's economy is booming and the country's thirst for oil is so strong that it has helped pushed up the price of crude worldwide. India produces about 793,000 barrels of oil per day (bpd), little changed since the start of the 1990s, according to oil industry analysts Douglas-Westwood. Consumption, meanwhile, has jumped to 2.4 million bpd, compared with 474,000 bpd in 1973. For countries to develop", they have to have access to energy," said John Westwood, managing director of oil industry analysts Douglas-Westwood. India is a dramatically growing economy that must have access to oil". By buying into Yugansk", ONGC would be able to reduce its dependence on Gulf states for oil imports, Mr Westwood explained," especially as the chances of finding and exploiting resources within India are slim. "We forecast that Indian production will go into significant decline", Mr Westwood said. By 2020," production may only be at half of today's levels." ONGC", which is majority-owned by the Indian state, already has bought petroleum assets in countries including Vietnam, Sudan and Russia. The company is a partner with Rosneft in the Sakhalin-1 oil field off Russia's Siberian coast. ONGC is, however, not the only firm interested in Yugansk. Chinese crude company China National Petroleum has also been mentioned as a possible investor, while on Thursday, Italy refused to rule out an interest. ONGC's interest is the latest twist in a saga that has seen one of the world's biggest oil producers brought to its knees. The dispute is partly driven by President Putin's clampdown on the political ambitions of ex-Yukos boss Mikhail Khodorkovsky.

rkovsky, who is currently in jail on charges of fraud and tax evasion. Yukos has been battling the Russian authorities for more than a year and has filed for bankruptcy protection in the US. Analysts have questioned how long it can continue to survive without Yugansk. On Thursday, a US court said it will hear arguments for Yukos' bankruptcy claim to be thrown out on 16 February. Should that happen, Yukos will have little chance of clawing back its assets, analysts said.

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"business 400.txt Monsanto fined \$1.5m for bribery The US agrochemical giant Monsanto has agreed to pay a \$1.5m (£799,000) fine for bribing an Indonesian official. Monsanto admitted one of its employees paid the senior official two years ago in a bid to avoid environmental impact studies being conducted on its cotton. In addition to the penalty, Monsanto also agreed to three years' close monitoring of its business practices by the American authorities. It said it accepted full responsibility for what it called improper activities. A former senior manager at Monsanto directed an Indonesian consulting firm to give a \$50,000 bribe to a high-level official in Indonesia's environment ministry in 2002. The manager told the company to disguise an invoice for the bribe as ""consulting fees"". Monsanto was facing stiff opposition from activists and farmers who were campaigning against its plans to introduce genetically-modified cotton in Indonesia. Despite the bribe," the official did not authorise the waiving of the environmental study requirement. Monsanto also has admitted to paying bribes to a number of other high-ranking officials between 1997 and 2002. The chemicals-and-crops firm said it became aware of irregularities at a Jakarta-based subsidiary in 2001 and launched an internal investigation before informing the US Department of Justice and the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). Monsanto faced both criminal and civil charges from the Department of Justice and the SEC. ""Companies cannot bribe their way into favourable treatment by foreign officials,"" said Christopher Wray, assistant US attorney general. Monsanto has agreed to pay \$1m to the Department of Justice, adopt internal compliance measures, and co-operate with continuing civil and criminal investigations. It is also paying \$500,000 to the SEC to settle the bribe charge and other related violations. Monsanto said it accepted full responsibility for its employees' actions, adding that it had taken remedial actions to address the activities in Indonesia"" and had been ""fully co-operative"" throughout the investigative process.

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"business 401.txt Marsh executive in guilty plea An executive at US insurance firm Marsh & McLennan has pleaded guilty to criminal charges in connection with an ongoing fraud and bid-rigging probe. New York Attorney General Elliot Spitzer said senior vice president Robert Stearns had pleaded guilty to scheming to defraud. The offence carries a sentence of 16 months to four years in state prison. Mr Spitzer's office added Mr Stearns had also agreed to testify in future cases during the industry inquiry. ""We are saddened by the development," Marsh said in a statement. The company added it would continue to co-operate in the case, adding it was committed to resolving the company's legal issues and to serving our clients with the highest standards of transparency and ethics"". According to a statement from Mr Spitzer's office," the Marsh executive admitted he instructed insurance companies to submit non-competitive bids for insurance business between 2002 and 2004. Those bids were then ""conveyed to Marsh clients under false and fraudulent pretences"". Through the practice", Marsh was allowed to determine which insurers won business from clients,

and so control the insurance market, Mr Spitzer's office added. It also protected incumbent insurers when their business was up for renewal and helped Marsh to maximise its fees, a statement said. In one case," an email showed Mr Stearns had instructed a colleague to solicit a non-competitive - or ""B"" - quote from AIG that was ""higher in premium and more restrictive in coverage"" and so fixed the bids in a way that would support the present provider Chubb. The company is also still being examined by US stock market regulator the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). Late last month the SEC asked for information about transactions involving holders of 5% or more of the firm's shares.

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"business 402.txt US interest rate rise expected US interest rates are expected to rise for the fifth time since June following the US Federal Reserve's latest rate-setting meeting later on Tuesday. Borrowing costs are tipped to rise by a quarter of a percentage point to 2.25%. The move comes as a recovery in the US economy", the world's biggest, shows signs of robustness and sustainability. The dollar's record-breaking decline, meanwhile," has spooked markets and along with high oil prices has raised concerns about the pace of inflation. ""We are seeing evidence that inflation is moving higher", said Ken Kim, an analyst at Stone & McCarthy Research. It's not a risk", it's actually happening." Mr Kim added that borrowing costs could rise further. The Fed has said that it will move in a ""measured"" way to combat price growth and lift interest rates from their 40-year lows that were prompted by sluggish US and global growth. With the economic picture now looking more rosy", the Fed has implemented quarter percentage point rises in June, August, September and November. Although the US economy grew at an annual rate of 3.9% in the three months to September, analysts warn that Fed has to be careful not to move too aggressively and take the wind out of the recovery's sails. Earlier this month figures showed that job creation is still weak," while consumer confidence is subdued. ""I think the Fed feels it has a fair amount of flexibility", said David Berson, chief economist at Fannie Mae. While inflation has moved up", it hasn't moved up a lot." "If economic growth should subside... the Fed would feel it has the flexibility to pause in its tightening. ""But if economic growth picked up and caused core inflation to rise a little more quickly", I think the Fed would be prepared to tighten more quickly as well."

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"business 403.txt WorldCom bosses' \$54m payout Ten former directors at WorldCom have agreed to pay \$54m (£28.85m)", including \$18m from their own pockets, to settle a class action lawsuit, reports say. James Wareham, a lawyer representing one of the directors, told Reuters the 10 had agreed to pay those who lost billions when the firm collapsed. The remaining \$36m will be paid by the directors' insurers. But, a spokesman for the prosecutor, New York State Comptroller Alan Hevesi, said no formal agreement had been made. Corporate governance experts said that if the directors do dip into their own pockets for the settlement, it will set a new standard for the accountability of bosses," when the firms they oversee face problems. ""Directors very rarely pay", said Charles Elson, chairman of the Center for Corporate Governance at the University of Delaware. He added that the settlement sends a pretty strong shockwave through the director world"". A formal agreement on the payout is expected to be signed on Thursday in a US district court in Manhattan. Earlier", the New York Times had reported that the personal payments were required as part of any deal at the start of negotiations. The ten former outside directors are James Allen, Judith Areen, Carl Aycock, Max Bobbitt, Clifford Alexander, Stiles Ke

llett, Gordon Macklin, John Porter, Lawrence Tucker and the estate of John Sidgmore," who died last year. It has not yet been determined how much each director will have to pay. ""None of the 10 former directors was a direct participant in the accounting machinations of the WorldCom fraud",," said the Wall Street Journal (WSJ). Two other outside former directors, Bert Roberts and Francesco Galesi, remain defendants in the lawsuit, said the newspaper. According to the WSJ, which cites people familiar to the case, the settling directors are expected to deny wrongdoing and state they are settling the case to eliminate the uncertainties and expense of further litigations. The second-largest US long-distance telecoms operator filed for bankruptcy in 2002 when an \$11bn accounting scandal was unearthed. The company emerged from Chapter 11 protection last year and changed its name to MCI Inc. Former WorldCom chief executive Bernard Ebbers is to face trial this month on criminal charges that he oversaw the fraud.

business 404.txt Continental 'may run out of cash' Shares in Continental Airlines have tumbled after the firm warned it could run out of cash. In a filing to US regulators the airline warned of inadequate liquidity"" if it fails to reduce wage costs by \$500m by the end of February. Continental also said that", if it did not make any cuts," it expects to lose ""hundreds of millions of dollars"" in 2005 in current market conditions. Failure to make cutbacks may also push it to reduce its fleet",," the group said. Shares in the fifth biggest US carrier had fallen 6.87% on the news to \$10.44 by 1830 GMT. ""Without the reduction in wage and benefit costs and a reasonable prospect of future profitability", we believe that our ability to raise additional money through financings would be uncertain," Continental said in its filing to the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). Airlines have faced tough conditions in recent years, amid terrorism fears since the 11 September World Trade Centre attack in 2001. But despite passengers returning to the skies, record-high fuel costs and fare wars prompted by competition from low cost carriers have taken their toll. Houston-based Continental now has debt and pension payments of nearly \$984m which it must pay off this year. The company has been working to streamline its operations - and has managed to save \$1.1bn in costs without cutting jobs. Two weeks' ago the group also announced it would be able to shave a further \$48m a year from its costs with changes to wage and benefits for most of its US-based management and clerical staff.

business 405.txt House prices rebound says Halifax UK house prices increased by 1.1% in December, the first monthly rise since September, the Halifax has said. The UK's biggest mortgage lender said prices rose 15.1% over the whole of 2004, but by only 2.8% in the second half of the year. The average price of a house in the UK now stands at £162,086, Halifax said. The survey seems to fly in the face of recent evidence that the UK housing market has been slowing substantially in response to interest rate rises. Last week, the Nationwide said that house prices fell 0.2% in December, with annual inflation running at a three year low. On Tuesday, figures from the Bank of England showed that the number of mortgages approved in the UK has fallen to the lowest level for nearly a decade. New loans in November fell to 77,000, from 85,000 in October, the lowest rate since September 1995, the Bank of England said. Growth in unsecured lending, such as personal loans and credit cards, also slowed last month. Capital Economics, which has in the past predicted a sharp fall in UK house prices, branded Halifax's findings a temporary surprise", which would be reversed over the coming months. The month by month volatility of the Halifax house price data should not distract from the fact that there is a clear downward trend in house prices," a Capital Economics statement said. Experts believe five interest rate rises since November 2003 are cutting borrowers' appetite for debt. Despite recording a price rise in December, the Halifax survey concluded

that there was continuing signs of a genuine slowdown in the housing market." "Martin Ellis", Halifax chief economist, said that there was no need to revise the bank's prediction, made last month," that prices would fall by 2% in 2005. ""Sound housing market fundamentals will continue to underpin the market in 2005", ensuring that the market remains healthy and that house prices fall only slightly," Mr Ellis said. If the bank's prediction of a 2% price drop comes true, it will be the first annual fall in nine years. The bank said that the recent pattern of house prices rising the fastest in the north of England continued in December. In the North West and Yorkshire and the Humber, Halifax said prices rose by 3% and 1.2% in the two regions respectively during the month. At the other end of the scale, prices in the South East and London fell by 1.6% and 0.5% respectively. The biggest decline was seen in Wales where prices fell by 6.2%, an area that had experienced strong house price growth during most of 2004. Overall, Halifax said prices in the final quarter of 2004 were 0.1% higher than in the previous quarter. This was the smallest quarterly rise since the second quarter of 2000, the bank said. As a result, annual house price inflation dipped below 20% during the final few months of 2004.

business 406.txt Mixed Christmas for US retailers US retailers posted mixed results for December - with luxury retailers faring well while many others were forced to slash prices to lift sales. Upscale department store Nordstrom said same store sales were 9.3% higher than during the same period last year. Trendy youth labels also sold well, with sales jumping 28% at young women's clothing retailer Bebe Stores and 32.2% at American Eagle Outfitters. But Wal-Mart only saw its sales rise after it cut prices. The company saw a 3% rise in December sales, less than the 4.3% rise seen a year earlier. Customers at the world's biggest retailer are generally seen to be the most vulnerable to America's economic woes. Commentators claim many have cut back on spending amid uncertainty over job security, while low and middle-income Americans have reined in spending in the face of higher gasoline prices. Analysts said Wal-Mart faced a stand-off" with shoppers", stepping up its discounts as the festive season wore on, as consumers waited longer to get the best bargains. However, experts added that if prices had not been cut across the sector," Christmas sales - which account for nearly 23% of annual retail sales - would have been far worse. ""So far", we are faring better than expected, but the results are still split," Ken Perkins, an analyst at research firm RetailMetrics LLC, told Associated Press. Stores that have been struggling over the last couple of months appear to be continuing that trend. And for stores that have been doing well over the last several months", "December was a good month." "Overall", December sales are forecast to rise by 4.5% to \$220bn - less than the 5.1% increase seen a year earlier. One discount retailer to fare well in December was Costco Wholesale, which continued a recent run of upbeat results with a better-than-expected 8% jump in same store sales. However, the losers were many and varied. Home furnishings store Pier 1 Imports saw its same store sales sink by a larger-than-forecast 8.8% as it battled fierce competition. Leading electronics chain Best Buy, meanwhile, missed its sales target of a 3-5% rise in sales, turning in a 2.5% increase over the Christmas period. Accessory vendor Claire's Stores also suffered as an expected last minute shopping rush never materialised, leaving its same store sales 5% higher," compared to a 6% rise last year. Jeweller Zale also felt little Christmas cheer with December sales down 0.7% on the same month last year. ""This was not a good period for retailers or shoppers. We saw a dearth of exciting", new items," Kurt Barnard, president of industry forecaster Retail Consulting Group, said. However, one beneficiary of the desertion of the High Street is expected to be online stores. According to a survey by Goldman Sachs & Co, Harris Interactive and Nielsen/Net Ratings sales surged 25% over the

holiday season to \$23.2bn.

business 407.txt India's Deccan gets more planes Air Deccan has signed a deal to acquire 36 planes from Avions de Transport Regional (ATR). The value of the deal has not been revealed, because of a confidentiality clause in the agreement. But Air Deccan's managing director Gorur Gopinath has said the price agreed was less than the catalogue price of \$17.6m (£9.49m) per plane. Recently, India's first low-cost airline ordered 30 Airbus A320 planes for \$1.8bn. Under the agreement, Air Deccan will buy 15 new ATR 72-500 and lease another 15. ATR will also provide six second hand airplanes. In a statement, ATR has said deliveries of the aircraft will begin in 2005 and will continue over a five-year period. Mr Gopinath said the planes will connect regional Indian cities. After an evaluation of both ATR and Bombardier aircraft, "we have chosen the ATR aircraft as we find it most suitable for our operations and for the Indian market for short haul routes." Filippo Bagnato, ATR's chief executive, has said that his firm will also work with Air Deccan to create a training centre in Bangalore. The potential of the Indian budget market has attracted attention from businesses at home and abroad. Air Deccan has said it will base its business model on European firms such as Ireland's Ryanair. Beer magnate Vijay Mallya recently set up Kingfisher Airlines, while UK entrepreneur Richard Branson has said he is keen to start a local operation. India's government has given its backing to cheaper and more accessible air travel.

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business 408.txt South African car demand surges Car manufacturers with plants in South Africa, including BMW, General Motors, Toyota and Volkswagen, have seen a surge in demand during 2004. New vehicle sales jumped 22% to 449,603 from a year earlier, the National Association of Automobile Manufacturers of South Africa (NAAMSA) said. Strong economic growth and low interest rates have driven demand, and analysts expect the trend to continue. NAAMSA said it expects sales to top 500,000 in 2005. During 2004 "South Africa was one of the best performing markets internationally" for car sales, NAAMSA said. While domestic demand is set to continue to enjoy rapid growth, foreign sales could come under pressure, analysts said. The vehicle industry accounts for about 13% of South Africa's total exports. However, the world auto market has its problems and analysts warn that overcapacity and the strength of the rand could hit exports.

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business 409.txt UK bank seals South Korean deal UK-based bank Standard Chartered said it would spend \$3.3bn (£1.8bn) to buy one of South Korea's main retail banks. Standard Chartered said acquiring Korea First Bank (KFB) fulfilled a strategic objective of building a bigger presence in Asia's third largest economy. Its shares fell nearly 3% in London as the bank raised funds for the deal by selling new stocks worth £1bn (\$1.8bn), equal to 10% of its share capital. Standard Chartered expects about 16% of future group revenue to come from KFB. The South Korean bank will also make up 22% of the group's total assets. The move, a year after Citigroup beat Standard Chartered to buy Koram bank, would be the South Korean financial sector's biggest foreign takeover. This time around, Standard Chartered is thought to have beaten HSBC to the deal. KFB is South Korea's seventh largest bank, with 3 million retail customers, 6% of the country's banking market and an extensive branch network. The country's banking market is three times the size of Hong Kong's with annual revenues of \$44bn. Standard Chartered has its headquarters in London but does two thirds of its business in Asia, "We're comfor

table with the price paid...the key here has been speed and decisiveness in making sure that we won", said Standard Chartered chief executive Mervyn Davies at a London press conference. Standard Chartered said KFB was a well-managed," conservatively run bank with a highly skilled workforce"" and represented a ""significant acquisition in a growth market"". In London", Standard Chartered's sale of 118 million new shares to institutional investors pushed its share price down, and contributing to the FTSE 100's 0.3% decline. Standard Chartered's shares were 28 pence lower at 925p by midday. Some analysts also queried whether Standard Chartered had overpaid for KFB. The deal, which requires regulatory approval, is expected to be completed by April 2005 and to be earnings accretive in 2006, Standard Chartered said. Rival banking giant HSBC, which is based in London and Hong Kong," was also in the running. Standard Chartered is believed to have gained the initiative by putting together a bid during the Christmas break. ""They were able to move so quickly it caught HSBC by surprise", the Financial Times newspaper quoted an insider in the talks as saying. HSBC will now have to wait for the next South Korean bank in line to be sold off - thought likely to be Korea Exchange Bank, also currently in the hands of a US group. Standard Chartered said it was buying 100% of KFB, an agreement that would bring an end to the bank's complex dual ownership. The South Korean government owns 51.4% of KFB, while the remaining shareholding, and operational control, are in the hands of US private equity group Newbridge Capital. Newbridge bought its stake during the government's nationalisation of several banks in the wake of the 1997 Asia-wide currency crisis which crippled South Korea's financial institutions. South Korea's economy is expected to grow by 4.5% this year. Although often thought of an export-driven economy, South Korea's service sector has overtaken manufacturing in the last decade or so. Services now make up roughly 40% of the economy, and consumer spending and retail banking have become increasingly important. In the aftermath of the Asian financial crisis, the government encouraged the growth of consumer credit. Bad loan problems followed; LG Card, the country's biggest credit card provider, has been struggling to avoid bankruptcy for months, for instance. But analysts believe South Korea's financial services industry is still in its infancy, offering plenty of scope for new products. Standard Chartered sees the opportunity to create value by the introduction of more sophisticated banking products"". Since 1999", KFB has been restructured from a wholesale bank into a retail bank focused on mortgage lending, which makes up 45% of its loans.

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"business 410.txt DaimlerChrysler's 2004 sales rise US-German carmaker DaimlerChrysler has sold 2.1% more cars in 2004 than in the previous year", as solid Chrysler sales offset a weak showing for Mercedes. Sales totalled 3.9 million units worldwide during 2004, the company said at the Detroit Motor Show. A switch to new models hit luxury marque Mercedes-Benz, with sales down 3.1% at 1.06 million. Chrysler avoided the fate of US rivals Ford and General Motors, both of whom lost ground to Japanese firms. Its sales rose 3.5% to 2.7 million units. Similarly on the up was the Smart brand of compact cars, with the division's sales jumping by 21.1% during 2004 to 136,000. The future of the brand - which is controlled by the Mercedes group within DaimlerChrysler - remains in question, however. Smart has consistently lost money since it started trading in 1998," and new model launches are now ""on hold""", said Mercedes chief executive Eckhard Cordes. In Europe, the Smart will now go on sale through regular Mercedes dealerships as well as its own dealer network, Mr Cordes said.

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"/"....."business 411.txt Tsunami cost hits Jakarta shares The stock market in Jakarta has seen its biggest slide in a month", after the country doubled the likely cost of rebuilding from the Asian tsunami. The fall came as Indonesia said it expected debt repayments of up to 30 trillion rupiah (\$3.2bn; £1.7bn) to be frozen to help pay for the recovery. By Monday's close, the Jakarta Stock Exchange was down 2.1% at 1,011.15. Bar a slight dip at the New Year, The JSE had risen steadily by 4.7% since the tsunami hit on 26 December. Construction and property companies in particular have gained ground, although banks were among the main fallers on Monday. So far, more than 100,000 people are believed to have been killed in Indonesia, the country closest to the earthquake which triggered the great wave. On Friday, the government said its five-year estimate of rebuilding costs for Banda Aceh province - much of which was flattened by the quake and the tsunami - was 20 trillion rupiah (\$2.2bn; £1.1bn), twice what it had previously estimated. That cost could be defrayed by temporary debt relief. On Monday," Indonesian economy minister Aburizal Bakrie told reporters that the Paris Club group of creditor countries was expected to freeze 20-30 bn rupiah in payments due in 2005 and 2006. ""We hope we can resume the repayments at least from 2007", Mr Bakrie said. French finance minister Herve Gaymard said on Sunday that the Paris Club had already agreed to a moratorium on repayments for tsunami-hit countries ahead of its meeting on 12 January.

business 412.txt Iran budget seeks state sell-offs Iran's president, Mohammad Khatami, has unveiled a budget designed to expand public spending by 30% but loosen the Islamic republic's dependence on oil. The budget for the fiscal year starting on 21 March calls for the sell-off of 20% of the state's corporate holdings. Mr Khatami's second term as president ends on 1 August, making this his last budget. But opposition from members of parliament who have attacked previous privatisations could block his plans. Elections in May 2004 ousted many of Mr Khatami's supporters in parliament in favour of more hard-line religious conservatives. Late last year, they backed a law which would give parliament a veto over foreign investment. The ruling was a response to the involvement in telecoms and airport projects by Turkish companies, which hardliners accused of doing business with Israel. It came not long after the Expediency Council - Iran's ultimate decision-maker - blessed Mr Khatami's policy of selling stakes in sectors protected by the constitution such as energy, transport, telecoms and banking. Continued obstruction of foreign investment could get in the way not only of privatisation plans, but also of Mr Khatami's hope of modestly reducing the government's reliance on oil revenues. In an address to the Majlis, Mr Khatami predicted economic growth of 7.1% in 2005-6, up from 6.7% in the current year. He said he wanted to increase the 2005-6 budget to 1,546 trillion rials (\$175.6bn; £93.6bn) from the previous year's 1,070 trillion. Within that figure, taxation would rise to \$14.3bn, a rise of over 40% from what is expected from the current year. In contrast, oil revenues were expected to fall to \$14.1bn from \$16bn in the year to March 2005. Current government expenditure should come from tax revenues", Mr Khatami said. Oil revenues should be used for productive investment." Mr Khatami has already been blocked by parliament from reducing the subsidies on many products including bread and petrol", reducing his room to manoeuvre.

"/"....."business 413.txt EC calls truce in deficit battle The European Commission (EC) has called a truce in its battle with France and Germany over breaching deficit limits. The move came after France and Germany vowed to run their budget deficits below the EU cap in 2005 - for the first time in four

years. But", the EC did warn the two were under close scrutiny and it would act if their fiscal situations deteriorated. Under EU rules," member countries must keep their deficits below 3%. France and Germany will breach that this year. It will be the third year in a row that the two countries have broken the European Union's Stability and Growth Pact rules. The eurozone's two biggest economies left the pact in tatters in November 2003 when they persuaded fellow EU members to put the threat of penalties for deficit breaches on hold. The commission then took the pair to the European Court of Human Justice - which ruled EU countries could not put the pact ""in abeyance""", and confirmed the EC's right to launch ""excessive debt procedures"". After announcing its decision to erase France and Germany from its list of deficit rule breakers", the EU said that the time lag created by the ruling meant that 2005 should be the target year for the pair to bring their budget's below 3%. ""The commission concludes that the two countries appear to be on track to correct their excessive deficits by 2005", it said in a statement. The EU expects the German deficit to fall to fall to 2.9% of GDP next year from 3.9% this year, while France's is forecast to drop to 3% from an expected 3.7% this year. The forecasts are based on EC predictions of GDP growth of 1.5% in Germany next year and 2.2% in France. Berlin welcomed the decision, with finance minister Hans Eichel saying it showed that the EC recognised Germany's fiscal policy was on the right track even amid very difficult economic conditions"". However Paris was more subdued", with finance minister Herve Gaymard telling parliament: ""We must continue along this path of saving money." However", the move still had its critics," with the European People's Party (EPP) attacking the EC for backing down from punitive action. ""The Commission is buckling under the pressure from Germany and France", EPP spokesman Alexander Radwan said. ""The scary fact is that budget sinners", despite having repeatedly exceeded the 3% deficit limit," do not have to fear any sanctions." Despite the commission delivering its decision on the two biggest eurozone economies", it refused to comment on similar action against Greece which has also broken the 3% deficit ceiling. Monetary Affairs Commissioner Joaquin Almunia said that it was a matter for next week.

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"business 414.txt Enron bosses in \$168m payout Eighteen former Enron directors have agreed a \$168m (£89m) settlement deal in a shareholder lawsuit over the collapse of the energy firm. Leading plaintiff", the University of California, announced the news, adding that 10 of the former directors will pay \$13m from their own pockets. The settlement will be put to the courts for approval next week. Enron went bankrupt in 2001 after it emerged it had hidden hundreds of millions of dollars in debt. Before its collapse," the firm was the seventh biggest public US company by revenue. Its demise sent shockwaves through financial markets and dented investor confidence in corporate America. ""The settlement is very significant in holding these outside directors at least partially personally responsible", William Lerach, the lawyer leading the class action suit against Enron, said. Hopefully", this will help send a message to corporate boardrooms of the importance of directors performing their legal duties," he added. Under the terms of the \$168m settlement - \$155m of which will be covered by insurance - none of the 18 former directors will admit any wrongdoing. The deal is the fourth major settlement negotiated by lawyers who filed a class action on behalf of Enron's shareholders almost three years ago. So far, including the latest deal, just under \$500m (£378.8m) has been retrieved for investors. However, the latest deal does not include former Enron chief executives Ken Lay and Jeff Skilling. Both men are facing criminal charges for their alleged misconduct in the run up to the firm's collapse. Neither does it cover An

drew Fastow, who has pleaded guilty to taking part in an illegal conspiracy while he was chief financial officer at the group. Enron's shareholders are still seeking damages from a long list of other big name defendants including the financial institutions JP Morgan Chase, Citigroup, Merrill Lynch and Credit Suisse First Boston. The University of California said the trial in the case is scheduled to begin in October 2006. It joined the lawsuit in December 2001 alleging massive insider trading"" and fraud", claiming it had lost \$145m on its investments in the company.

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"business 415.txt UK house prices dip in November UK house prices dipped slightly in November", the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) has said. The average house price fell marginally to £180,226, from £180,444 in October. Recent evidence has suggested that the UK housing market is slowing after interest rate increases, and economists forecast a drop in prices during 2005. But while the monthly figures may hint at a cooling of the market, annual house price inflation is still strong, up 13.8% in the year to November. Economists, however," forecast that ODPM figures are likely to show a weakening in annual house price growth in coming months. ""Overall", the housing market activity is slowing down and that is backed up by the mortgage lending and the mortgage approvals data," said Mark Miller, at HBOS Treasury Services. The ODPM data is a fairly lagging indicator." The figures come after the Bank of England said the number of mortgages approved in the UK has fallen to the lowest level for nearly a decade. The Halifax", meanwhile, said last week that house prices increased by 1.1% in December - the first monthly rise since September. The UK's biggest mortgage lender said prices rose 15.1% over the whole of 2004, but by only 2.8% in the second half of the year. It is predicting a 2% fall in overall prices in 2005 as the market stabilises after large gains in recent years. The ODPM attributed the monthly fall of prices in November to a drop in the value of detached houses and flats. It said annual inflation rose between October and November because prices had fallen by 1.1% in the same period in 2003. The ODPM data showed the average house price was £192,713 in England; £139,544 in Wales; £116,542 in Scotland, and £111,314 in Northern Ireland. All areas saw a rise in annual house price inflation in November except for Northern Ireland and the West Midlands, where the rate was unchanged, the ODPM said. The North East showed the highest rate of inflation at 26.2%, followed by Yorkshire and the Humber on 21.7%, and the North West on 21.1%. The East Midlands, the West Midlands and the South West all had an annual inflation rate of more than 15%. In London, the area with the highest average house price at £262,825, annual inflation rose only slightly in November to 7.1% from 7% the previous month.

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"business 416.txt Steady job growth continues in US The US created fewer jobs than expected in December", but analysts said that the dip in hiring was not enough to derail the world's biggest economy. According to Labor Department figures, 157,000 new jobs were added last month. That took 2004's total to 2.2 million, the best showing in five years. Job creation was one of last year's main concerns for the US economy. While worries still remain, the conditions are set for steady growth in 2005, analysts said. The unemployment rate stayed at 5.4% in December, and about 200,000 jobs will need to be created each month if that figure is to drop. ""It was a respectable report", said Michael Moran, analyst at Daiwa Securities. Payroll growth in December was a little lighter than the consensus forecast", but we had upward revisions to the prior two months and an increase in manufacturing employment." "Manufacturing

is a cyclical area of the economy and if it's showing job growth", "it's a good indication that the economy is on a solid growth track." "That means that the Federal Reserve is likely to continue its policy of raising interest rates. The Fed lifted borrowing costs five times last year to 2.25%", citing evidence the US economic recovery was becoming more robust. Job creation was one of last year's main concerns for the US economy, and proved to be a main topic of debate in the US presidential election. While demand for workers is far from booming," the conditions are set for steady growth. " "Overall", compared to the previous year it looks great," it just keeps going stronger and stronger and I expect that to be the case" "in 2005", said Kurt Karl, economist at Swiss Re in New York. Meanwhile, economists cautioned against reading too much into data from the Federal Reserve showing an unexpected \$8.7bn drop in consumer debt in November. A fall in consumer spending, which makes up about two-thirds of all US economic activity, could help limit the extent of any future interest rate rises. But economists said there could be a number of reasons for a fall in the borrowing, which include credit cards and personal loans, while noting that such figures can vary on a month-to-month basis.

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"business 417.txt Barclays shares up on merger talk Share  
s in UK banking group Barclays have risen on Monday following a weekend press report that it had held merger talks with US bank Wells Fargo. A tie-up between Barclays and California-based Wells Fargo would create the world's fourth biggest bank", valued at \$180bn (£96bn). Barclays has declined to comment on the report in the Sunday Express, saying it does not respond to market speculation. The two banks reportedly held talks in October and November 2004. Barclays shares were up 8 pence, or 1.3%, at 605 pence by late morning in London on Monday, making it the second biggest gainer in the FTSE 100 index. UK banking icon Barclays was founded more than 300 years ago; it has operations in over 60 countries and employs 76,200 staff worldwide. Its North American divisions focus on business banking, whereas Wells Fargo operates retail and business banking services from 6,000 branches. In 2003, Barclays reported a 20% rise in pre-tax profits to £3.8bn, and it has recently forecast similar gains in 2004, predicting that full year pre-tax profits would rise 18% to £4.5bn. Wells Fargo had net income of \$6.2bn in its last financial year, a 9% increase on the previous year, and revenues of \$28.4bn. Barclays was the focus of takeover speculation in August, when it was linked to Citigroup," though no bid has ever materialised. Stock market traders were sceptical that the latest reports heralded a deal. " "The chief executive would be abandoning his duty if he didn't talk to rivals", but a deal doesn't seem likely," Reuters quoted one trader as saying.

business 418.txt US firm 'bids for Lacroix label' A US firm has said it is in final negotiations with luxury goods group LVMH to buy the loss-making Christian Lacroix haute-couture house. Paris-based LVMH has been selling non-core businesses and focusing on its most profitable labels including Moet & Chandon champagne and Louis Vuitton. Privately-held Falic Group bought two cosmetics brands, Hard Candy and Urban Decay, from LVMH in early 2003. The Florida company also own a chain of 90 duty free stores in the US. LVMH refused to comment on the reports. But one of the three brothers behind the Falic Group said the firm had also held talks with the designer Christian Lacroix, and wished to retain him. We are buying his name", " Simon Falic told the Reuters news agency. We have plans to increase the exposure of the brand and increase the volume of business." "

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"business 419.txt \$1m payoff for former Shell boss Shell  
is to pay \$1m (£522,000) to the ex-finance chief who stepped down from her post in April 2004 after the firm over-stated its reserves. Judy Boynton finally left the firm on 31 December, having spent the intervening time as a special advisor to chief executive Jeroen van der Veer. In January 2004," Shell told shocked investors that its reserves were 20% smaller than previously thought. Shell said the pay-off was in line with Ms Boynton's contract. She was leaving ""by mutual agreement to pursue other career opportunities"", the firm said in a statement. The severance package means she keeps long-term share options, but fails to collect on a 2003 incentive plan since the firm has failed to meet the targets included in it. The revelation that Shell had inflated its reserves led to the resignation of its chairman, Sir Phil Watts," and production chief Walter van der Vijver. An investigation commissioned by Shell found that Ms Boynton had to share responsibility for the company's behaviour. Despite receiving an email from Mr Van de Vijver which said the firm had ""fooled"" the market about its reserves", the investigation said, she did nothing to inquire further. In all, Shell restated its reserves four times during 2003. In September, it paid £82.7m in fines to regulators on both sides of the Atlantic for violating market rules in its reporting of its reserves.

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"business 420.txt India and Iran in gas export deal India  
has signed a \$40bn (£21bn) deal to import millions of tonnes of liquefied natural gas from Iran. Firms led by the Oil & Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) will also assist in the development of Iranian oil fields. Ministers", eager to gain access to energy supplies to meet the demands of a booming economy, secured a similar deal to one between Iran and China. The announcement comes as ONGC said it was in talks to buy former assets of troubled Russian oil firm Yukos. The agreements with Iran were sealed after talks in New Delhi between Middle East producers and Asia's biggest energy consumers - China, India, Japan and South Korea. Iran - Opec's second-biggest oil producer and one of the world's top gas producers - has been pursuing a series of deals, rewarding LNG buyers with participation in development of its oil fields. Under the agreement, it will supply India with 7.5 million tonnes of LPG annually over a 25 year period from 2009. ONGC and the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) reached a preliminary deal for Indian firms to take part in the development of the Yadavaran and Jufeyr oilfields, both countries said in a statement. India's oil production has stagnated over recent years, and it is having to look abroad to secure future supplies. India imports about 70% of its total oil consumption. Consumption has jumped to 2.4 million barrels per day, compared with 474,000 bpd in 1973.

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"business 421.txt LSE 'sets date for takeover deal' The London Stock Exchange (LSE) is planning to announce a preferred takeover by the end of the month", newspaper reports claim. The Sunday Telegraph said the LSE's plan was further evidence it wants to retain tight control over its destiny. Both Deutsche Boerse and rival Euronext held talks with the London market last week over a possible offer. A £1.3bn offer from Deutsche Boerse has already been rejected, while Euronext has said it will make an all cash bid. Speculation suggests that Paris-based Euronext has the facilities in place to make a bid of £1.4bn, while its German rival may up its bid to the £1.5bn mark. Neither has yet tabled a formal bid, but the LSE is expected to hold further talks with the two parties later this week. However, the Sunday Telegraph report added that there are signs that Deutsche Boerse chief executive Werner Seifert is becoming

increasingly impatient with the LSE's managed bid process. Despite insisting he wants to agree a recommended deal with the LSE's board," the newspaper suggested he may pull out of the process and put an offer directly to shareholders instead. The newspaper also claimed Mr Seifert was becoming ""increasingly frustrated"" with the pace of negotiations since Deutsche Boerse's £1.3bn offer was rejected in mid-December", in particular the LSE's decision to suspend talks over the Christmas period. Meanwhile, the German exchange's offer has come under fire recently. Unions for Deutsche Boerse staff in Frankfurt have reportedly expressed fears that up to 300 jobs would be moved to London if the takeover is successful. Others claim it will weaken the city's status as Europe's financial centre, while German politicians are also said to be angry over the market operator's promise to move its headquarters to London if a bid is successful. A further stumbling block is Deutsche Boerse's control over its Clearstream unit, the clearing house that processes securities transactions. LSE shareholders fear it would create a monopoly situation, weakening the position of shareholders when negotiating lower transaction fees for share dealings. LSE and Euronext do not have control over their clearing and settlement operations, a situation which critics say is more transparent and competitive.

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"business 422.txt News Corp makes \$5.4bn Fox offer News Corporation is seeking to buy out minority investors in Fox Entertainment Group", its broadcasting subsidiary, for about \$5.4bn (£3.7bn). The media giant, run by Rupert Murdoch, owns 82% of the shares in the company, home to the Fox television network and the 20th Century Fox film studio. The move follows News Corp's decision to register its business in the US. 20th Century Fox's recent film releases include I Heart Huckabees and I, Robot, while Fox puts out hit TV series 24. Under the terms of the offer, minority Fox shareholders will receive 1.90 News Corp shares in return for each Fox share they hold. Analysts said the decision to list News Corp in the US - which will result in the firm's shares trading in New York rather than Sydney- nullified the need to retain a separate stock market listing for Fox Entertainment shares. News Corp investors voted in October to approve the transfer of the company's corporate domicile from Australia to the US state of Delaware. The move is designed to help News Corp attract more investment from the largest US financial institutions, and make it easier to raise capital. Fox Entertainment Group generated revenues of \$12bn last year. News Corp shares fell 25 cents to \$17.65 after the share offer was announced while Fox shares were up 19 cents at \$31.22.

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"business 423.txt Israel looks to US for bank chief Israel has asked a US banker and former International Monetary Fund director to run its central bank. Stanley Fischer", vice chairman of banking giant Citigroup, has agreed to take the Bank of Israel job subject to approval from parliament and cabinet. His nomination by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon came as a surprise, and led to gains on the Tel Aviv stock market. Mr Fischer, who speaks fluent Hebrew, will have to become an Israeli citizen to take the job. The US says he will not have to give up US citizenship to do so. Previous incumbent David Klein, who often argued with the Finance Ministry, steps down on 16 January. Mr Fischer will face a delicate balancing act - both in political and economic terms - between Mr Sharon and finance minister Binyamin Netanyahu, who also backed his nomination. But his appointment has also raised hopes that it could bring in fresh investment - and perhaps even an improvement in the country's credit rating. Mr Fischer first went to Israel for six months in 1973, and almost emigrated th

ere before deciding finally to return to the US. While teaching at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology he spent a month seconded to the Bank of Israel in 1979, beginning a long-time involvement in studying Israel's economy. In 1983 Mr Fischer became adviser on Israel's economy to then-US secretary of state George Shultz. At the World Bank in 1985, he participated in drawing up an economic stabilisation package for Israel.

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"business 424.txt EU-US seeking deal on air dispute The EU and US have agreed to begin talks on ending subsidies given to aircraft makers", EU Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson has announced. Both sides hope to reach a negotiated deal over state aid received by European aircraft maker Airbus and its US rival Boeing," Mr Mandelson said. Airbus and Boeing accuse each other of benefiting from illegal subsidies. Mr Mandelson said the EU and US hoped to avoid having to resolve the dispute at the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

"With this agreement the EU and US have confirmed their willingness to resolve the dispute which has arisen between them", Mr Mandelson said. I hope our negotiations in the next three months will lead to an agreement ending subsidies to development and production of large civil aircraft." Last year", the US terminated an agreement with the EU, reached in 1992, which limits the subsidies countries can hand over to civil aircraft makers. The US filed a complaint against Brussels with the WTO over state aid to Airbus, prompting a retaliatory EU complaint over US support for Boeing. However, both sides agreed to suspend their requests for WTO arbitration at the beginning of December, to allow bilateral talks to continue. EADS and BAE Systems, the European defence and aerospace firms which own Airbus," welcomed Mr Mandelson's announcement. "It has always been preferable that any differences between the US and Europe on this matter be overcome through constructive discussion rather than through legal recourse", the companies said in a joint statement. Separately, the world's largest package delivery company, UPS, said it had placed an order for 10 Airbus A380 superjumbo freight-carrying jets, with an option to buy 10 more of the triple-decker aircraft. The US company said it needed to expand its air freight capacity following strong international growth, and would begin receiving deliveries of the A380s from 2009. However, UPS said it was cutting a previous order for smaller Airbus A300s from 90 planes to 53. So far, Airbus has delivered 40 A300s to UPS. Airbus overtook Boeing as the world's largest manufacturer of commercial airliners in 2003.

business 425.txt Nortel in \$300m profit revision Telecoms equipment maker Nortel Networks has sharply revised downwards its profits for the 2003 fiscal year. In a long-awaited filing, Nortel said it had made \$434m (£231m), compared to the previously reported \$732m. But the figures - revised after an audit which led to the sacking of the Canadian firm's chief - showed revenue was about 4% higher than first thought. Nortel shares, which have lost nearly 50% of their value since last year, climbed 1.46% in Toronto on Tuesday. Nortel's head Frank Dunn and two other executives were fired in January last year after the company announced it had conducted the internal audit. Securities and police authorities in both the US and Canada are still conducting inquiries into the accounts. Nortel also issued new figures for the 2001-2002 period, which they had previously indicated had understated losses. With the completion of our restatements we have a solid foundation on which to move forward with our business", said Nortel president and chief executive Bill Owens. The restatement has been a monumental task," both complex and demanding." The company also said 12 senior executives - none of whom were involved directly in the accounting of the revised figures - have voluntarily agreed to repay to bonuses awarded

in 2003 totalling \$8.6m. Nortel added: ""these members of the core executive team share the board's deep disappointment over the circumstances that led to the restatement.""

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"business 426.txt Minister hits out at Yukos sale Russia's renationalisation of its energy industry needs to be reversed," a senior government figure has warned. Economy minister German Gref told the *Kommersant* newspaper that direct state involvement in oil was ""unjustified"". His comments follow the sale of much of oil giant Yukos to cover back taxes - a deal which effectively took most of the firm's assets into public ownership. On 28 December", another senior economic adviser called the sale ""the swindle of the century"". Yuganskneftegaz", the unit which produced 60% of Yukos' output, had been seized and sold in December for less than \$10bn to a previously unknown firm called Baikal. Baikal promptly passed into the hands of state-controlled firm Rosneft," itself shortly to merge with state gas giant Gazprom. ""We used to see street hustlers do this kind of thing", Andrei Illarionov - then economic adviser to President Vladimir Putin - told a press conference. Now officials are doing it." Within days", he was stripped of most of his responsibilities. Mr Gref, a well-known opponent of nationalisation in competitive parts of the market, was keen to distance himself from Mr Illarionov's comments. The privatisation of companies such as Yukos in the 1990s had been badly handled," he said. But he stressed that the government needed to get out of oil. ""I think that Rosneft and Yuganskneftegaz", should it become a state-owned company, must be privatized, he said. Today our government is ineffective and state companies, as a result," are for the overwhelming part ineffective as well." And he warned that using back taxes to deal with firms like Yukos - a technique now being applied by the Kremlin to several other firms - was a mistake. ""If we follow that logic", we should nationalise all businesses," he said. Many large Russian companies, particularly in the energy sector, use complex webs of offshore companies to avoid taxes. Mr Gref also poured cold water on President Putin's promises of doubled economic growth within a decade. The assault on Yukos' assets has been widely blamed for a slowdown in economic growth in recent months. The task is not simply to double GDP; instead it is to use GDP to qualitatively improve people's lives", Mr Gref told *Kommersant*. We don't need simply to increase GDP," but to improve its structure." Instead of focusing on headline growth figures", Russia needed to focus on better institutions, such as a more efficient - and less corrupt - court system.

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"business 427.txt Chinese exports rise 25% in 2004 Export s from China leapt during 2004 over the previous year as the country continued to show breakneck growth. The spurt put China's trade surplus - a sore point with some of its trading partners - at a six-year high. It may also increase pressure on China to relax the peg joining its currency", the yuan, with the weakening dollar. The figures released by the Ministry of Commerce come as China's tax chief confirmed that growth had topped 9% in 2004 for the second year in a row. State Administration of Taxation head Xie Xuren said a tightening of controls on tax evasion had combined with the rapid expansion to produce a 25.7% rise in tax revenues to 2.572 trillion yuan (\$311bn; £165bn). According to the Ministry of Commerce, China's exports totalled \$63.8bn in December, taking the annual total up 35.4% to \$593.4bn. With imports rising a similar amount, the deficit rose to \$43.4bn. The increased tax take comes despite healthy tax rebates for many exporters totalling 420bn yuan in 2004, according to Mr Xie. China's expor

ting success has made the trade deficit of the United States soar even further and made trade with China a sensitive political issue in Washington. The peg keeping the yuan around 8.30 to the dollar is often blamed by US lawmakers for job losses at home. A US report issued on Tuesday on behalf of a Congressionally-mandated panel said almost 1.5 million posts disappeared between 1989 and 2003. The pace accelerated in the final three years of the period, said the report for the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, moving out of labour-intensive industries and into more hi-tech sectors. The US's overall trade deficit with China was \$124bn in 2003, and is expected to rise to about \$150bn for 2004.

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"business 428.txt Karachi stocks hit historic high The Karachi Stock Exchange (KSE) has recorded its largest single day gain", surging 3.5% to a new high. The index rose 225.79 points in four hours of furious trading, with many investors optimistic that political stability could bring an economic boom. The KSE index closed at 6709.93 - an overall gain of nearly 400 points in the first two trading days of the week. Energy and telecommunication stocks performed particularly well, recording an 8%-10% rise since Monday morning. In 2002, the KSE was the world's best performing stock market, with the index rising 112%. Pakistani investors are expecting the KSE to repeat, if not improve on, its 2002 performance. Jubilant investors danced on the streets as the market closed for the day on Tuesday, confident that the boom will continue at least until the public holiday on 22 January. Others, however, who had stayed out fearing an imminent collapse because of prices overheating," continued to warn that the ""bubble may burst any time""."That's rubbish", KSE chairman Yaseen Lakhani told the BBC News website. Whenever the market reflects Pakistan's true economic reality," it is described as a bubble." Mr Lakhani feels that the market has risen on the basis of solid economic growth and its current level rests on sound foundations. Market analysts are inclined to agree with Mr Lakhani", arguing that there are a number of major factors behind the KSE's performance. Analysts argue that a steady improvement in Pakistan's credit ratings by international credit rating agencies has finally begun to register in the market. Standard & Poor's upgraded Pakistan a few weeks ago. There are indications of yet another upgrade by the end of February. Then, say analysts, there is corporate profitability in the current fiscal year," which has gone up by 27% from last year. ""Coupled with the 7% GDP growth expected by June this year", I am least surprised at the market's performance, says Mr Lakhani. One leading Karachi broker said the real reasons may be political. If you file a \$1.3 trillion case against Saudi money after 9/11," Arab money will not go to the US any more." A lot of Arab money", he says, has already gone to Malaysia and Indonesia. Pakistan is now hoping that energy and telecoms, two of the strongest sectors in Pakistan, draw some of the Arab money to the KSE. Locally, too, say analysts, recent political developments have worked to the market's advantage. An anti-Musharraf campaign threatened by the MMA, a nationwide alliance of religious parties, has fizzled out. The release of Asif Zardari, former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's husband, has eased political tensions between the military-backed government and the opposition Pakistan People's Party. Most importantly, say analysts, the failure of talks between India and Pakistan on the Baglihar dam in Indian-administered Kashmir has not automatically led to heightened tensions. This, they say, indicates that neither country is interested in raising the temperature at this stage, irrespective of the state of their disagreements. The market is abuzz with speculation that substantial investment may now start to flow in from the US," a country seen locally as deeply interested in defusing tensions

between the South Asian neighbours. ""You can call it a peace dividend,"" smiles one broker. Let us see how long one can reap its benefits."

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"business 429.txt US trade gap ballooned in October The US trade deficit widened by more than expected in October", hitting record levels after higher oil prices raised import costs, figures have shown. The trade shortfall was \$55.5bn (£29bn), up 9% from September, the Commerce Department said. That pushed the 10 month deficit to \$500.5bn. Imports rose by 3.4%, while exports increased by only 0.6%. A weaker dollar also increased the cost of imports," though this should help drive export demand in coming months. ""Things are getting worse", but that's to be expected, said David Wyss of Standard & Poor's in New York. The first thing is that when the dollar goes down," it increases the price of imports. ""We are seeing improved export orders. Things seem to be going in the right direction." Despite this optimism", significant concerns remain as to how the US will fund its trade and budget deficits should they continue to widen. Another problem highlighted by analysts was the growing trade gap with China, which has been accused of keeping its currency artificially weak in order to boost exports. The US imported almost \$20bn worth of goods from China during October," exporting a little under \$3bn. ""It seems the key worry that has existed in the currency market still remains", said Anthony Crescenzi, a bond strategist at Miller Tabak in New York. The trade deficit and the shortfall with China are big issues going forward"". The Commerce Department figures caused the dollar to weaken further despite widespread expectations that the Federal Reserve will raise interest rates for a fifth time this year. Borrowing costs are tipped to rise by a quarter of a percentage point to 2.25% at a Fed meeting later on Tuesday.

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"business 430.txt US prepares for hybrid onslaught Sales of hybrid cars in the US are set to double in 2005", research suggests. Research group JD Power estimates sales will hit 200,000 in 2005, despite higher prices and customer scepticism. Carmakers are starting to build hybrid sports utility vehicles (SUVs), the four-wheel-drive vehicles which now dominate the US car market. Hybrids cut both petrol consumption and emissions by combining a petrol engine with an electric motor constantly kept charged by extra engine power. Several jurisdictions, notably the state of California, mandate low emissions for new cars. Equally, the rise in oil prices over the past year has sparked hopes that consumers may be tempted by potential savings of a few hundred dollars a year on fuel. At the Detroit Motor Show, a range of manufacturers are prominently displaying their hybrid credentials. Toyota has led the market to date with the Prius," popularised by a number of celebrities keen to burnish their ""green"" credentials. In April it will launch a hybrid version of its Highlander SUV, with an SUV from its luxury Lexus marque due later in the year. Honda has three hybrids on the market, and between them the two Japanese carmakers sold more than 80,000 units last year. Ford, which has sold 4,000 of its first hybrid since its launch in August, is bringing a hybrid SUV - the Mariner - to market a year ahead of schedule, with plans for three more models by 2008. GM has a hybrid pickup on the market and is showing two concept SUVs in Detroit. Even sports car maker Porsche may join the race, although it insists it is still considering whether to hybridise its Cayenne SUV. Others remain more sceptical. Nissan has bought Toyota's hybrid technology," but plans to bring out its first model only in 2006. ""We want to make sure we are not concentrating on one technology," Nissan chief executive Carlos Ghosn said. We will not be surprised by any

acceleration or deceleration in the hybrid market." "Volkswagen", meanwhile, says it will focus on clean-burning diesel engines instead. And some watchers point out that the price tag on a hybrid - upwards of \$3,000 above that of an equivalent normal-engined car," and suspicion of the technology - may still cool its attraction. ""The average consumers aren't willing to pay that premium for a car they won't drive more than six years", " said Anthony Pratt from JD Power.

business 431.txt Mitsubishi in Peugeot link talks Troubl e-hit Mitsubishi Motors is in talks with French carmaker PSA Peugeot Citroen about a possible alliance. On Tuesday Mitsubishi, the only major Japanese car firm in the red, confirmed earlier reports of negotiations. But a spokesman refused to comment on speculation that Mitsubishi could end up building cars for PSA and perhaps its Japanese rival Nissan. Mitsubishi has been hit by a recall scandal and the withdrawal of support from shareholder DaimlerChrysler. The US-German firm, once a majority shareholder, decided last April to stop providing financial backing. Mitsubishi's sales have slid 41% in the past year, catalysed by the revelation that the company had systematically been hiding records of faults and then secretly repairing vehicles. Mitsubishi is due to unveil a recovery plan later in January. Analysts said that alliances with other carmakers would be a necessary part of whatever it came up with, not least because its own slow sales have left its manufacturing capacity under-used.

business 432.txt BA to suspend two Saudi services British Airways is to halt its flights from London Heathrow to Jeddah and Riyadh in Saudi Arabia from 27 March. The airline said the decision was a commercial one due to reduced passenger demand for the services. BA currently operates four flights per week from Heathrow to Jeddah, and three weekly journeys to Riyadh. It suspended flights to Saudi Arabia for three weeks in autumn 2003 after a government warning about a threat to UK aviation interests in Saudi Arabia". BA will now suspend the Saudi flights - which it says will remain ""under constant review"" - from 27 March. ""The decision to suspend flights between the UK and Saudi Arabia is a difficult one to make as we have enjoyed a long history of flying between the two countries", " said BA director of commercial planning, Robert Boyle. However", " the routes don't currently make a profitable contribution to our business and we are unable to sustain them while this remains the case." " Passengers with flights booked after the suspension date will be contacted by BA for alternative arrangements to be made.

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"business 433.txt Cairn Energy in Indian gas find Shares in Cairn Energy rose 3.8% to 1",088 pence on Tuesday after the UK firm announced a fresh gas discovery in northern India. The firm, which last year made a number of other new finds in the Rajasthan area, said the latest discovery could lead to large gas volumes. However," chief executive Bill Gammell cautioned that additional evaluation was first needed at the site. Cairn has also been granted approval to extend its Rajasthan exploration area. This approval has come from the Indian government. A spokesman said the company's decision to carry out further investigations at the new find showed that it believed there was significant gas. But he added: ""It's still too early to say what the extent of it is." " Cairn's string of finds in Rajasthan last year saw it elevated to the FTSE 100 index of the UK's leading listed companies. The company had bought the rights to explore in the area from oil giant Shell. Mr Gammell is a former Scottish international rugby player.

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"business 434.txt Asia quake increases poverty risk Nearl  
y two million people across Asia could be thrown into poverty because of the In  
dian Ocean tsunami", the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has said. In its first o  
verview of the disaster," the ADB said the impact on economic growth would be s  
light because major cities and factories escaped damage. But the blow to many l  
ow-income people could be ""enormous"". The Paris Club of rich creditor nations  
on Wednesday offered to freeze debts owed by tsunami-hit countries. The move w  
as aimed at helping South Asian governments find budgets to rebuild devastated  
coastal areas", though so far only Sri Lanka," Indonesia and the Seychelles hav  
e indicated that they will take it up. Other countries believe their economies  
are strong enough to cope or wish to avoid being viewed as credit risks. ""Pove  
rty is potentially the most important impact of this natural disaster"" said A  
DB chief economist Ifzal Ali. Donor nations have promised to give \$717m (£379m)  
in disaster relief over the next six months, according to the United Nations.  
Mr Ali added his voice to those warning that aid pledges must be promptly deliv  
ered, saying the number of people at risk of poverty hinged on concerns over sa  
nitation and health conditions"," and other basic needs"" being ""properly and  
quickly addressed"". There are 1.9 billion people in Asia living on less than  
\$2 a day. The ADB fears that 1 million Indonesians could join them", while in I  
ndia just over half a million people - 645,000 - are at risk of falling into po  
verty. A quarter of a million Sri Lankans and 23,500 people in the Maldives are  
also facing poverty. In the Maldives, where 43% of the population already lives  
on less than \$2 a day, this could rise to half. Sri Lanka and the Maldives are  
the two countries the ADB fears are most at risk of suffering lasting economic  
damage from the tsunami. Sri Lanka's government has estimated reconstruction co  
sts at nearly \$3bn. A government task force held meetings to discuss an emergen  
cy rebuilding plan with the ADB, World Bank and Japanese aid agencies on Wednes  
day, and promised to publish the plan within 10 days. Indonesia, Malaysia, Tha  
iland and India have enjoyed strong economic growth in recent years, which shou  
ld cushion them against reconstruction costs. Although Indonesia's northern pro  
vince of Aceh suffered the worst death toll," the region's oil and natural gas  
production facilities ""have survived intact""", the report said. However," it  
remains too soon to asses the damage to poor people's livelihoods in Aceh becau  
se it would depend on how much farm land had been flooded by seawater. ""This i  
s a profoundly tragic event for the region and for the millions who are sufferi  
ng. But the economies of the affected countries except Sri Lanka and the Maldiv  
es should emerge with minimal damage", the ADB report said. Some businesses ma  
y even gain from the reconstruction efforts, thereby creating jobs. At a meetin  
g in Thailand, ABD president Thadao Chino said he was confident of the countr  
y's own capabilities to restore normalcy to the affected areas and meet the reh  
abilitation requirements"". Thailand has said it does not wish to opt for a deb  
t repayment freeze", while India has also rejected international aid, saying it  
can cope on its own resources. Debt repayment holidays carry the risk of credit  
ratings downgrades, making it more expensive to borrow money in future. Indones  
ia, however, is pressing for greater help with its debts than the current freez  
e would bring. It is one of the world's most indebted countries.

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"business 435.txt Fosters buys stake in winemaker Austral  
ian brewer Fosters has bought a large stake in Australian winemaker Southcorp",  
sparking rumours of a possible takeover. Fosters bought 18.8% of Southcorp, th  
e global winemaker behind the Penfolds, Lindemans and Rosemount brands," for  
4.17 Australian dollars per share. A bid at that price would value the company  
at A\$3.1bn (\$2.4bn; £1.25bn ). Fosters said it was currently in discussions ""w

hich may lead to a major corporate announcement"". In a separate statement", Southcorp confirmed the brewer had asked for talks. Both firms asked the Sydney stock market to suspend trading in their shares until Monday. Southcorp's shares were suspended at A\$4.25. Fosters bought the 18.8% stake from Reline Investments, the family investment firm for the Oatleys, who founded the Rosemount Estates label and sold it to Southcorp in 2001. Robert Oatley and his son Sandy Oatley have both resigned from Southcorp's board following the share deal. Southcorp employs 2,700 people and is the largest single investor in rural Australia, according to its website. The prospect of Fosters launching a major acquisition startled investors, as the brewer said last summer that it was not looking to expand through a big buy in the near future. It has cash available, after getting A\$846m from selling property business Lensworth," but it has been widely expected to return cash to shareholders. ""People will scratching their heads over this one. Fosters has done a back-flip""", said Shawn Burns, a fund manager at Deutsche Asset Management. Southcorp's shares have risen in recent months on speculation that it could become a takeover target. It spent two years in the red, returning to profit in 2004. Consolidation in the wine industry is being driven by Constellation, the world's biggest winemaker. It seized the top spot when it bought Australian firm BRL Hardy for just over \$1bn in 2003. Since then, it has paid \$1bn for US wine maker Robert Mondavi, bought last month. Fosters' main wine business is Beringer Blass Wine Estate. Its best known brand is Fosters Lager, though it makes a clutch of beer brands," and spirits. Analysts were divided on Thursday about whether Fosters was more likely to go for a takeover or merely wanted to take a big enough chunk of Southcorp to prevent it falling to a rival. ""Currently", I think the strategic position is more sensible rather than an outright takeover," said one analyst quoted by the Agence France Presse news agency. However, Matt Williams, a fund manager at Perpetual Trustees said taking the stake is definitely a precursor to a takeover"".

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"business 436.txt ECB holds rates amid growth fears The European Central Bank has left its key interest rate unchanged at 2% for the 19th month in succession. Borrowing costs have remained on hold amid concerns about the strength of economic growth in the 12 nations sharing the euro", analysts said. Despite signs of pick-up, labour markets and consumer demand remain sluggish, while firms are eyeing cost cutting measures such as redundancies. High oil prices, meanwhile, have put upward pressure on the inflation rate. Surveys of economists have shown that the majority expect borrowing costs to stay at 2% in coming months, with an increase of a quarter of a percentage point predicted some time in the second half of the year. If anything, there may be greater calls for an interest rate cut," especially with the euro continuing to strengthen against the dollar. ""The euro land economy is still struggling with this recovery", said economist Dirk Schumacher. The ECB may sound rather hawkish but once the data allows them to cut again," they will." Data coming out of Germany on Thursday underlined the problems facing European policy makers. While Germany's economy expanded by 1.7% in 2004", growth was driven by export sales and lost some of its momentum in the last three months of the year. The strength of the euro is threatening to dampen that foreign demand in 2005, and domestic consumption currently is not strong enough to take up the slack. Inflation in the euro zone, however, is estimated at about 2.3% in December, above ECB guidelines of 2%. ECB President Jean-Claude Trichet has remained upbeat about prospects for the region, and inflation is expected to drop below 2% later in 2005. The ECB has forecast economic growth in the eurozone of 1.9% in 2005.

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"/"business 437.txt China bans new tobacco factories The world's biggest tobacco consumer", China, has said it will not allow any new tobacco factories to be built. China already has more than enough cigarette-making capacity, according to a spokesman for the tobacco industry regulator quoted in China Daily. The ban threatens to reignite tensions between the regulator and British American Tobacco," which plans to become China's first foreign cigarette maker. A spokeswoman for Bat declined to comment on the report. ""China won't allow any new tobacco factories to be built"," including joint ventures""", said Xing Wangli, a spokesman for the State Tobacco Administration Monopoly quoted in China Daily. He also said that the state would retain its monopoly on cigarette distribution. China has 350 million smokers who consume 1.7 trillion cigarettes a year. Smoking is fashionable in China, where it is seen as an essential - and manly - sociable touch for some jobs, such as salesmen. More young, urban women are taking up smoking too. In July 2004, Bat announced it had won approval for to build a \$1.5bn (£800m) joint venture factory in China which would make it the first foreign cigarette maker to manufacture there. The State Tobacco Monopoly Administration said a week later that it had not approved the deal, leading to an embarrassing public row. Bat told the BBC at that time that it had not negotiated with the STMC," and secured approval from ""the highest levels of government"". Since then", the row has flared occasionally," most recently at a forum in November. Bat consistently declines to comment. ""Xing's statement comes as especially bad news for British American Tobacco""", the China Daily newspaper said of the latest development. The Bat spokeswoman said: ""There is nothing for us to add...since our announcement in July last year. The central government of China is the authority that approved our strategic investment."" The decision to ban further tobacco factories does not apply to deals made before 2005", according to the French news agency AFP. The joint venture factory was expected to take till 2006 to build. The Bat spokeswoman would not comment on its progress. However, if the STMA continues to take a tough stance, expansion opportunities could be limited. China's tobacco market is increasingly valuable as anti-smoking campaigners target public smoking in the West. China Daily said the market was currently enjoying steady growth, making more than 210bn yuan (\$25.4bn) in pre-tax profits last year, almost double the figure in 2000. The paper made no mention of health concerns. The STMA is trying to restructure the domestic tobacco industry, closing some factories, though such moves can be unpopular with local governments.

"/"business 438.txt UK interest rates held at 4.75% The Bank of England has left interest rates on hold again at 4.75%", in a widely-predicted move. Rates went up five times from November 2003 - as the bank sought to cool the housing market and consumer debt - but have remained unchanged since August. Recent data has indicated a slowdown in manufacturing and consumer spending, as well as in mortgage approvals. And retail sales disappointed over Christmas, with analysts putting the drop down to less consumer confidence. Rising interest rates and the accompanying slowdown in the housing market have knocked consumers' optimism, causing a sharp fall in demand for expensive goods," according to a report earlier this week from the British Retail Consortium. The BRC said Britain's retailers had endured their worst Christmas in a decade. ""Today's no change decision is correct""", said David Frost, Director General of the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC). But", if there are clear signs that the economy slows," the MPC should be ready to take quick corrective action and cut rates. ""Dismal reports from the retail trade about Christmas sales are worryin

g", " if they indicate a more general weakening in consumer spending." " Mr Frost added: " "The housing market outlook remains highly uncertain. " "It is widely accepted that", if house prices start falling more sharply," the risks facing the economy will worsen considerably." " CBI chief economist Ian McCafferty said the economy had " "slowed in recent months in response to rate rises" " but that it was difficult to gauge from the Christmas period the likely pace of activity through the summer. " "The Bank is having to juggle the emergence of inflationary pressures", driven by a tight labour market and buoyant commodity prices, against the risk of an over-abrupt slowdown in consumer activity," he said. Interest rates are likely to remain on hold for some time." " On Thursday there was more gloomy news on the manufacturing front", as the Office for National (ONS) statistics revealed British manufacturing output unexpectedly fell in November - for the fifth month in the past six. The ONS said manufacturing output dropped 0.1% in November, matching a similar unrevised fall in October and confounding economists' expectations of a 0.3% rise. Manufacturers' organisation, the EEF, " said it expected the hold in interest rates to continue in the near future. It also said there was evidence that manufacturers' confidence may be waning as the outlook for the world economy becomes more uncertain. " "So far the evidence suggests that last year's rate increases have helped to rebalance the economy without damaging the recovery in manufacturing", " said EEF chief economist, Steve Radley. However", should the business outlook start to deteriorate," the Bank should stand ready to cut rates." " Some economists have predicted rates will drop later in the year", although others feel the Bank may still think there is a need for a rise to 5% before that happens. The Bank remains concerned about the long-term risks posed by personal debt - which is rising at 15% a year - if economic conditions worsen.

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"business 439.txt German economy rebounds Germany's economy", the biggest among the 12 countries sharing the euro, grew at its fastest rate in four years during 2004, driven by strong exports. Gross domestic product (GDP) rose by 1.7% last year, the statistical office said. The economy contracted in 2003. Foreign sales increased by 8.2% last year, compared with a 0.3% slide in private consumption. Concerns remain, however, over the strength of the euro, weak domestic demand and a sluggish labour market. The European Central Bank (ECB) left its benchmark interest rate unchanged at 2% on Thursday. It is the nineteenth month in a row that the ECB has not moved borrowing costs. Economists predict that an increase is unlikely to come until the second half of 2005," with growth set to sputter rather than ignite. " "During 2004 we profited from the fact that the world economy was strong", " said Stefan Schilbe, analyst at HSBC Trinkaus & Burkhardt. If exports weaken and domestic growth remains poor", " we cannot expect much from 2005." " Many German consumers have been spooked and unsettled by government attempts to reform the welfare state and corporate environment. Major companies including Volkswagen", DaimlerChrysler and Siemens have spent much of 2004 in tough talks with unions about trimming jobs and costs. They have also warned there are more cost cutting measures on the horizon.

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"business 440.txt US trade deficit widens sharply The gap between US exports and imports has widened to more than \$60bn (£31.7bn)", an all-time record. Figures from the Commerce Department for November showed exports down 2.3% to \$95.6bn, while imports grew 1.3% to \$155.8bn on rising consumer demand. Part of the expanding deficit came from high prices for oil imports. But the numbers suggested the sliding dollar - which makes exports less expensive

- has had little impact, and could indicate slowing economic growth. The trade deficit - far bigger than the \$54bn widely expected on Wall Street - prompted a rapid response from the currency markets. By 1650 GMT, the dollar was trading against the euro at \$1.3280, almost a cent and a half weaker than before the announcement. Against the pound, the dollar was down about 0.7% at \$1,"8923. ""The dollar's fall has been sudden", violent and appropriate given this number," said Brian Taylor of Wells Fargo in Minneapolis. Recent exchange rate movements certainly haven't had any impact yet." Treasury Secretary John Snow put a brave face on the news", saying it was a sign of strong economic expansion. ""The economy is growing at such a fast rate that it is generating lots of disposable income... some of which is used to buy goods from our trading partners." Although the White House officially still backs the US's traditional ""strong dollar"" policy", it has tacitly indicated that it would be happy if the slide continued. The dollar has fallen by 50% against the euro - as well as by 30% against the yen - in the past three years. The main catalyst, most economists accept, is the large budget deficit on the one hand, and the current account deficit - the difference between the flow of money in and out of the US - on the other. The trade deficit is a large part of the latter. In November, the fall in exports was largely due to a decline in sales of industrial supplies and materials such as chemicals, as well as of cars, consumer goods and food. One small bright spot for US policy-makers was a slight decline in the deficit with China, often blamed for job losses and other economic woes. Although China's overall trade surplus is expanding, according to Chinese government figures, the Commerce Department revealed the US's deficit with China was \$19.6bn in November, down from \$19.7bn the month before. But the deficit with Japan was at its worst in more than four years.

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"business 441.txt Trade gap narrows as exports rise The UK's trade gap narrowed in November", helped by a 7.5% rise in exports outside the European Union. According to the Office for National Statistics, the difference between what the UK exported and imported was £3.1bn (\$5.8bn), down from October's £3.6bn. Overall UK exports - including both goods and services - rose by more than 3.2% to £24.8bn, although total imports rose again to a new record of £27.9bn. The deficit for goods alone was £4.6bn, down from October's £5bn. During November the UK exported £16.9bn worth of goods, but imported £21.5bn. The cumulative deficit for the first eleven months of 2004 now stands at £36.3bn, £4.5bn higher than the same period in 2003. November saw an improvement in export levels to both the European Union and the rest of the world, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said. EU exports rose 2%, fuelled by an increase in sales of chemicals. Non-EU exports shot up 7.5%, with growth seen across a range of manufacturing sectors including cars, consumer durables and chemicals. The export boost offset a 1% rise in imports. Non-EU imports rose 3%, but the growth in goods entering the UK from the EU slowed to 0.5%. The UK's deficit with the EU fell to £1.9bn from £2.1bn, while its non-EU shortfall dropped to £2.7bn from £2.9bn in October. The country's surplus on trade-in-services remained steady at £1.5bn for the fifth month in a row. Paul Dales, UK economist for Capital Economics, said the figures represented an improvement on recent months. However, he stressed that the long-term prognosis for exports was still uncertain. ""The figures are a lot better than expected but the trend still remains poor," he said. There have been some very encouraging signs that the UK export recovery is starting to take hold. But there is a danger that this could be held back by the ongoing weakness of domestic demand on the continent." "

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"/"business 442.txt Lesotho textile workers lose jobs Six foreign-owned textile factories have closed in Lesotho", leaving 6,650 garment workers jobless, union officers told the AP news agency. Factory Workers Union secretary general Billy Macaefa blamed the closures on the end of worldwide textile quotas. The quotas for developing nations, ended on 1 January," gave them a set share of the rich countries' markets. They also limited the amount countries like China could export to the big markets of the United States and EU.

"We understand that some (owners)... were complaining that the South African rand was strong against the US dollar", and they were losing when exporting textiles and clothing to the United States," Mr Macaefa said at a news briefing in the capital, Maseru. Lesotho's currency, the maloti, is fixed to the rand. But we suspect that they left the country unceremoniously because of the end of quotas introduced by the World Trade Organization." He said the six factories were Leisure Garments", Modern Garments, Precious Six Garments, TW Garments, Lesotho Hats and Vogue Landmark. The owners - two from Taiwan, two from China, one from Mauritius and one from Malaysia - left over the December holiday period without informing or paying their employees, he said. Union leaders and trade campaigners have been warning that developing nations such as Lesotho, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh could lose thousands of jobs once the quotas were lifted. In the mountainous country surrounded by South Africa, it is feared as many as 50,000 textile workers could lose their jobs, and Mr Mafeca said he expected more companies to leave. The assistance of a US law had given Lesotho's textiles duty-free access to North American markets. The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), gave sub-Saharan countries preferential access to the US market for apparel and textile products as well as a wide range of other goods. A Lesotho government news briefing is expected on Wednesday.

"/"business 443.txt Kraft cuts snack ads for children Kraft plans to cut back on advertising of products like Oreo cookies and sugary Kool-Aid drinks as part of an effort to promote healthy eating. The largest US food maker will also add a label to its more nutritional and low-fat brands to promote the benefits. Kraft rival PepsiCo began a similar labelling initiative last year. The moves come as the firms face criticism from consumer groups concerned at rising levels of obesity in US children. Major food manufacturers have recently been reformulating the content of some calorie-heavy products. Kraft's new advertising policy", which covers advertising on TV, radio and in print publications," is aimed at children between the ages of six and 11. It means commercials for some of its most famous snacks and cereals shown during early morning cartoon shows on TV will now be replaced by food and drink qualifying for Kraft's new ""Sensible Solution"" label. But the firm said it would continue to advertise all its products in media seen by parents and ""all family"" audiences. ""We're working on ways to encourage both adults and children to eat wisely by selecting more nutritionally balanced diets" said Lance Friedmann, Kraft senior vice president.

business 444.txt Khodorkovsky quits Yukos shares Jailed tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky has transferred his controlling stake in oil giant Yukos to a business partner. Mr Khodorkovsky handed over his entire 59.5% stake in holding company Group Menatep - which controls Yukos - to Leonid Nevezlin. A close ally of the ex-Yukos boss, Mr Nevezlin is currently based in Israel. Mr Khodorkovsky handed over his stake after the forced sale of Yukos' core oil production unit, Yuganskneftegaz to pay a giant tax bill. Yuganskneftegaz was sold off at auction in December last year, eventually falling into the hands of stat

e oil firm Rosneft in a deal worth \$9.4bn (£5bn). Since the sale of Yuganskneft egaz", I have been delivered of (all) responsibility for the business that remains and the group's money as a whole, Mr Khodorkovsky said. It is all over. As before," I see my future in public activity to build a civil society in Russia a." Mr Nevezlin is Yukos' largest shareholder but is living in self-imposed exile in Israel. Yuganskneftegaz pumps around 1 million barrels of oil a day. It was sold by the Russian authorities to recover government tax claims against Yukos totalling over \$27bn. Previously considered to be Russia's richest man", with an estimated fortune of \$15bn, Mr Khodorkovsky is currently on trial for fraud and tax evasion following his arrest in October 2003. However, the charges are widely seen as politically motivated and part of a drive by Russian President Vladimir Putin to rein in the country's super-rich business leaders, the so-called oligarchs. It is also believed that Mr Khodorkovsky was particularly targeted because he had started to bankroll political opponents of Mr Putin.

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"business 445.txt Executive trio leave Aer Lingus Three senior executives of Ireland's state-owned airline", Aer Lingus, are set to leave early on 28 January after accusations of a conflict of interest. The trio are chief executive Willie Walsh, chief financial officer Brian Dunne and chief operations officer Seamus Kearney. The three have refused to confirm reports they plan to launch a private airline in competition with Aer Lingus. They announced in November they would quit in May," but did not give a reason. That decision had followed an announcement by Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern - who is still considering the future of the airline - which ruled out a proposed management buy-out of Aer Lingus. Mr Walsh denied they had been forced out early because of the reports claiming they were set to launch a competitor airline. ""What I do after I leave Aer Lingus is still too early to say", Mr Walsh told AP news agency on Wednesday. I have opportunities open to me. Brian and Seamus are in the equally fortunate position." He said he had received more than 40 business proposals", mostly aviation-related, since the trio announced their resignation two months ago. Mr Walsh said there was no conflict of interest, and, if he was to launch a rival airline or join an existing competitor, ""this thing happens in every business"". ""There's absolutely no question of a conflict of interest. I've been completely focused on my responsibilities at Aer Lingus", he told AP. This week opposition politicians had called on the Irish government to make an urgent decision on the future of the airline. On Wednesday Irish Transport Minister Martin Cullen said in a statement: A conflict of interest cannot, "should not and will not be allowed to arise between their current roles at Aer Lingus and their future career intentions." Last Friday the minister had announced he was to advertise for three senior executives for Aer Lingus. Mr Walsh", who took charge in 2000, and his team have earned praise for turning Aer Lingus around, by cutting air fares and staff, and re-positioning it as a low-fare airline to rival Ryanair. The company is 85% owned by the government and 15% by its staff.

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"business 446.txt US in EU tariff chaos trade row The US has asked the World Trade Organisation to investigate European Union customs tariffs", which it says are inconsistent and hamper trade. The EU's own institutions have noted the uneven way EU customs rules are applied but failed to act, the US Trade Representative's Office said. Small and mid-sized US firms were worst-hit, it added. The EU expanded from 15 to 25 member states in May. The US said it filed the complaint after talks failed to find a solution. The move came

e in the same week that the US and EU stepped back from confrontation in a tense dispute over aircraft subsidies to European manufacturer Airbus and US firm Boeing. New EU trade commissioner Peter Mandelson said on Tuesday that the two sides had agreed to reopen talks in the aircraft subsidies row, which led to tit-for-tat WTO filings in last autumn. Explaining why it has asked the WTO to set up a dispute settlement panel on customs barriers," the US Trade Representative's Office said that it wants to tackle the issue ""early in the EU's process of dealing with the problems of enlargement"". Ten countries", mostly in Eastern Europe," joined the EU in May. The US said its trade with the 25 EU member countries was worth \$155.2bn (£82.8bn) in 2003. ""Although the EU is a customs union", there is no single EU customs administration," a statement issued on behalf of Robert Zoellick, US Trade Representative, said. Lack of uniformity, coupled with lack of procedures for prompt EU-wide review can hinder US exports, especially for small to mid-sized businesses", An EU spokesman in Washington dismissed the US complaint. ""We think the US case is very weak. They haven't come up with any evidence that US companies are being harmed", said Anthony Gooch. It could take several months for the WTO's dispute settlement panel to report its findings.

business 447.txt News Corp eyes video games market News Corp, the media company controlled by Australian billionaire Rupert Murdoch, is eyeing a move into the video games market. According to the Financial Times, chief operating officer Peter Chernin said that News Corp is kicking the tires of pretty much all video games companies". Santa Monica-based Activision is said to be one firm on its takeover list. Video games are ""big business""", the paper quoted Mr Chernin as saying. We ""would like to get into it"". The success of products such as Sony's Playstation", Microsoft's X-Box and Nintendo's Game Cube have boosted demand for video games. The days of arcade classics such as Space Invaders, Pac-Man and Donkey Kong are long gone. Today, games often have budgets big enough for feature films and look to give gamers as real an experience as possible. And with their price tags reflecting the heavy investment by development companies, video games are proving almost as profitable as they are fun. Mr Chernin, however," told the FT that News Corp was finding it difficult to identify a suitable target. ""We are struggling with the gap between companies like Electronic Arts", which comes with a high price tag, and the next tier of companies," he explained during a conference in Phoenix, Arizona. These may be too focused on one or two product lines.""

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business 448.txt US Ahold suppliers face charges US prosecutors have charged nine food suppliers with helping Dutch retailer Ahold inflate earnings by more than \$800m (£428m). The charges have been brought against individuals as well as companies", alleging they created false accounts. Ahold hit the headlines in February 2003 after it emerged that there were accounting irregularities at its US subsidiary Foodservice. Three former Ahold top executives last year agreed to settle fraud charges. Ahold has admitted that it fraudulently inflated promotional allowances at Foodservice, improperly consolidated joint ventures and also committed other accounting errors and irregularities. The nine now charged, who worked as suppliers to Ahold, are accused of signing false documents relating to the amount of money they paid the retailer for promoting their products in its stores. Food companies pay supermarkets and retailers for prime shelf space. The suppliers in question are said to have inflated the amount of money they paid," providing auditors with signed letters that allowed Ahold to inflate its earnings. US Attorney David Kelley said he expects the nine vendors will plead guilty to the charges. He added that there may be more

court actions in the future. ""I don't want to leave you with the impression that these were the only ones involved," he said. Among those facing charges are John Nettle, a former employee of General Mills; Mark Bailin of Rymer International Seafood; Tim Daly of Michael Foods and Kenneth Bowman, who worked as an independent contractor for Total Foods. Others include Michael Hannigan of Sugar Foods; Peter Marion of Maritime Seafood Processors and First Choice Foods; Gordon Redgate of Commodity Manager and Private Label Distribution; Bruce Robinson of Basic American Foods and Michael Rogers, formerly of Tyson Foods. Pasquale D'Amuro of the FBI called the nine vendors the key ingredients in the process of cooking the books"" at Ahold. At the time of the scandal", Ahold was seen by many as Europe's Enron. Ahold shares tumbled on the news and many market observers predicted that the fall out could damage investor confidence across Europe. It was less severe than many had envisaged, however, and since then Ahold has worked hard at rebuilding its reputation and investor confidence. Ahold is the world's fourth-largest supermarket chain. Its other US businesses include Stop & Shop, and Giant Food.

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"business 449.txt Wal-Mart fights back at accusers Two big US names have launched advertising campaigns to ""set the record straight"" about their products and corporate behaviour. The world's biggest retailer Wal-Mart took out more than 100 full page adverts in national newspapers. The group is trying to see off criticism over its pay deals", benefits package and promotion strategy. Meanwhile," drugs group Eli Lilly is planning a campaign against ""false"" claims about its product Prozac. Wal-Mart kicked off the battle with adverts in newspapers like the Wall Street Journal", using an open letter from company president Lee Scott saying it was time for the public to hear the ""unfiltered truth"". ""There are lots of 'urban legends' going around these days about Wal-Mart", but facts are facts. Wal-Mart is good for consumers, good for communities and good for the US economy," Mr Scott said in a separate statement. Its adverts - and a new website - outlined the group's plans to create more than 10,000 US jobs in 2005. Wal-Mart's average pay is almost twice the national minimum wage of \$5.15 (£3.90) an hour, while employees are offered health and life insurance, company stock and a retirement plan, the adverts say. Unions accuse Wal-Mart of paying staff less than its rivals do, with fewer benefits. In California, the company is fighting opposition to new stores amid allegations it forces local competitors out of business. Lawmakers in the state are also examining allegations that the firm burdens the state with an unfair proportion of employee health care costs. I think they are going to have a tough time suddenly overcoming the perceptions of some people", said Larry Bevington, chairman of Save Our Community - a group fighting to prevent Wal-Mart opening a store in Rosemead, California. Wal-Mart is also fighting two lawsuits - one accusing it of discriminating against women and another alleging it discriminates against black employees. Meanwhile Eli Lilly is launching a series of adverts in a dozen major newspapers, to present what it says are the true facts about its anti-depressant drug Prozac. The move is in response to a British Medical Journal article that claimed missing"" Lilly documents linked Prozac to suicide and violent behaviour. In the averts", entitled An Open Letter from chief executive Sidney Taurel," the company says the article continues to ""needlessly spread fear among patients who take Prozac""." "It was simply wrong to suggest that information on Prozac was missing", or that important research data on the benefits and possible side effects of the drug were not available to doctors and regulators," the letter added. Eli Lilly's chief medical officer Alan Breier said that the article was false and misleading"" as the documents it referred to were actually

created by officials at the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and presented to an FDA meeting in 1991. Later", FDA medical advisors agreed the claims were based on faulty data and there was no increased risk of suicide.

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"business 450.txt US retail sales surge in December US retail sales ended the year on a high note with solid gains in December", boosted by strong car sales. Seasonally adjusted sales rose 1.2% in the month, compared to 0.1% a month earlier, boosted by a surge in shopping just before and after Christmas. Sales climbed 8% for the year, the best performance since an 8.5% rise in 1999, the Commerce Department added. The gains were led by a 4.3% jump in auto sales as dealers used enhanced offers to get cars out of showrooms. Dealers were forced to cut prices in December to maintain sales growth in a tough quarter when the usual end-of-year holiday sales boom was slow to get started. The increase in sales during December pushed total spending for the month to \$349.4bn (£265.9bn). Sales for the year also broke through the \$4 trillion mark for the first time - with annual sales coming in at \$4.06 trillion. However, if automobiles are excluded from December's data, retail sales rose just 0.3% on the month. Home furnishings and furniture stores also performed well, rising 2.2%. But as well as hitting the shops, more US consumers were going online or using mail order for their purchases - with non-store retailers seeing sales rise by 1.9%. However," analysts said that the strong figures were unlikely to put the Federal Reserve Bank off its current policy of measured interest rate rises.

"Consumers for now remain willing to spend freely", sustaining the US expansion. Given that attitude, the Fed remains likely to continue boosting the Fed funds rate at upcoming meetings," UBS economist Maury Harris told Reuters. Retail sales are seen as a major part of consumer spending - which in turn makes up two-thirds of economic output in the US. Consumer spending has been picking up in recent years after slumping during 2001 and 2002 as the country battled to recover from its first recession of the decade and the World Trade Centre attacks. During that time, sales grew a lacklustre 2.9% in 2001 and 2.5% a year later. Looking ahead, analysts now expect improvement in jobs growth to feed through to the High Street with consumer spending remaining strong. The belief comes despite the latest labor department report showing a surprise rise in unemployment. The number of Americans filing initial jobless claims jumped to 367,000, the highest rate since September. However, long-term claims slipped to their lowest level since 2001.

business 451.txt Winemaker rejects Foster's offer Australian winemaker Southcorp has rejected a takeover offer worth 3.1bn Australian dollars (\$2.3bn; £1.8bn) from brewing giant Foster's Group. Southcorp, whose brands include Penfolds, Rosemount and Lindemans, dismissed the offer as inadequate. The two companies held four days of talks after Foster's bought an 18.8% stake in Southcorp on 13 January. A merger would create a global player with worldwide annual sales of 39m cases and revenues of A\$2.6bn. Southcorp said Foster's A\$4.17-a-share takeover proposal offered a excellent strategic fit"" but undervalued the company. ""Southcorp's board has informed Foster's that it is not prepared to recommend the offer as it does not adequately reflect the strategic value of the company", said Southcorp chairman Brian Finn. Southcorp said Foster's takeover offer was opportunistic"". However", it said that the offer may represent an 'opening bid', opening up the possibility of Foster's returning with an improved offer. Foster's said a combination of the two companies would create a global player with an ""unrivalled"" collection of premium wine brands. Despite being best known for brewing Foster's Lager", Foster's is already one of Australia's largest wine producers," owning the Beringer and Wolf Blass br

ands among others. "The combination of Foster's and Southcorp will transform the global wine industry and significantly enhance Australia's competitive position on the global stage", said Trevor O'Hoy, Foster's chief executive officer. Foster's spent A\$584m on buying an 18.8% stake in Southcorp from the Oatley family, which founded the Rosemount Estates business and later merged it into Southcorp. Shares in both companies were suspended while the two held talks about a deal. Southcorp's shares rose 12% to A\$4.76 on news of the offer but Foster's shares fell 3.7% to A\$5.44.

business 452.txt McDonald's boss Bell dies aged 44 Charlie Bell, the straight-talking former head of fast-food giant McDonald's, has died of cancer aged 44. Mr Bell was diagnosed with colorectal cancer in May last year, a month after taking over the top job. He resigned in November to fight the illness. Joining the company as a 15-year-old part-time worker, Mr Bell quickly moved through its ranks, becoming Australia's youngest store manager at 19. A popular go-getter, he is credited with helping revive McDonald's sales. Mr Bell leaves a wife and daughter. As we mourn his passing", I ask you to keep Charlie's family in your hearts and prayers, chief executive James Skinner said in a statement. And remember that in his abbreviated time on this earth," Charlie lived life to the fullest." "No matter what cards life dealt", Charlie stayed centred on his love for his family and for McDonald's." After running the company's Australian business in the 1990s", Mr Bell moved to the US in 1999 to run operations in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. In 2001, he took over the reins in Europe, McDonald's second most important market. He became chief operating officer and president in 2002. Mr Bell took over as chief executive after his predecessor as CEO, Jim Cantalupo, died suddenly of a heart attack in April. Having worked closely with Mr Cantalupo, who came out of retirement to turn McDonald's around," Mr Bell focused on boosting demand at existing restaurants rather than follow a policy of rapid expansion. He had promised not to let the company get "fat", dumb and happy," and, according to Reuters, once told analysts that he would shove a fire hose down the throat of competitors if he saw them drowning. Mr Bell oversaw McDonald's I'm lovin' it"" advertising campaign and introduced successes such as McCafe", now the biggest coffee shop brand in Australia and New Zealand. Colleagues said that Mr Bell was proud of his humble beginnings, helping out behind cash tills and clearing tables when visiting restaurants.

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"business 453.txt US industrial output growth eases US industrial production continued to rise in November", albeit at a slower pace than the previous month. The US Federal Reserve said output from factories, mines and utilities rose 0.3% - in line with forecasts - from a revised 0.6% increase in October. Analysts added that if the carmaking sector - which saw production fall 0.5% - had been excluded the data would have been more impressive. The latest increase means industrial output has grown 4.2% in the past year. Many analysts were upbeat about the prospects for the US economy," with the increase in production coming on the heels of news of a recovery in retail sales. "This is very consistent with an economy growing at 3.5 to 4.0%. It is congruent with job growth and consumer optimism", Comerica chief economist David Littman said of the figures. The US economy grew at a respectable annual rate of 3.7% in the three months between July and September, while jobs growth averaged 178,000 during the same period. While the employment figures are not spectacular, experts believe they are enough to whittle away at America's 5.4% jobless rate. A breakdown of the latest production figures shows mining output drove the increase, surging 2.1%, while factory output rose 0.3%. But utility output dropped 1.4%. M

eanwhile, the amount of factory capacity in use during the month rose to 77.6% - its highest level since May 2001. Many investors think that product market inflation won't be a problem until the utilisation rates are at 80% or higher", "Cary Leahy, senior US economist at Deutsche Bank Securities, said. So there is still a lot of inflation-fighting slack in the manufacturing sector", Overall I'd say manufacturing at least away from autos continues to improve and I would bet that it improves at a faster rate in coming months given how lean inventories are," Citigroup senior economist Steven Wieting added.

business 454.txt LSE doubts boost bidders' shares Shares in Deutsche Boerse have risen more than 3% after a shareholder fund voiced opposition to the firm's planned takeover of the London Stock Exchange. TCI, which claims to represent owners of 5% of Deutsche Boerse's (DB) shares, has complained that the £1.35bn (\$2.5bn) offer for the LSE is too high. Opposition from TCI has fuelled speculation that the proposed takeover could fail. Rival exchange operator Euronext has also said it may bid for the LSE. Euronext operates the Paris, Amsterdam, Brussels and Lisbon bourses, while Deutsche Boerse runs the Frankfurt exchange. BBC News spoke to a number of analysts on Monday morning about shareholder worries over Deutsche Boerse's bid for LSE. Although none were prepared to speak on the record, most thought it was unlikely that TCI's opposition would halt the deal. Obviously we'll have to wait and see", but I don't think it will make much difference. Deutsche Boerse appears very committed," said one London-based broker. He forecast the takeover bid would succeed and was more concerned to see improvements in the daily running of the LSE. In voicing its opposition to the planned takeover, TCI said it would prefer to see Deutsche Boerse return \$500m (£350m) to shareholders. The Deutsche Boerse was prepared to pay for the LSE exceeds the potential benefits of this acquisition""", said TCI. Another Deutsche Boerse shareholder on Monday also appeared to back TCI's call. Another investor in Deutsche Boerse has supported the view that a payout to shareholders would be preferable to Deutsche Boerse overpaying for the LSE," Reuters news agency reported. ""We prefer a sensible entrepreneurial solution at a price that is not too high",," said Rolf Dress, a spokesman for Union Investment. If that cannot be achieved",," then we would wish for a distribution of liquid assets to shareholders." The Financial Times also reported a third Deutsche Boerse shareholder as opposed to the deal. It quoted a spokesman for US-based hedge fund Atticus Capital complaining that the planned takeover appeared to be motivated by ""empire-building"" rather than the best interests of shareholders. TCI has called for Deutsche Boerse to hold an emergency general meeting to discuss the bid for LSE. Yet under German business law",," DB does not have to gain shareholder approval before making a significant acquisition. Deutsche Boerse said TCI's opposition would not change its bid approach. ""Deutsche Boerse is convinced that its contemplated cash acquisition of the London Stock Exchange is in the best interests of its shareholders and the company",," it said. DB's shares were up 3.4% to 45.25 euros by 1030 GMT, the highest gainer in Frankfurt.

business 455.txt Qantas considers offshore option Australian airline Qantas could transfer as many as 7,000 jobs out of its home country as it seeks to save costs, according to newspaper reports. Chief executive Geoff Dixon was quoted by The Australian newspaper as saying the carrier could no longer afford to remain all-Australian"". Unions criticised the possible move - which may affect cabin and maintenance staff - saying Qantas was profitable. More than 90% of the airline's staff are based in Australia. Qantas confirmed it was looking at whether it might recruit and source products overseas - potentially through joint ventures - but said it would continue to create jobs in Australia. Despite making a record Australian dollars 648m (\$492m) profit last year",," Qantas has argued that it needs to make considerable savings if it is to r

emain competitive. ""We're going to have to get the lowest cost structure we can and that will mean sourcing things more and more from overseas",," the newspaper quoted Qantas chief executive Geoff Dixon as saying. Early this year, Qantas increased the number of flight attendants based in London from 370 to 870. If Qantas were to follow the lead of other airlines moving staff 'offshore' 7,000 jobs could shift overseas, the newspaper reported. In a statement, Qantas said it was looking to build its operations overseas. However, it stressed this would not result in large scale redundancies in its home market, where most of its 35,000 staff are employed. We are totally committed to continuing to grow jobs in Australia", Mr Dixon said. We are, however," operating in a global market and there is no room for complacency simply because we are currently profitable and successful." Unions reacted angrily to the reported disclosure",, arguing that Qantas was profitable and did not need to take such action. "We could understand if Qantas was a struggling airline about to go under", Michael Mijatov, international division secretary of the Flight Attendants Association, told Agence France Presse. Qantas announced a record profit last year and is on course this year for an even greater profit so it is totally unnecessary." In an effort to meet the challenge posed by low cost carriers", Qantas sought a tie-up with Air New Zealand last year. However, the deal was thrown out by the New Zealand High Court on competition grounds.

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"business 456.txt Gazprom 'in \$36m back-tax claim' The nuclear unit of Russian energy giant Gazprom is reportedly facing a 1bn rouble (\$35.7m; £19.1m) back-tax claim for the 2001-2003 period. Vedomosti newspaper reported that Russian authorities made the demand at the end of last year. The paper added that most of the taxes claimed are linked to the company's export activity. Gazprom", the biggest gas company in the world, took over nuclear fuel giant Atomstroieksport in October 2004. The main project of Atomstroieksport is the building of a nuclear plant in Iran, which has been a source of tension between Russia and the US. Gazprom is one of the key players in the complex Russian energy market, where the government of Vladimir Putin has made moves to regain state influence over the sector. Gazprom is set to merge with state oil firm Rosneft, the company that eventually acquired Yuganskneftegas, the main unit of embattled oil giant Yukos. Claims for back-taxes was a tool used against Yukos, and led to the enforced sale Yuganskneftegas. Some analysts fear the Kremlin will continue to use these sort of moves to boost the efforts of the state to regain control over strategically important sectors such as oil.

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"business 457.txt Germany calls for EU reform German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder has called for radical reform of the EU's stability pact to grant countries more flexibility over their budget deficits. Mr Schroeder said existing fiscal rules should be loosened to allow countries to run deficits above the current 3% limit if they met certain criteria. Writing in the Financial Times", Mr Schroeder also said heads of government should have a greater say in reforms. Changes to the pact are due to be agreed at an economic summit in March. The current EU rules limit the size of a eurozone country's deficit to 3% of GDP. Countries which exceed the threshold are liable to heavy fines by the European Commission, although several countries, including Germany," have breached the rules consistently since 2002 without facing punishment. The European Commission acknowledged last month that it would not impose sanctions on countries who break the rules. Mr Schroeder - a staunch supporter of the pact when it was set up in the 1990s - said exemptions were now needed to take into acc

ount the cost of domestic reform programmes and changing economic conditions. ""The stability pact will work better if intervention by European institutions in the budgetary sovereignty of national parliaments is only permitted under very limited conditions", he wrote. Only if their competences are respected will the member states be willing to align their policies more consistently with the economic goals of the EU." Deficits should be allowed to rise above 3%", Mr Schroeder argued," if countries meet several ""mandatory criteria"". These include governments which are adopting costly structural reforms", countries which are suffering economic stagnation and nations which are shouldering ""special economic burdens"". The proposed changes would make it harder for the European Commission to launch infringement action against any state which breaches the pact's rules. Mr Schroeder's intervention comes ahead of a meeting of the 12 Euro zone finance ministers on Monday to discuss the pact. The issue will also be discussed at Tuesday's Ecofin meeting of the finance ministers of all 25 EU members. Mr Schroeder also called for heads of government to play a larger role in shaping reforms to the pact. A number of EU finance ministers are believed to favour only limited changes to the eurozone's rules.

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"business 458.txt Parmalat founder offers apology The founder and former boss of Parmalat has apologised to investors who lost money as a result of the Italian dairy firm's collapse. Calisto Tanzi said he would co-operate fully with prosecutors investigating the background to one of Europe's largest financial scandals. Parmalat was placed into bankruptcy protection in 2003 after a 14bn euro black hole was found in its accounts. More than 130",000 people lost money following the firm's collapse. Mr Tanzi, 66, issued a statement through his lawyer after five hours of questioning by prosecutors in Parma on 15 January. Prosecutors are seeking indictments against Mr Tanzi and 28 others - including several members of his family and former Parmalat chief financial officer Fausto Tonna - for alleged manipulation of stock market prices and making misleading statements to accountants and Italy's financial watchdog. Two former Parmalat auditors will stand trial later this month for their role in the firm's collapse. ""I apologise to all who have suffered so much damage as a result of my schemes to make my dream of an industrial project come true," Mr Tanzi's statement said. It is my duty to collaborate fully with prosecutors to reconstruct the causes of Parmalat's sudden default and who is responsible." Mr Tanzi spent several months in jail in the wake of Parmalat's collapse and was kept under house arrest until last September. Parmalat is now being run by a state appointed administrator", Enrico Bondi, who has launched lawsuits against 80 banks in an effort to recover money for the bankrupt company and its shareholders. He has alleged that these companies were aware of the true state of Parmalat's finances but continued to lend money to the company. The companies insist they were the victims of fraudulent book-keeping. Parmalat was declared insolvent after it emerged that 4 billion euros (£2.8bn; \$4.8bn) it supposedly held in an offshore account did not in fact exist. The firm's demise sent shock waves through Italy, where its portfolio of top-selling food brands and its position as the owner of leading football club Parma had turned it into a household name.

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"business 459.txt 'Golden economic period' to end Ten years of ""golden"" economic performance may come to an end in 2005 with growth slowing markedly", City consultancy Deloitte has warned. The UK economy could suffer a backlash from the slowdown in the housing market, triggering a fall in consumer spending and a rise in unemployment. Deloitte is forecasting economic g

rowth of 2% this year, below Chancellor Gordon Brown's forecast of 3% to 3.5%. It also believes that interest rates will fall to 4% by the end of the year. In its quarterly economic review," Deloitte said the UK economy had enjoyed a ""golden period"" during the past decade with unemployment falling to a near 30 year low and inflation at its lowest since the 1960s. But it warned that this growth had been achieved at the expense of creating major ""imbalances"" in the economy. Deloitte's chief economic advisor Roger Bootle said: ""The biggest hit of all is set to come from the housing market which has already embarked on a major slowdown. ""Whereas the main driver of the economy in recent years has been robust household spending growth""" this is likely to suffer as the housing market slowdown gathers pace." Economic growth is likely to be constrained during the next few years by increased pressure on household budgets and rising taxes", Deloitte believes. Gordon Brown will need to raise about \$10bn a year in order to sustain the public finances in the short term, the firm claims. This will result in a marked slowdown in growth in 2005 and 2006 compared to last year, when the economy expanded by 3.25%. However," Deloitte stressed that the slowdown was unlikely to have any major impact on retail prices while it expected the Bank of England to respond quickly to signs of the economy faltering. It expects a series of ""aggressive"" interest rate cuts over the next two years", with the cost of borrowing falling from its current 4.75% mark to 3.5% by the end of 2006. ""Although 2005 may not be the year when things go completely wrong", it will probably mark the start of a more difficult period for the UK economy," Mr Bootle.

business 460.txt Jobs go at Oracle after takeover Oracle has announced it is cutting about 5,000 jobs following the completion of its \$1 0.3bn takeover of its smaller rival Peoplesoft last week. The company said it would retain more than 90% of Peoplesoft product development and product support staff. The cuts will affect about 9% of the 55,000 staff of the combined companies. Oracle's 18-month fight to acquire Peoplesoft was one of the most drawn-out and hard-fought US takeover battles of recent times. The merged companies are set to be a major force in the enterprise software market, second only in size to Germany's SAP. In a statement, Oracle said it began notifying staff of redundancies on Friday and the process would continue over the next 10 days. By retaining the vast majority of Peoplesoft technical staff", Oracle will have the resources to deliver on the development and support commitments we have made to Peoplesoft customers over the last 18 months," Oracle's chief executive Larry Ellison said in a statement. Correspondents say 6,000 job losses had been expected - and some suggest more cuts may be announced in future. They say Mr Ellison may be trying to placate Peoplesoft customers riled by Oracle's determined takeover strategy. Hours before Friday's announcement, there was a funereal air at Peoplesoft's headquarters, reported AP news agency. A Peoplesoft sign had been turned into shrine to the company, with flowers, candles and company memorabilia. We're mourning the passing of a great company", the agency quoted Peoplesoft worker David Ogden as saying. Other employees said they would rather be sacked than work for Oracle. The new company is going to be totally different," said Anil Aggarwal, Peoplesoft's director of database markets. Peoplesoft had an easygoing", relaxed atmosphere. Oracle has an edgy," aggressive atmosphere that's not conducive to innovative production." On the news", Oracle shares rose 15 cents - 1.1% - on Nasdaq. In after-hours trading the shares did not move.

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"business 461.txt Beijingers fume over parking fees Choking traffic jams in Beijing are prompting officials to look at reorganising car parking charges. Car ownership has risen fast in recent years", and there are

now two and a half million cars on the city's roads. The trouble is that the high status of car ownership is matched by expensive fees at indoor car parks," making motorists reluctant to use them. Instead roads are being clogged by drivers circling in search of a cheaper outdoor option. ""The price differences between indoor and outdoor lots are unreasonable", said Wang Yan, an official from the Beijing Municipal Commission for Development and Reform quoted in the state-run China Daily newspaper. Mr Wang, who is in charge of collecting car parking fees, said his team would be looking at adjusting parking prices to close the gap. Indoor parking bays can cost up to 250% more than outdoor ones. Sports fans who drive to matches may also find themselves the target of the commission's road rage. It wants them to use public transport, and is considering jacking up the prices of car parks near sports grounds. Mr Wang said his review team may scrap the relatively cheap hourly fee near such places and impose a higher flat rate during matches. Indoor parking may be costly, but it is not always secure. Mr Wang's team are also going to look into complaints from residents about poor service received in exchange for compulsory monthly fees of up to 400 yuan (\$48; £26). The Beijing authorities decided two years ago that visiting foreign dignitaries' motorcades should no longer get motorcycle outriders as they blocked the traffic. Unclogging Beijing's increasingly impassable streets is a major concern for the Chinese authorities, who are building dozens of new roads to create a showcase modern city ahead of the 2008 Olympic Games.

business 462.txt GM issues 2005 profits warning General Motors has warned that it expects earnings this year to be lower than in 2004. The world's biggest car maker is grappling with losses in its European business, and weak US sales. GM said higher healthcare costs in North America, and lower profits at its financial services subsidiary would hurt its performance in 2005. GM said it expects to meet its 2004 earnings targets despite a tough competitive environment". GM", whose brands include Buick, Cadillac and Chevrolet in the US and Opel, Saab and Vauxhall in Europe, is due to reveal 2004 earnings on 19 January. It said it would deliver a shareholder payout of \$6.0-\$6.5 per share this year, as promised, but that next year's earnings per share would be lower, "at between \$4.0-\$5.0. ""We're following a roadmap that we believe will deliver strong results", said GM chief executive Rick Wagoner. GM said it was expecting reduced financial losses" in Europe in 2005. It is in the midst of cutting 12",000 jobs - one fifth of the European total - in a bid to cut costs. The biggest job losses are in Germany. Its vehicle businesses have gained market share in three out of four regions in 2004, achieving record profitability in Asia Pacific and returning to profit in Latin America, the Middle East and Africa. The car maker has diversified into financial services, and is extending the reach of General Motors Acceptance Corp (GMAC), which has said it may enter the home loans market. GMAC has been a strong contributor to profits in 2004 but GM said it will do less well this year," delivering net income of \$2.5bn. ""Attaining earnings of \$10 a share remains GM's goal", the company said, adding it believes it can achieve this in 2007.

business 463.txt US economy still growing says Fed Most areas of the US saw their economy continue to expand in December and early January, the US Federal Reserve said in its latest Beige Book report. Of the 12 US regions it identifies for the study, 11 showed stronger economic growth, with only the Cleveland area falling behind with a mixed" rating. Consumer spending was higher in December than November", and festive sales were also up on 2003. The employment picture also improved," the Fed said. ""Labour markets firmed in a number of districts", but wage pressures generally remained modest, the Beige Book said. Several districts reported higher prices for building materials and manufacturing inputs," but most reported steady or only slightly higher over

all price levels." "The report added that residential real estate activity remained strong and that commercial real estate activity strengthened in most districts. " "Office leasing was especially brisk in Washington DC", and New York City, two of the nation's strongest commercial markets," the Fed said.

business 464.txt Wall Street cool to eBay's profit Shares in online auction house eBay fell 9.8% in after-hours trade on Wednesday, after its quarterly profits failed to meet market expectations. Despite seeing net profits rise by 44% to \$205.4m (£110m) during October to December, from \$142m a year earlier, Wall Street had expected more. eBay stock fell to \$92.9 in after-hours trade, from a \$103.05 end on Nasdaq. eBay's net revenue for the quarter rose to \$935.8m from \$648.4m, boosted by growth at its PayPal payment service. Excluding special items, eBay's profit was 33 cents a share, but analysts had expected 34 cents. I think Wall Street has gotten a bit ahead of eBay this quarter and for the 2005 year." " said Janco Partners analyst Martin Pyykkonen. For 2004 as a whole", " eBay earned \$778.2m on sales of \$3.27bn. eBay president and chief executive Meg Whitman called 2004 an "outstanding success" that generated "tremendous momentum" for 2005. "I'm more confident than ever that the decisions and investments we're making today will ensure a bright future for the company and our community of users around the world", " she said. eBay now forecasts 2005 revenue of \$4.2bn to \$4.35bn and earnings excluding items of \$1.48 to \$1.52 per share. Analysts had previously estimated that eBay would achieve 2005 revenues of \$4.37bn and earnings of \$1.62 per share, excluding items.

business 465.txt WorldCom trial starts in New York The trial of Bernie Ebbers, former chief executive of bankrupt US phone company WorldCom, has started in New York with the selection of the jury. Mr Ebbers, 63, is accused of being the mastermind behind an \$11bn (£6bn) accounting fraud that eventually saw the firm collapse in July 2002. His indictment includes charges of securities fraud, conspiracy and filing false reports with regulators. If found guilty, Mr Ebbers could face a substantial jail sentence. He has firmly declared his innocence. Under Mr Ebbers' leadership, WorldCom emerged from Mississippi obscurity to become a \$160bn telecoms giant and the darling of late 1990s investors. Yet as competition intensified and the telecoms boom petered out, WorldCom found itself under growing financial stress. When WorldCom finally collapsed, shareholders lost about \$180bn and 20,000 workers lost their jobs. Mr Ebbers' trial, which is expected to last two months, is the latest in a series of attempts by US prosecutors to pursue senior executives for fraud. It will coincide with the retrial of former Tyco International chief Dennis Kozlowski and his top lieutenant, accused of looting the industrial conglomerate to the tune of \$600m. Trial preparations are also preparing for former executives of shamed US energy firm Enron.

business 466.txt High fuel costs hit US airlines Two of the largest airlines in the US - American and Southwest - have blamed record fuel prices for their disappointing quarterly results. American Airlines' parent AMR reported a loss of \$387m (£206m) for the fourth quarter of 2004, against a \$111m loss for the same period a year earlier. Meanwhile, Southwest Airlines saw its fourth-quarter 2004 profits fall 15% to \$56m, against \$66m a year earlier. Both said high fuel bills would continue to pressure revenues in 2005. American, the world's biggest airline by some measures, said it expected to report a loss for the first quarter of 2005. Southwest, which has the highest market value of any US carrier, said it would remain profitable despite high fuel prices. AMR's shares were flat in Wednesday morning trading on the New York Stock Exchange, as the results were slightly better than analysts had anticipated. AMR's chief executive Gerard Arpey said the airline's difficulties reflected the situation within the industry. AMR's results for the fourth quarter of 2004 reflect

the economic woes that plagued the airline industry throughout 2004 - in particular", high fuel prices and a tough revenue environment," he said. For the full year, AMR posted a loss of \$761m, lower than 2003's \$1.2bn loss and an indication that the airline has successfully cut costs. AMR added that as part of its cost cutting measures, it is postponing the delivery of 54 Boeing jets. Shares in Southwest fell 65 cents to \$14.35 as analysts voiced their disappointment. The results came in below our already conservative estimate for the quarter", said Ray Neidl, an analyst at Calyon Securities. Both American and Southwest have been squeezed by cut-throat competition in the US airline industry, as a glut of available seats has led to fierce price reductions.

business 467.txt European losses hit GM's profits General Motors (GM) saw its net profits fall 37% in the last quarter of 2004, as it continued to be hit by losses at its European operations. The US giant earned \$63 0m (£481.5m) in the October-to-December period, down from \$1bn in the fourth quarter of 2003. GM's revenues rose 4.7% to \$51.2bn from \$48.8bn a year earlier. The fourth-quarter losses at General Motors Europe totalled \$345m, up from \$66m during the same period in 2003. GM's main European brands are Opel and Vauxhall. Excluding special items, GM's global income from continuing operations totalled \$569m during the quarter, down from \$838m a year earlier. The results were in line with Wall Street expectations and shares in GM rose by about 1% in pre-market trade. For the whole of 2004, GM earned \$3.7bn, down from \$3.8bn in 2003, while its annual revenue rose 4.5% to \$193bn. GM said its profits were also hit by higher healthcare costs in the US. GM reported solid overall results in 2004", despite challenging competitive conditions in many markets around the globe," GM chairman and chief executive Rick Wagoner said in a statement. The company recently announced that it expected profits in 2005 to be lower than in 2004.

business 468.txt EU to probe Alitalia 'state aid' The European Commission has officially launched an in-depth investigation into whether Italian airline Alitalia is receiving illegal state aid. Commission officials are to look at Rome's provision of a 400m euro (\$495m; £275m) loan to the carrier. Both the Italian government and Alitalia have repeatedly denied that the money - part of a vital restructuring plan - is state aid. The investigation could take up to 18 months. However, Transport Commissioner Jacques Barrot said he wanted it to be carried out as swiftly as possible. The Italian authorities have presented a serious industrial plan", said Mr Barrot. We now have to verify certain aspects to confirm that this plan contains no state aid. I would like our analysis to be completed swiftly."" The matter of possible state aid was brought to the Commission's attention by eight of Alitalia's rivals", including Germany's Lufthansa, British Airways and Spain's Iberia. While Alitalia needs to restructure to bring itself back to profitability, the rival carriers say it has both violated state aid rules and threatened competition. Alitalia lost 330m euros in 2003 as it struggled to get to grips with high costs, spiralling oil prices, competition from budget carriers and reduced demand. It plans to split into AZ Fly and AZ Services," which will handle air and ground services respectively. Alitalia already enjoyed state aid in 1997. EU rules prevent that from happening again in what is known as the ""one time", "last time"" rule for airlines. Otherwise", EU regulations on state aid stipulate that governments may help companies financially, but only on the same terms as a commercial investor. The airline declined to comment on the Commission decision.

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"business 469.txt IMF agrees fresh Turkey funding Turkey has agreed a draft proposal with the International Monetary Fund to borrow \$10b

n (£5.19bn)", extending its ongoing financial support until 2007. Turkey's current \$18.6bn loan agreement with the IMF expires in February and the new deal would see it receive added support between 2005 and 2007. In return for the funding, Turkey would be expected to keep inflation under control and introduce market reforms. Turkey's economy has steadily recovered from a severe crisis in 2001. Economic growth has average 6-7% in the past three years, ahead of IMF forecasts, while inflation fell below 10% this year for the first time in 30 years. However, Turkey has a huge debt burden - already owing \$23bn to the IMF - while its current account deficit has swelled to \$10.7bn this year. The Turkish economics minister, Ali Babacan, said the two sides had reached general agreement on a new three year funding program. Rodrigo de Rato, the IMF's managing director," said the loan agreement would help to improve Turkish economic prospects by cutting its debt and stimulating growth. ""I believe the new programme", if implemented successfully, will help Turkey create the conditions for sustained growth and employment creation, reduce inflation toward European level and enhance the economy's resilience," he said. The agreement must still be ratified by IMF directors at a meeting expected to take place next month. The agreement would also enable Turkey to defer payments on previous loans worth \$3.7m until 2006. As part of the draft agreement, Turkey has signed a letter of intent"" stating its determination to push through far-reaching reforms to its tax and benefits system and its banking sector. Such reforms are considered vital for Turkey if it is to fulfil its ambition of joining the European Union. The EU will decide on 17 December whether to begin entry talks with Turkey. The US", the largest of the IMF's 184 members, is a strong supporter of continued financial support for Turkey.

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"business 470.txt Saudi investor picks up the Savoy London's famous Savoy hotel has been sold to a group combining Saudi billionaire investor Prince Alwaleed bin Talal and a unit of HBOS bank. Financial details of the deal", which includes the nearby Simpson's in the Strand restaurant, were not disclosed. The seller - Irish-based property firm Quinlan Private - bought the Savoy along with the Berkeley, Claridge's and the Connaught for £750m last year. Prince Alwaleed's hotel investments include the luxury George V in Paris. He also has substantial stakes in Fairmont Hotels & Resorts, which will manage the Savoy and Simpson's in the Strand, and Four Seasons. Fairmont said it planned to invest \$48m (£26m) in renovating parts of the Savoy including the River Room and suites with views over the River Thames. Work was expected to be completed by summer 2006, Fairmont said.

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"business 471.txt Tsunami slows Sri Lanka's growth Sri Lanka's president has launched a reconstruction drive worth \$3.5bn (£1.8bn) by appealing for peace and national unity. President Kumaratunga said it was now important to find a peaceful solution to years of internal conflict. Meanwhile", the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said damage from the tsunami would cut one percentage point from Sri Lanka's economic growth this year. It estimated the wave left physical damage equal to 6.5% of the economy. Separately, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) said that at least one million people have lost their livelihoods in Sri Lanka and Indonesia alone. It called for action to create jobs. President Kumaratunga attended a ceremony in the southern town of Hambantota. She was joined by government and opposition politicians, together with Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim and Christian clergy. Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapakse laid the foundation stone on a new housing project intended to provide

6,000 homes for survivors of the tsunami. Mrs Kumaratunga called for the tragedy to be "the start of a new beginning to rebuild our nation". "We are a country blessed with so many natural resources and we have not made use of them fully. Instead we have been squabbling", fighting," she added. Norway's peace negotiator Erik Solheim is due to arrive on Wednesday to try to revive peace talks in the decades-long conflict between government forces and the Tamil Tigers, who want a separate state in the north east of the country. Reconstruction efforts in eastern Sri Lanka have been hampered by tensions between the two sides. The IMF said that the Sri Lankan authorities' initial estimates have put the physical damage at \$1.3 to \$1.5bn, but added that the implications for the economy were much wider than this. The broader macroeconomic impact will clearly be substantial but the details are difficult to assess at this early stage", the IMF said. Growth, inflation, the balance of payments and foreign exchange reserves are all expected to show the effects of lost businesses and reconstruction costs. The fishing industry has been devastated", agricultural production may be affected and tourism will suffer, especially in the short term," the report said. The ILO estimated that 400,000 Sri Lankans have lost their jobs, mostly in these three industries. Earnings from tourism this year are expected to be 15% lower than last year. Economic growth this year is expected to be 4%, which is about 1% less than previously forecast. Inflation could climb to 14% compared to a previous estimate of 12%. Although major exports have not suffered, the IMF expects the reconstruction effort will require higher imports which could damage the balance of payments. Foreign exchange reserves may become strained as Sri Lanka will be hard pressed to keep international reserves at the pre-tsunami level" which totalled more than two months worth of imports. Last week", the IMF approved Sri Lanka's request for a freeze on loan repayments.

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"business 472.txt China suspends 26 power projects China has ordered a halt to construction work on 26 big power stations", including two at the Three Gorges Dam," on environmental grounds. The move is a surprising one because China is struggling to increase energy supplies for its booming economy. Last year 24 provinces suffered black outs. The State Environmental Protection Agency said the 26 projects had failed to do proper environmental assessments. Topping the list was a controversial dam on the scenic upper Yangtze River. "Construction of these projects has started without approval of the assessment of their environmental impact... they are typical illegal projects of construction first", approval next," said SEPA vice-director Pan Yue, in a statement on the agency's website. Some of the projects may be allowed to start work again with the proper permits, but others would be cancelled, he said. Altogether, the agency ordered 30 projects halted. Other projects included a petrochemicals plant and a port in Fujian. The bulk of the list was made up of new power plants, with some extensions to existing ones. The stoppages would appear to be another step in the central government's battle to control projects licensed by local officials. However, previous crackdowns have tended to focus on projects for which the government argued there was overcapacity, such as steel and cement. The government has encouraged construction of new electricity generating capacity to solve chronic energy shortages which forced many factories onto part-time working last year. In 2004, China increased its generating capacity by 12.6%, or 440,700 megawatts (MW). The biggest single project to be halted was the Xiluodi Dam project, designed to produce 12,600 MW of electricity. It is being built on the Jinshajiang - or 'river of golden sand' as the upper reaches of the Yangtze are known. Second and third on the agency's list were two power stations being built at the \$22bn Three Gorges Dam project on the central Yangtze - an und

erground 4,200 MW power plant and a 100 MW plant. The Three Gorges Dam has proved controversial in China - where more than half a million people have been relocated to make way for it - and abroad. It has drawn criticism from environmental groups and overseas human rights activists. The damming of the Upper Yangtze has also begun to attract criticism from environmentalists in China. In April 2004, central government officials ordered a halt to work on the nearby Nu River, which is part of a United Nations world heritage site, the Three Parallel Rivers site which covers the Yangtze, Mekong and Nu (also known as the Salween), according to the UK-published China Review. That move reportedly followed a protest from the Thai government about the downstream impact of the dams, and a critical documentary made by Chinese journalists. China's energy shortage influenced global prices for oil, coal and shipping last year.

business 473.txt Two Nigerian banks set to merge Nigerian banks United Bank of Africa and Standard Trust Bank have agreed plans to merge and create the biggest bank in West Africa. The deal is also in line with a 2004 directive from the Nigerian central bank that called for more consolidation in the nation's crowded banking sector. The merger was announced in a statement on Standard Trust's website on Tuesday, but no financial details were revealed. United Bank is the third biggest in Nigeria in terms of number of branches. Standard Trust is smaller but more profitable. The boards of United Bank and Standard Trust", at separate meetings yesterday, approved arrangements to merge both institutions," Standard Trust said. Standard Trust is 100% Nigerian-owned, but United Bank has some foreign investors, including New York-based Global Depository Receipts (32.8%), and Banca Nazionale del Lavoro and Monte del Paschi di Siena, both from Italy, who each have a 2.4% stake.

business 474.txt Virgin Blue shares plummet 20% Shares in Australian budget airline Virgin Blue plunged 20% after it warned of a steep fall in full year profits. Virgin Blue said profits after tax for the year to March would be between 10% to 15% lower than the previous year. Sluggish demand reported previously for November and now December 2004 continues", " said Virgin Blue chief executive Brett Godfrey. Virgin Blue, which is 25% owned by Richard Branson, has been struggling to fend off pressure from rival Jetstar. It cut its full year passenger number forecast by approximately 2.5%". Virgin Blue reported a 22% fall in first quarter profits in August 2004 due to tough competition. In November", first half profits were down due to slack demand and rising fuel costs. Virgin Blue was launched four years ago and now has roughly one third of Australia's domestic airline market. But the national carrier, Qantas, has fought back with its own budget airline, Jetstar, which took to the skies in May 2004. Sydney-listed Virgin Blue's shares recovered slightly to close 12% down on Wednesday. Shares in its major shareholder, Patrick Corporation - which owns 46% of Virgin Blue - had dropped 31% by the close.

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"business 475.txt Watchdog probes Vivendi bond sale French stock market regulator AMF has filed complaints against media giant Vivendi Universal", its boss and another top executive. It believes the prospectus for a bond issue was unclear and that executives may have had privileged information. AMF has begun proceedings against Vivendi, its chief executive Jean-Rene Fourtou and chief operating officer Jean-Bernard Levy. Vivendi advisor Deutsche Bank was also the subject of a complaint filing. Deutsche Bank, which was responsible for selling the convertible bonds to investors," could face penalties if the complaint is upheld. Vivendi has said it believes there is ""no legal basis"" for the complaints. The watchdog is said to believe the executive pair were party to ""privileged information"" surrounding the issue of the bonds. Both me

n bought some of the bonds", the Associated Press news agency reported. AMF is investigating claims that the duo were aware of an interest in Vivendi's US assets from investor Marvin Davis, at the time of the bond sale. Vivendi, however, has said that the information was public knowledge as Mr Davis' offer for the US assets had already been rejected by Vivendi's board. AMF is also looking into whether the executives knew that Vivendi was considering exercising its right to buy British Telecom's shares in Cegetel. Vivendi has rejected the charge," saying the decision to buy the Cegetel shares was ""no more than a possibility", "of which the public was perfectly aware"" at the time of the bond issue. Back in December", Vivendi and its former chief executive Jean-Marie Messier were each fined 1m euros (\$1.3m; £690,000) by AMF. The fines came after a 15-month probe into allegations that the media giant misled investors after a costly acquisition programme went wrong.

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"business 476.txt Saudi NCCI's shares soar Shares in Saudi Arabia's National Company for Cooperative Insurance (NCCI) soared on their first day of trading in Riyadh. They were trading 84% above the offer price on Monday", changing hands at 372 riyals (\$99; £53) after topping 400 early in the day. Demand for the insurer's debut shares was strong - 12 times what was on sale. The listing was part of the country's plans to open up its insurance market and boost demand in the sector. Deregulation is expected to boost demand for accident and damage cover. Previously, only NCCI has been legally allowed to offer insurance products within Saudi Arabia. However, the authorities have turned a blind eye to the many other firms selling insurance. Saudi Arabia now wants a fully functioning insurance industry and is introducing legislation that will clamp down on unauthorised companies. Policy-makers also want to make having insurance more of a requirement, but first have to take steps to boost public confidence in the system, analysts said. As a result, NCCI is being developed as the industry's flagship firm - publicly-listed, with audited accounts. Saudi Arabia sold 7 million NCCI shares, or about 70% of the company's total capital last month. More than 800,000 applicants got 9 shares each for 205 riyals apiece.

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"business 477.txt JP Morgan admits US slavery links Thous ands of slaves were accepted as collateral for loans by two banks that later became part of JP Morgan Chase. The admission is part of an apology sent to JP Morgan staff after the bank researched its links to slavery in order to meet legislation in Chicago. Citizens Bank and Canal Bank are the two lenders that were identified. They are now closed", but were linked to Bank One, which JP Morgan bought last year. About 13,000 slaves were used as loan collateral between 1831 and 1865. Because of defaults by plantation owners, Citizens and Canal ended up owning about 1,250 slaves. ""We all know slavery existed in our country", but it is quite different to see how our history and the institution of slavery were intertwined, JP Morgan chief executive William Harrison and chief operating officer James Dimon said in the letter. Slavery was tragically ingrained in American society," but that is no excuse." "We apologise to the African-American community", particularly those who are descendants of slaves," and to the rest of the American public for the role that Citizens Bank and Canal Bank played." "The slavery era was a tragic time in US history and in our company's history." JP Morgan said that it was setting up a \$5m scholarship programme for students living in Louisiana", "the state where the events took place. The bank said that it is a "very different company than the Citizens and Canal Banks of the 1800s"".

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"business 478.txt Egypt and Israel seal trade deal In a sign of a thaw in relations between Egypt and Israel", the two countries have signed a trade protocol with the US, allowing Egyptian goods made in partnership with Israeli firms free access to American markets. The protocol, signed in Cairo," will establish what are called ""qualified industrial zones"" in Egypt. Products from these zones will enjoy duty free access to the US", provided that 35% of their components are the product of Israeli-Egyptian cooperation. The US describes this as the most important economic agreement between Egypt and Israel in two decades. The protocol establishing the zones has been stalled for years. There has been deep sensitivity in Egypt about any form of co-operation with Israel as long as its peace process with the Palestinians remains blocked. But in recent weeks an unusual warmth has crept into relations between the two countries. Both exchanged prisoners earlier this month, with Egypt handing back an Israeli who has served eight years in prison after being convicted for spying. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak has described Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon as the best chance for the Palestinians to achieve peace. The government in Cairo now believes Mr Sharon is moving towards the centre and away from the positions of right wing groups. It also believes the US, pressed by Europe, is now more willing to engage seriously in the search for a settlement. But there are also pressing economic reasons for Egypt's decision to enter into the trade agreement. It will give a huge boost to Egyptian textile exports, which are about to suffer a drop after new regulations come into force in the US at the beginning of the year.

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"business 479.txt Ford gains from finance not cars Ford", the US car company, reported higher fourth quarter and full-year profits on Thursday boosted by a buoyant period for its car loans unit. Net income for 2004 was \$3.5bn (£1.87bn) - up nearly \$3bn from 2003 - while turnover rose \$7.2bn to \$170.8bn. In the fourth quarter alone Ford reported net income of \$104m, compared with a loss of \$793m a year ago. But its auto unit made a loss. Fourth quarter turnover was \$44.7bn, compared to \$45.9bn a year ago. Though car and truck loan profits saved the day, Ford's auto unit made a pre-tax loss of \$470m in the fourth quarter (compared to a profit of £13m in the year-ago period) and its US sales dipped 3.8%. Yesterday General Motor's results also showed its finance unit was a strong contributor to profits. However, Ford is working hard to revitalise its product portfolio," unveiling the Fusion and Zephyr models at the International Motor Show in Detroit. It also brought out a number of new models in the second half of 2004. ""In 2004", our company gained momentum, delivering...more new products, and more innovative breakthroughs, such as the Escape Hybrid, the industry's first full-hybrid sport utility vehicle," said chairman and chief executive officer Bill Ford. ""We also confronted operating challenges with our Jaguar brand and high industry marketing costs" he added. But Ford declined to provide guidance for first quarter 2005. It will do so at a presentation in New York on 26 January. In addition, the company said 2004 net income was affected by a fourth-quarter pre-tax charge taken to reduce the value of a receivable owed to Ford by Visteon, a former subsidiary. Recent new models introduced by Ford include the Ford Five Hundred and Mercury Montego sedans, the Ford Freestyle crossover, the Ford Mustang, the Land Rover LR3/Discovery, and Volvo S40 and V50 in North America and Europe. Total company vehicle unit sales in 2004 were 6,798,000, an increase of 62,000 units from 2003. Fourth-quarter vehicle unit sales totalled 1,751,000, a decline of 133,000 units. For the full year

r, Ford's worldwide automotive division earned a pre-tax profit of \$850m, a \$69 7m improvement from \$153m a year ago.

business 480.txt Wipro beats forecasts once again Wipro, India's third-biggest software firm, has reported a 60% rise in profit, topping market expectations. Net income in the last quarter was 4.3bn rupees (\$98m; £5 2m), against 2.7bn a year earlier. Profit had been forecast to be 4.1bn rupees. Wipro offers services such as call centres to foreign clients and has worked for more than half of the companies on the Fortune 500 list. Wipro said demand was strong, allowing it to increase the prices it charged. On the face of it", the results don't look very exciting," said Apurva Shah, an analyst at ASK-Raymond James. But the guidance is positive and pricing going up is good news." Third-quarter sales rose 34% to 20.9bn rupees. One problem identified by Wipro was the high turnover of its staff. It said that 90% of employees at its business process outsourcing operations had had to be replaced. "We have to get that under control", said vice-chairman Vivek Paul. Wipro is majority owned by India's richest man Azim Premji.

business 481.txt Christmas sales worst since 1981 UK retail sales fell in December, failing to meet expectations and making it by some counts the worst Christmas since 1981. Retail sales dropped by 1% on the month in December, after a 0.6% rise in November, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said. The ONS revised the annual 2004 rate of growth down from the 5.9% estimated in November to 3.2%. A number of retailers have already reported poor figures for December. Clothing retailers and non-specialist stores were the worst hit with only internet retailers showing any significant growth, according to the ONS. The last time retailers endured a tougher Christmas was 23 years previously, when sales plunged 1.7%. The ONS echoed an earlier caution from Bank of England governor Mervyn King not to read too much into the poor December figures. Some analysts put a positive gloss on the figures, pointing out that the non-seasonally-adjusted figures showed a performance comparable with 2003. The November-December jump last year was roughly comparable with recent averages, although some way below the serious booms seen in the 1990s. And figures for retail volume outperformed measures of actual spending, an indication that consumers are looking for bargains, and retailers are cutting their prices. However, reports from some High Street retailers highlight the weakness of the sector. Morrisons, Woolworths, House of Fraser, Marks & Spencer and Big Food all said that the festive period was disappointing. And a British Retail Consortium survey found that Christmas 2004 was the worst for 10 years. Yet, other retailers - including HMV, Monsoon, Jessops, Body Shop and Tesco - reported that festive sales were well up on last year. Investec chief economist Philip Shaw said he did not expect the poor retail figures to have any immediate effect on interest rates. The retail sales figures are very weak", but as Bank of England governor Mervyn King indicated last night, you don't really get an accurate impression of Christmas trading until about Easter," said Mr Shaw. Our view is the Bank of England will keep its powder dry and wait to see the big picture."

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"business 482.txt Businesses fail to plan for HIV Companies fail to draw up plans to cope with HIV/Aids until it affects 20% of people in a country", new research says. The finding comes in a report published on Thursday by the World Economic Forum," Harvard and the UN aids agency. ""Too few companies are responding proactively to the social and business threats", said Dr Kate Taylor, head of the WEF's global Health Initiative. Nearly 9,000 business leaders in 104 countries were surveyed for Business and HIV/AIDS: Commitment and Action? Dr Taylor described the level of action taken by businesses as rev

ealed by the report as too little", "too late"". The issue will be highlighted to business and world leaders at the World Economic Forum", which meets in Davos, Switzerland, next week. The WEF report shows that despite the fact that 14,000 people contract HIV/Aids every day, concern among businesses has dropped by 23% in the last 12 months. Most (71%) have no policies in place to address the disease. Nor could over 65% of the business leaders surveyed say or estimate the prevalence of HIV among their staff. The UN programme tackling Aids, UNAIDS, pointed out that having a clear strategy for dealing with HIV/Aids was a good investment as well as being socially responsible. One company that does have a plan is Anglo-American, the international mining company, which estimates an HIV prevalence of 24% among its 130,000-strong Southern African workforce. Over the last two years the company has implemented extensive voluntary counselling and testing for HIV infection, coupled with anti-retroviral therapy for employees progressing to Aids. Over 90% of the 2,200 employees who have accessed and remained on treatment are well and have returned to normal work. ""Effective action on HIV/Aids is synonymous with good business management and leads to more profitable and sustainable operations", said Brian Brink, senior vice-president, health, at Anglo-American. Companies should encourage all workers to know their HIV status", making it as routine as monitoring blood pressure or cholesterol," he said. Providing access to treatment is a critical part of this." Across sub-Saharan Africa", even in countries with an HIV prevalence of 10-19%, only around 7% of companies have formal HIV/Aids policies in place, according to the report. The gap is even wider in China, Ethiopia, India, Nigeria and Russia," the so-called "next wave" countries", which are predicted to experience the highest numbers of new HIV/Aids cases worldwide by 2010. The report adds ""an important building block to our understanding of how the business community is experiencing the HIV/Aids epidemic and to whether and how it is reacting", said David Bloom, professor of economics and demography at the Harvard School of Public Health. The WEF report concludes that businesses need to understand their exposure to HIV/Aids risks and come up with good local practices to manage them. A key priority, in both high and low-prevalence settings, said the WEF is to establish a policy based on non-discrimination and confidentiality.

business 483.txt Ailing EuroDisney vows turnaround EuroDisney, the European home of Mickey Mouse and friends, has said it will sell 253m euros (£175m; \$328m) of new shares as it looks to avoid insolvency. The sale is the last part of a plan to restructure 2.4bn euros-worth of debts. Despite struggling since it was opened in 1992, EuroDisney has recently made progress in turning its business around and ticket sales have picked up. However, analysts still question whether it attracts enough visitors to stay open, even with the restructuring. EuroDisney remains Europe's largest single tourist attraction, attracting some 12.4 million visitors annually. A new attraction - Walt Disney Studios - has recently opened its site near Paris. The company's currently traded stock tumbled in Paris on the latest news, shedding 15% to 22 euro cents. EuroDisney will sell the new shares priced at 9 euros cents each. The US Disney Corporation and Saudi Arabian prince Al-Walid bin Talal, the firm's two main shareholders, will buy the new stock. The restructuring deal is the second in the firm's troubled financial history; its finances were first reorganised in 1994.

business 484.txt UK young top Euro earnings league British children enjoy the highest average annual income in Europe - more than double that of Spanish or Italian youngsters, a report suggests. Children in the UK between the ages of 10 and 17 had an annual income of £775, said market analyst Datamonitor. They use pester power" to get their parents to stump up nearly a third of this income", the report said. As for how they spend their cash, the bulk goes on personal care, soft drinks and food, Datamonitor said. Datamonitor

adds that British teenagers are keen on personal care because it helps them combine two seemingly contradictory emotional needs - the desire to fit in and the desire to express their individuality. British teenage girls, compared to their counterparts in seven European countries," are the most keen to use make-up products. Nearly three out of four girls said they used make-up. According to the Datamonitor report the trend marked British teenagers out as ""particularly important to cosmetics manufacturers as they are likely to experiment more with brands and products and form long-term beauty routines"". And the good times are likely to keep rolling for British children", as the report predicts that they will still be topping the earnings table in 2008.

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"business 485.txt Swiss cement firm in buying spree Swiss cement firm Holcim has bid \$800m (£429m) to buy two Indian cement firms and a holding company in the country. It plans to buy Associated Cement Companies (ACC)", Ambuja Cement Eastern and the holding firm, Ambuja Cement India Ltd, a Holcim statement said. Shares in ACC fell 5.5% as investors, who thought the offer was underpriced, decided to sell. Meanwhile, UK-based firm Aggregate Industries said it had agreed a £1.8bn takeover by Holcim. The deal with Aggregates will give Holcim, the world's second-biggest cement maker, an entry into the UK market and boost its presence in the US. Peter Tom, who will remain as Aggregate chief executive," said the 138p a share offer provided ""significant value"" for shareholders. The Markfield", Leicestershire-based company runs 142 quarries in the UK and the US. It also has 164 ready-mixed concrete plants, 90 asphalt plants and 32 pre-cast concrete factories. If the Indian deals go ahead," it will give Holcim a major presence in the world's fastest-growing market behind China. ACC is India's second-largest cement maker with an annual capacity of 18.2 million tonnes and a market share of 13%. ""Holcim is looking to buy it (ACC) very cheap", said KK Mittal, a fund manager with Escorts Mutual Fund in New Delhi. The market is not impressed. If they want a substantial chunk", then they should be paying a premium over the market price."" Shares in Holcim rose by 2.3% on Thursday following news of the takeover.

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"business 486.txt India's Reliance family feud heats up T he ongoing public spat between the two heirs of India's biggest conglomerate", Reliance Group, has spilled over to the board meeting of a leading company with in the group. Anil Ambani, vice-chairman of India Petrochemicals Limited (IPCL), stayed away from a gathering of senior managers on Thursday. The move follows a decision earlier this month by Anil - the younger brother of Reliance Group president Mukesh Ambani - to resign from his post. His resignation was not accepted by his brother, who is also the boss of IPCL. The IPCL board met in Mumbai to discuss the company's results for the October-to-December quarter. It is understood that the board also considered Anil's resignation and asked him to reconsider his decision. However, Anil's demand that Anand Jain - another IPCL board member accused by Anil of creating a rift in the Ambani family - be thrown out, was not met. Anil has accused Anand Jain, a confidant of his brother Mukesh, of playing a negative role in the Ambani family, and being responsible for the trouble between the brothers. On Wednesday, the board of Reliance Energy, an other Reliance Group company, reaffirmed its faith in Anil, who is the company's chief. Reliance Group acquired the government's 26% stake in IPCL - India's second-largest petrochemicals company - in 2002, as part of the privatisation drive. Meanwhile, the group's flagship company, Reliance Industries, has its board meeting on Friday to consider its financial results. Mukesh is the company's

chairman and Anil its deputy, and it is expected that both brothers will come face to face in the meeting. The Ambani family controls 48% of the group, which is worth \$17bn (£9.1bn; 745bn Indian rupees). It was founded by their father, Dhiru Bhai Ambani, who died two years ago.

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"business 487.txt World leaders gather to face uncertainty

More than 2",000 business and political leaders from around the globe are arriving in the Swiss mountain resort Davos for the annual World Economic Forum (WEF). For five days, they will discuss issues ranging from China's economic power to Iraq's future after this Sunday's elections. UK Prime Minister Tony Blair and South African President Thabo Mbeki are among the more than 20 government leaders and heads of state leaders attending the meeting. Unlike previous years, protests against the WEF are expected to be muted. Anti-globalisation campaigners have called off a demonstration planned for the weekend. The Brazilian city of Porto Alegre will host the rival World Social Forum, timed to run in parallel with the WEF's ritzy event in Davos. The organisers of the Brazilian gathering, which brings together thousands of campaigners against globalisation, for fair trade, and many other causes, have promised to set an alternative agenda to that of the Swiss summit. However, "many of the issues discussed in Porto Alegre are Davos talking points as well. ""Global warming"" features particularly high. WEF participants are being asked to offset the carbon emissions they cause by travelling to the event. Davos itself is in deep frost. The snow is piled high across the mountain village", and at night the wind chill takes temperatures down to minus 20C and less. Ultimately, the forum will be dominated by business issues - from outsourcing to corporate leadership - with bosses of more than a fifth of the world's 500 largest companies scheduled to attend. But much of the media focus will be on the political leaders coming to Davos," not least because the agenda of this year's forum seems to lack an overarching theme. ""Taking responsibility for tough choices"" is this year's official talking point", hinting at a welter of knotty problems. One thing seems sure, though: transatlantic disagreements over how to deal with Iran, Iraq and China are set to dominate discussions. Pointedly, only one senior official from President Bush's new administration is scheduled to attend. The US government may still make a conciliatory gesture, just as happened a year ago when Vice President Dick Cheney made a surprise appearance in Davos. Ukraine's new president, Viktor Yushchenko, is to speak, just days after his inauguration, an event that crowned the civil protests against the rigged first election that had tried to keep him from power. The European Union's top leaders, among them German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and European Commission President Manuel Barroso, will be here too. Mr Blair will formally open the proceedings, although his speech will be pre-empted by French President Jacques Chirac," who announced his attendance at the last minute and secured a slot for a ""special message"" two hours before Mr Blair speaks. The organisers also hope that the new Palestinian leader", Mahmoud Abbas, will use the opportunity for talks with at least one of the three Israeli deputy prime ministers coming to the event, a list that includes Shimon Peres. Davos fans still hark back to 1994, when talks between Yassir Arafat and Mr Peres came close to a peace deal. Mr Blair's appearance will be keenly watched too, as political observers in the UK claim it is a calculated snub against political rival Chancellor Gordon Brown, who was supposed to lead the UK government delegation. Microsoft founder Bill Gates, the world's richest man and a regular at Davos, will focus on campaigning for good causes, though business interests will not be wholly absent either. Having already donated billions of dollars to the fight against Aids and Malaria, Mr Gates will call on world leaders to support

t a global vaccination campaign to protect children in developing countries from easily preventable diseases. On Tuesday, Mr Gates pledged \$750m (£400m) of his own money to support the cause. Mr Gates' company, software giant Microsoft, also hopes to use Davos to shore up its defences against open source software like Linux, which threaten Microsoft's near monopoly on computer desktops. Mr Gates is said to be trying to arrange a meeting with Brazil's President Lula da Silva. The Brazilian government has plans to switch all government computers from Microsoft to Linux. At Davos, global problem solving and networking are never far apart.

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"business 488.txt US budget deficit to reach \$368bn The US budget deficit is set to hit a worse-than-expected \$368bn (£197bn) this year", officials said on Tuesday. The cost of military operations still needs to be factored in, with analysts saying the deficit could end up a further \$100bn in the red. Past Congressional Budget Office (CBO) forecasts said there would be a \$348bn shortfall in the 2005 fiscal year. In recent months, the dollar has weakened amid market jitters about the size of the budget and trade deficits. In November, the gap between US exports and imports widened to more than \$60bn, "a record figure. The CBO says it envisages a further ""orderly"" decline in the greenback over the next two years as the twin deficit drives dollar investors away. But the non-partisan fiscal watchdog notes the declines will help exporters and boost US economic growth. The budget deficit hit a record \$412bn in the 12 months to 30 September 2004", after reaching \$377bn in the previous fiscal year. The CBO also forecast a total shortfall of \$855bn for the years from 2006 to 2015, an improvement on previous projections. However, analysts say the new figures fail to take into account the potential \$2-\$3.8 trillion costs of the president's plan to revamp state pensions and extend tax cuts. The figure could also be worsened by any further military costs. Republicans have blamed the size of the deficit on slow economic conditions after the 11 September attacks and ongoing military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. One of President George W Bush's election pledges was to halve the budget deficit within five years. But Democrats have accused the president of excluding Iraq-related costs from previous budgets to meet the aim of reducing the deficit, a charge which the administration denies. On Tuesday, the US administration asked Congress for additional funds for military operations.

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"business 489.txt Criminal probe on Citigroup deals Trade rs at US banking giant Citigroup are facing a criminal investigation in Germany over a controversial bond deal. The deal saw the sale of 11bn euros (\$14.4bn; £7.6bn) of government bonds in a few minutes on 2 August", with 4bn euros-worth then bought back later. The move was widely criticised at the time," and now the German regulator has said it has found evidence of possible market manipulation. Citigroup said it would continue to co-operate fully with the authorities. ""We are disappointed that the BaFin has referred to the prosecutor the question of whether action should be brought against individuals involved", Citigroup said. If the traders are found guilty, they could face a five-year jail term or a fine, Reuters reported BaFin as saying. However, under German criminal law, prosecutors cannot pursue Citigroup itself. Germany's financial watchdog BaFin told BBC News it had now transferred the investigation to the public prosecutor. I can confirm that BaFin has passed through the case to the public prosecutor", a BaFin spokeswoman said. It is now a criminal investigation." " "We found clues of possible market manipulation", the spokeswoman said, which included s

igns of linked bond trading ahead of the main trades on 2 August. Germany's Securities Trading Act says that if BaFin finds such clues", "it has to put the case in the hands of the prosecutor." "Regulatory investigations are still going on in France", "the UK and elsewhere. Some Citigroup operations elsewhere in the world came under regulatory criticism in 2004. Its private banking operation in Japan was closed down by regulators in Tokyo after an "aggressive sales culture" led the bank to flout anti-money laundering rules.

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"business 490.txt Brazil jobless rate hits new low Brazil's unemployment rate fell to its lowest level in three years in December", according to the government. The Brazilian Institute for Geography and Statistics (IBGE) said it fell to 9.6% in December from 10.6% in November and 10.9% in December 2003. IBGE also said that average monthly salaries grew 1.9% in December 2004 from December 2003. However, average monthly wages fell 1.8% in December to 895.4 reais (\$332; £179.3) from November. Tuesday's figures represent the first time that the unemployment rate has fallen to a single digit since new measurement rules were introduced in 2001. The unemployment rate has been falling gradually since April 2004 when it reached a peak of 13.1%. The jobless rate average for the whole of 2004 was 11.5%, down from 12.3% in 2003, the IBGE said. This improvement can be attributed to the country's strong economic growth, with the economy registering growth of 5.2% in 2004, the government said. The economy is expected to grow by about 4% this year. President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva promised to reduce unemployment when he was elected two years ago. Nevertheless," some analysts say that unemployment could increase in the next months. "The data is favourable", but a lot of jobs are temporary for the (Christmas) holiday season, so we may see slightly higher joblessness in January and February," Julio Hegedus, chief economist with Lopes Filho & Associates consultancy in Rio de Janeiro, told Reuters news agency. Despite his leftist background, President Lula has pursued a surprisingly conservative economic policy, arguing that in order to meet its social promises, the government needs to first reach a sustained economic growth. The unemployment rate is measured in the six main metropolitan areas of Brazil (Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte, Recife, Salvador and Porto Alegre), where most of the population is concentrated.

business 491.txt Indonesia 'declines debt freeze' Indonesia no longer needs the debt freeze offered by the Paris Club group of creditors, Economics Minister Aburizal Bakrie has reportedly said. Indonesia, which originally accepted the debt moratorium offer, owes the Paris Club about \$48bn (£25.5bn). Mr Bakrie told the Bisnis Indonesia newspaper that a \$1.7bn donors' aid package meant that the debt moratorium was unnecessary. This aid comes on top of a previously-pledged \$3.4bn package. Most of this 'normal aid' would be used to finance the country's budget deficit. The Indonesian Economics Minister explained that the money - \$1.2bn in grants and \$500m in soft loans - was for the rebuilding of Aceh province, which was badly hit by the tsunami of 26 December. Nevertheless, one of Mr Bakrie's deputies, Mahendra Siregar, told AFP news agency that Indonesia was still considering the offer by the Paris Club of rich creditor nations to temporarily suspend its debt payments. What is true is that we are still discussing... the Paris Club decision to find out more details such as how much of our debt will be subject to a moratorium. That's how far we are at this stage", "said Mr Siregar. The 19 member countries of the Paris Club are owed about \$5bn this year in debt repayments by nations affected by the Indian Ocean tsunami. Indonesia, Sri Lanka and the Seychelles accepted the Paris Club offer, which was criticised by some aid groups as being too little. Thailand and India have however declined the offer, with Thailand preferring to keep up

with its payments while India said it would prefer to rely on its own resources rather than on international aid. Putting off payments may lower a country's rating among financial organisations, making it more expensive and more difficult for them to borrow money in the future, analysts said. Separately, the Indonesian government has said it will announce monthly how much it has received in foreign donations and how it has spent the money. Welfare Minister Alwi Shihab told AP news agency that this announcement should allay suspicion of official corruption in relief operations.

business 492.txt Parmalat bank barred from suing Bank of America has been banned from suing Parmalat, the food group which went bust in 2003 after an accounting scandal. The bank - along with investors, auditors and the group's managers - wants damages for being a victim of fraud at the hands of the Italian firm. But a judge has barred Bank of America and two auditors from the case. The bank, and Italaudit - formerly the Italian arm of auditor Grant Thornton - face lawsuits and possible prosecution. A second auditor, Deloitte & Touche, has also been banned from the case. Grant Thornton - now rid of the Italian unit at the centre of the case - is still being permitted to sue, as are Consob, Italy's stock market regulator, hundreds of small investors and Parmalat's new managers. Parmalat collapsed in December 2003 after it emerged that the 4bn euros (\$5.2bn; £2.8bn) it supposedly held in a Bank of American offshore account did not in fact exist.

business 493.txt China continues rapid growth China's economy has expanded by a breakneck 9.5% during 2004, faster than predicted and well above 2003's 9.1%. The news may mean more limits on investment and lending as Beijing tries to take the economy off the boil. China has sucked in raw materials and energy to feed its expansion, which could have knock-on effects on the rest of the world if it overheats. But officials pointed out that industrial growth had slowed, with services providing much of the impetus. Growth in industrial output - the main target of government efforts to impose curbs on credit and investments - was 11.5% in 2004, down from 17% the previous year. Still, consumer prices - at 2.4% - rose faster than in 2004, adding to concern that a sharp rise in producer prices of 7.1% could stoke inflation. And overall investment in fixed assets was still high, up 21.3% from the previous year - although some way off the peak of 43% seen in the first quarter of 2004. The result could be higher interest rates. China raised rates by 0.27 percentage points to 5.8% - its first hike in nine years - in October 2004. Despite the apparent rebalancing of the economy the overall growth picture remains strong, economists said. There is no sign of a slowdown in 2005", said Tim Congdon, economist at ING Barings. China's economy is not only gathering speed thanks to domestic demand, but also from soaring sales overseas. Figures released earlier this year showed exports at a six-year high in 2004, up 35%. Part of the impetus comes from the relative cheapness of the yuan, China's currency. The government keeps it pegged close to a rate of 8.28 to the US dollar, - much to the chagrin of many US lawmakers who blame China for lost jobs and competitiveness. Despite urging to ease the peg, officials insist they are a long way from ready to make a shift to a more market-set rate. We need a good and feasible plan and formulating such a plan also needs time", National Bureau of Statistics chief Li Deshui told Reuters. Those who hope to make a fortune by speculating on a renminbi revaluation will not succeed in making a profit."

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"business 494.txt SEC to rethink post-Enron rules The US stock market watchdog's chairman has said he is willing to soften tough new US corporate governance rules to ease the burden on foreign firms. In a speech at

the London School of Economics", "William Donaldson promised ""several initiatives"" . European firms have protested that US laws introduced after the Enron scandal make Wall Street listings too costly. The US regulator said foreign firms may get extra time to comply with a key clause in the Sarbanes-Oxley Act. The Act comes into force in mid-2005. It obliges all firms with US stock market listings to make declarations", which, critics say, will add substantially to the cost of preparing their annual accounts. Firms that break the new law could face huge fines, while senior executives risk jail terms of up to 20 years. Mr Donaldson said that although the Act does not provide exemptions for foreign firms," the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) would ""continue to be sensitive to the need to accommodate foreign structures and requirements"". There are few", if any, who disagree with the intentions of the Act, which obliges chief executives to sign a statement taking responsibility for the accuracy of the accounts. But European firms with secondary listings in New York have objected - arguing that the compliance costs outweigh the benefits of a dual listing. The Act also applies to firms with more than 300 US shareholders, a situation many firms without US listings could find themselves in. The 300-shareholder threshold has drawn anger as it effectively blocks the most obvious remedy," a delisting. Mr Donaldson said the SEC would ""consider whether there should be a new approach to the deregistration process"" for foreign firms unwilling to meet US requirements. ""We should seek a solution that will preserve investor protections"" without turning the US market into ""one with no exit""", he said. He revealed that his staff were already weighing up the merits of delaying the implementation of the Act's least popular measure - Section 404 - for foreign firms. Seen as particularly costly to implement, Section 404 obliges chief executives to take responsibility for the firm's internal controls by signing a compliance statement in the annual accounts. The SEC has already delayed implementation of this clause for smaller firms - including US ones - with market capitalisations below \$700m (£374m). A delegation of European firms visited the SEC in December to press for change, the Financial Times reported. It was led by Digby Jones, director general of the UK's Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and included representatives of BASF, Siemens and Cadbury Schweppes. Compliance costs are already believed to be making firms wary of US listings. Air China picked the London Stock Exchange for its secondary listing in its \$1.07bn (£558m) stock market debut last month. There are also rumours that two Chinese state-run banks - China Construction Bank and Bank of China - have abandoned plans for multi-billion dollar listings in New York later this year. Instead, the cost of Sarbanes-Oxley has persuaded them to stick to a single listing in Hong Kong, according to press reports in China.

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"business 495.txt BBC poll indicates economic gloom Citizens in a majority of nations surveyed in a BBC World Service poll believe the world economy is worsening. Most respondents also said their national economy was getting worse. But when asked about their own family's financial outlook", a majority in 14 countries said they were positive about the future. Almost 23,000 people in 22 countries were questioned for the poll, which was mostly conducted before the Asian tsunami disaster. The poll found that a majority or plurality of people in 13 countries believed the economy was going downhill, compared with respondents in nine countries who believed it was improving. Those surveyed in three countries were split. In percentage terms, an average of 44% of respondents in each country said the world economy was getting worse, compared to 34% who said it was improving. Similarly, 48% were pessimistic about their national economy, while 41% were optimistic. And 47% saw their family's economic con

ditions improving, as against 36% who said they were getting worse. The poll of 22,953 people was conducted by the international polling firm GlobeScan," together with the Program on International Policy Attitudes (Pipa) at the University of Maryland. ""While the world economy has picked up from difficult times just a few years ago", people seem to not have fully absorbed this development, though they are personally experiencing its effects, said Pipa director Steven Kull. People around the world are saying: 'I'm OK,' but the world isn't'." There may be a perception that war", terrorism and religious and political divisions are making the world a worse place, even though that has not so far been reflected in global economic performance, says the BBC's Elizabeth Blunt. The countries where people were most optimistic, both for the world and for their own families, were two fast-growing developing economies, China and India, followed by Indonesia. China has seen two decades of blistering economic growth, which has led to wealth creation on a huge scale, says the BBC's Louisa Lim in Beijing. But the results also may reflect the untrammelled confidence of people who are subject to endless government propaganda about their country's rosy economic future, our correspondent says. South Korea was the most pessimistic, while respondents in Italy and Mexico were also quite gloomy. The BBC's David Willey in Rome says one reason for that result is the changeover from the lira to the euro in 2001, which is widely viewed as the biggest reason why their wages and salaries are worth less than they used to be. The Philippines was among the most upbeat countries on prospects for respondents' families, but one of the most pessimistic about the world economy. Pipa conducted the poll from 15 November 2004 to 3 January 2005 across 22 countries in face-to-face or telephone interviews. The interviews took place between 15 November 2004 and 5 January 2005. The margin of error is between 2.5 and 4 points, depending on the country. In eight of the countries, the sample was limited to major metropolitan areas.

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"business 496.txt Europe asks Asia for euro help European leaders say Asian states must let their currencies rise against the US dollar to ease pressure on the euro. The European single currency has shot up to successive all-time highs against the dollar over the past few months. Tacit approval from the White House for the weaker greenback", which could help counteract huge deficits, has helped trigger the move. But now Europe says the euro has had enough, and Asia must now share some of the burden. China is seen as the main culprit," with exports soaring up 35% in 2004 partly on the back of a currency pegged to the dollar. ""Asia should engage in greater currency flexibility", said French finance minister Herve Gaymard, after a meeting with his German counterpart Hans Eichel. Markets responded by pushing the euro lower, in the expectation that the rhetoric - and the pressure - is unlikely to ease ahead of a meeting of the G7 industrialised countries next week. Early on Tuesday morning, the dollar had edged higher to 1.3040 euros. The yen, meanwhile, had strengthened to 102.975 against the dollar by 0730 GMT.

business 497.txt FBI agent colludes with analyst A former FBI agent and an internet stock picker have been found guilty of using confidential US government information to manipulate stock prices. A New York court ruled that former FBI man Jeffrey Royer, 41, fed damaging information to Anthony Elgindy, 36. Mr Elgindy then drove share prices lower by spreading negative publicity via his newsletter. The Egyptian-born analyst would extort money from his targets in return for stopping the attacks, prosecutors said. Under the guise of protecting investors from fraud", Royer and Elgindy used the FBI's crime-fighting tools and resources actually to defraud the public," said US Attorney Roslyn Mauskopf. Mr Royer was convicted of racketeering, securities fraud, obstr

uction of justice and witness tampering. Mr Elgindy was convicted of racketeering, securities fraud and extortion. The charges carry sentences of up to 20 years. When the guilty verdict was announced by the jury foreman, Mr Elgindy dropped his face into his hands and sobbed, the Associated Press news agency reported. He was led weeping from the court room by US marshals, AP said. Defense lawyers contended that Mr Royer had been feeding information to Mr Elgindy and another trader in an attempt to expose corporate fraud. Mr Elgindy's team claimed that he also was fighting against corporate wrongdoing. Elgindy's conviction marks the end of his public charade as a crusader against fraud in the market", "said Ms Mauskopf. One of the more bizarre aspects of the trial focused on the claims that Mr Elgindy may have had foreknowledge of the 11 September terrorist attacks in New York and Washington. Mr Elgindy had been trying to sell stock prior to the attack and had predicted a slump in the market. No charges were brought in relation to these allegations.

business 498.txt Millions go missing at China bank Two senior officials at one of China's top commercial banks have reportedly disappeared after funds worth up to \$120m (£64m) went missing. The pair both worked at Bank of China in the northern city of Harbin, the South China Morning Post reported. The latest scandal at Bank of China will do nothing to reassure foreign investors that China's big four banks are ready for international listings. Government policy sees the bank listings as vital economic reforms. Bank of China is one of two frontrunners in the race to list overseas. The other is China Construction Bank. Both are expected to list abroad during 2005. They shared a \$45 bn state bailout in 2003, to help clean up their balance sheets in preparation for a foreign stock market debut. However, a report in the China-published Economic Observer said on Monday that the two banks may have scrapped plans to list in New York because of the cost of meeting regulatory requirements imposed since the Enron scandal. Bank of China is the country's biggest foreign exchange dealer, while China Construction Bank is the largest deposit holder. China's banking sector is burdened with at least \$190bn of bad debt according to official data, though most observers believe the true figure is far higher. Officially, one in five loans is not being repaid. Attempts to strengthen internal controls and tighten lending policies have uncovered a succession of scandals involving embezzlement by bank officials and loans-for-favours. The most high-profile case involved the ex-president of Bank of China, Wang Xuebing, jailed for 12 years in 2003. Although, he committed the offences whilst running Bank of China in New York, Mr Wang was head of China Construction Bank when the scandal broke. Earlier this month, a China Construction Bank branch manager was jailed for life in a separate case. China's banks used to act as cash offices for state enterprises and did not require checks on credit worthiness. The introduction of market reforms has been accompanied by attempts to modernise the banking sector, but links between banks and local government remain strong. Last year, China's premier, Wen Jiabao, targeted bank lending practices in a series of speeches, and regulators ordered all big loans to be scrutinised, in an attempt to cool down irresponsible lending. China's leaders see reforming the top four banks as vital to distribute capital to profitable companies and protect the health of China's economic boom. But two problems persist. First, inefficient state enterprises continue to receive protection from bankruptcy because they employ large numbers of people. Second, many questionable loans come not from the big four, but from smaller banks. Another high profile financial firm, China Life, is facing shareholder lawsuits and a probe by the US Securities and Exchange Commission following its 2004 New York listing over its failure to disclose accounting irregularities at its parent company.

business 499.txt China Aviation seeks rescue deal Scanda

l-hit jet fuel supplier China Aviation Oil has offered to repay its creditors \$220m (£117m) of the \$550m it lost on trading in oil futures. The firm said it hoped to pay \$100m now and another \$120m over eight years. With assets of \$200m and liabilities totalling \$648m, it needs creditors' backing for the offer to a void going into bankruptcy. The trading scandal is the biggest to hit Singapore since the \$1.2bn collapse of Barings Bank in 1995. Chen Jiulin, chief executive of China Aviation Oil (CAO), was arrested by Singapore police on 8 December. He was returning from China, where he had headed when CAO announced its trading debacle in late-November. The firm had been betting heavily on a fall in the price of oil during October, but prices rose sharply instead. Among the creditors whose backing CAO needs for its restructuring plan are banking giants such as Barclay's Capital and Sumitomo Mitsui, as well as South Korean firm SK Energy. Of the immediate payment, the firm - China's biggest jet fuel supplier - said it would be paying \$30m out of its own resources. The rest would come from its parent company, China Aviation Oil Holding Company in Beijing. The holding company, owned by the Chinese government, holds most of CAO's Singapore-listed shares. It cut its holding from 75% to 60% on 20 October.

business 500.txt Low-cost airlines hit Eurotunnel Channel Tunnel operator Eurotunnel has seen sales fall in the face of the upsurge in European low-cost airlines. The firm said sales were down 4% in 2004 to 789m euros (\$1.03bn; £548m). The impact of the development of no-frills airlines is being felt ever more strongly", said chief executive Jean-Louis Raymond. Income from its vehicle-carrying shuttle services fell 7%, although 15% more passengers meant a 2% rise in railway revenue. The cross-Channel truck market is improving, Eurotunnel said, but warned that it was not benefiting since much of the traffic was in containers destined for ports. The passenger-only trains which use the tunnel are run by a separate company, Eurostar. Eurotunnel is still struggling with debts of more than 6bn euros. The company is currently kept afloat by the 200-plus banks to whom it owes the money. A shareholder revolt threw out the old board in 2004. But the BBC's business editor, Jeff Randall, said the banks could yet step in and take over altogether. At the moment it can't even service the interest on its debt", he said. This is a company in the departure lounge of life."

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"business 501.txt Water firm Suez in Argentina row A conflict between the Argentine State and water firm Aguas Argentinas", controlled by France's Suez, is casting doubt on the firm's future. The firm, which serves the province of Buenos Aires," wants a tariff rise of 60% to fund water-supply improvements. The government has rejected the 60% rise and wants Aguas Argentinas to make an annual investment of 400m pesos (\$136m; £72.3m) in improvements. Planning Minister Julio De Vido has offered State help but not for ""free"". Mr De Vido said that the Argentine state would not make a contribution ""in the form of a subsidy"". He has said a contribution could be made in return for a seat on the company's board. He added that the government is in discussions with Aguas Argentinas about what role it might take in the event that a State contribution is agreed. However", Aguas Argentinas told the Argentine newspaper Clarin it would not accept any change to its legal structure and, in practice," this rules out State participation on its board. The Planning Minister didn't rule out the possibility of cancelling Aguas Argentinas water concession. Yet he added that he didn't like to do ""futurology"". But last week", Argentine Economic Minister, Roberto Lavagna, told the French media in Paris that the government was considering allowing a 16% increase in tariffs and the possibility of a State contribution to Aguas Argentinas infrastructure investments. Speaking in B

uenos Aires, Mr De Vido later denied the possibility of any tariff increase and insisted that the annual investment in water infrastructure was at the centre of the discussions. He added that in the coming weeks the future of Aguas Argentinas would be decided. Suez owns 40% of Aguas Argentinas (39.9%), while Spain's Aguas de Barcelona is its second biggest shareholder with 25.01%. Recently, Suez lost a water concession in Bolivia after mass protests in the city of El Alto (the poorest in the country), with citizens complaining of unfair water charges. This forced the government to cancel the contract. In Argentina, Suez's subsidiary, which has been fined for cutting the supply of water during a recent heat wave and allegedly failing to keep up investment to meet the demand for water, has maintained a tense relationship with the Argentine government. During the last financial crisis in Argentina, the firm sued the state alleging that converting its tariffs from US dollars to pesos, and then freezing them during devaluation, had affected the company and made it difficult for it to meet its contractual obligations. When President Nestor Kirchner of Argentina arrived in power he began to negotiate a solution to the disagreements with international utilities operating in Argentina. But he has rejected any tariff increases, alleging this will impoverish citizens further. He has also asked for more investments to meet the growing demand for water. On May 2004, Aguas Argentinas and the government signed an agreement to renegotiate its Buenos Aires water-concession contract. The firm agreed to invest 242m pesos. The issue has attracted European interest. Last week in Paris, President Kirchner discussed this problem and other issues with French president Jacques Chirac. The Argentine government is also under pressure from European Union countries and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to raise utilities tariffs, because most of the utilities operating in Argentina are European.

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"business 502.txt Algeria hit by further gas riots Algeria suffered a weekend of violent protests against government plans to raise gas prices", local press reports. Demonstrators in a number of regions blocked roads, attacked public buildings and overturned vehicles, newspapers including El Watan reported. The price of butane gas, a vital fuel for cooking, has risen to 200 dinars (\$2.77) per canister from 170 dinars. Even before the hike, failing economic conditions had been fanning resentment in some of Algeria's poorest regions. Demonstrators took to the streets last week when the cost change was first announced, but police seemed to have restored order. According to local press reports, trouble flared up again on Saturday and carried on into Sunday. El Watan said that a number of hot spots centred on the villages and towns close to Bouira, about 100 kilometres (60 miles) south of the capital Algiers. Among the other main areas affected were the western Tiaret region and Sidi Ammar in the east of the country, Agence France Presse (AFP) reported. Riots also flared up in the Maghnia region close to the border with Morocco in the west, AFP said. Butane gas and fuel oil are used as the main source of fuel to heat homes and cook food in Algeria's remote mountain areas.

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"business 503.txt India's Maruti sees profits jump India's biggest carmaker Maruti has reported a sharp increase in quarterly profit after a booming economy and low interest rates boosted demand. Net profit surged 70% to 2.39bn rupees (\$54.98m; £29.32m) in the last three months of 2004 compared with 1.41bn rupees a year earlier. Total sales were 30.1bn rupees", up 27% from the same 2004 period. Maruti accounts for half of India's domestic car sales, luring consumers with cheap, fuel-efficient vehicles. Demand in India also

has been driven by the poor state of public transport and the very low level of car ownership, analysts said. Figures show that only eight people per thousand are car owners. Maruti beat market expectations despite an increase in raw materials costs. The company, majority-owned by Japan's Suzuki, said an increase in steel and other raw material prices was partially offset by cost cutting. Sales in the fiscal third quarter, including vans and utility vehicles, rose by 17.8% to 136,069 units. Maruti is not the only company benefiting as India's economic growth gives consumer greater spending power. Utility vehicle and tractor maker Mahindra has reported a 52% rise in net profit during the last three months of 2004. Profit was 1.33bn rupees compared with 874.2m rupees a year earlier.

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"business 504.txt Aids and climate top Davos agenda Climate change and the fight against Aids are leading the list of concerns for the first day of the World Economic Forum in the Swiss resort of Davos. Some 2",000 business and political leaders from around the globe will listen to UK Prime Minister Tony Blair's opening speech on Wednesday. Mr Blair will focus on Africa's development plans and global warming. Earlier in the day came an update on efforts to have 3 million people on anti-Aids drugs by the end of 2005. The World Health Organisation (WHO) said 700,000 people in poor countries were on life-extending drugs - up from 440,"000 six months earlier but amounting to only 12% of the 5.8 million who needed them. A \$2bn ""funding gap"" still stood in the way of hitting the 2005 target", the WHO said. The themes to be stressed by Mr Blair - whose attendance was announced at the last minute - are those he wants to dominate the UK's chairmanship of the G8 group of industrialised states. Other issues to be discussed at the five-day conference range from China's economic power to Iraq's future after this Sunday's elections. Aside from Mr Blair, more than 20 other world leaders are expected to attend including French President Jacques Chirac - due to speak by video link after bad weather delayed his helicopter - and South African President Thabo Mbeki, whose arrival has been delayed by Ivory Coast peace talks. The Ukraine's new president, Viktor Yushchenko, will also be there - as will newly elected Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas. Showbiz figures will also put in an appearance, from U2 frontman Bono - a well-known campaigner on trade and development issues - to Angelina Jolie, a good will campaigner for the UN on refugees. Unlike previous years, protests against the WEF are expected to be muted. Anti-globalisation campaigners have called off a demonstration planned for the weekend. At the same time, about 100,"000 people are expected to converge on the Brazilian resort of Porto Alegre for the World Social Forum - the so-called ""anti-Davos"" for campaigners against globalisation", for fair trade, and many other causes. In contrast," the Davos forum is dominated by business issues - from outsourcing to corporate leadership - with bosses of more than a fifth of the world's 500 largest companies scheduled to attend. A survey published on the eve of the conference by PricewaterhouseCoopers said four in ten business leaders were ""very confident"" that their companies would see sales rise in 2005. Asian and American executives", however, were much more confident than their European counterparts. But the political discussions, focusing on Iran, Iraq and China, are likely to dominate media attention.

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"business 505.txt China now top trader with Japan China overtook the US to become Japan's biggest trading partner in 2004", according to numbers released by Japan's Finance Ministry on Wednesday. China accounted for 20.1% of Japan's trade in 2004, compared with 18.6% for the US. In 2003, the US

was ahead with 20.5% and China came second with 19.2%. The change highlights China's growing importance as an economic powerhouse. In 2004, Japan's imports from and exports to China (and Hong Kong) added up to 22,201bn yen (\$214.6bn; £114.5bn). This is the highest figure for Japanese trade with China since records began in 1947. It compares with 20,479.5bn yen in trade with the US. Trade with the US during 2004 was hurt by one-off factors, including a 13-month ban on US beef imports following the discovery of a cow infected with mad cow disease (BSE) in the US. However, economists predict China will become an even more important Japanese trading partner in the coming years. On Tuesday, figures showed China's economy grew by 9.5% in 2004 and experts say the overall growth picture remains strong. Analysts see two spurs to future growth as being China's membership of the World Trade Organisation and lower trade tariffs. During 2004, Japan's trade surplus grew 17.9% to 12.011 trillion yen, with more than half the surplus, 6.962 trillion yen, accounted for by its trade with the US. In December, the surplus grew 1.8% on a year ago to 1.14 trillion yen thanks to stronger-than-expected exports.

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"business 506.txt Trial begins of Spain's top banker The trial of Emilio Botin", the chairman of Spain's most powerful bank, Santander Central Hispano, has started in Madrid. Mr Botin is accused of misusing the bank's funds after he approved the payment of 160m euros (\$208m; £111m) in bonus and pension payouts to two former executives. However, the trial was suspended when Mr Botin's lawyer introduced a new set of documents on the day testimony was set to begin. A three-judge panel gave prosecution lawyers until Monday to study the documents, when the trial will be reconvened. The high-profile case began after two Santander shareholders filed a criminal complaint about the payments to Jose Maria Amusategui and Angel Corcostegui, who stepped down in 2001. Both executives helped Mr Botin orchestrate Spain's biggest bank merger, between Santander and Banco Central Hispano, in 1999. As he arrived at Spain's High Court earlier on Wednesday, Mr Botin greeted the waiting media," saying: ""I have full faith in justice." Santander's board of governors strongly reject the charges against their chairman", saying the payouts were legal and made with their unanimous support. But if convicted, Mr Botin could face a prison term of up to six years. Mr Corcostegui, a former CEO at Santander, also asked the court for new evidence to be admitted. In spite of the allegations against him, Mr Botin continues to lead Santander, and was instrumental in the £8.5bn takeover last November of the British bank Abbey National. Since taking over the chairmanship in 1986, he has turned Santander into one of the top ten biggest banks in the world.

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"business 507.txt UK economy ends year with spurt The UK economy grew by an estimated 3.1% in 2004 after accelerating in the last quarter of the year", says the Office for National Statistics (ONS). The figure is in line with Treasury and Bank of England forecasts. The ONS says gross domestic product (GDP) rose by a strong 0.7% in the three months to 31 December, compared with 0.5% in the previous quarter. The rise came despite a further decline in production output and the worst Christmas for retailers in decades. The annual figure marked out the best year since 2000," and was also well ahead of the 2.2% recorded in 2003. Growth in the final three months of 2004 marked the 50th consecutive quarter of expansion. ""On the basis of the latest information the UK has entered 2005 on course to continue its record period of growth", said Paul Boateng, chief secretary to the Treasury in a statement. The ONS said the

services sector, which accounts for nearly three-quarters of the UK economy, grew 1.0% in the quarter. The strong services figure was welcomed by analysts, given lacklustre retail sales in December and across the Christmas holiday period. The fact that other services components are doing so well suggests to me that we are back to trend (growth) and I am not particularly concerned about any further slowdown", said Ross Walker, UK economist at RBS Financial Markets. However, output in the production sector contracted 0.5%, the second quarterly fall in row and a state of affairs that some economists classify as a recession. However the ONS would not comment on the definition of a recession and whether the manufacturing recovery was over. But Steve Radley, chief economist at the manufacturers' organisation EEF, said: These figures remain at odds with what is actually happening on the ground. "Whilst companies may be experiencing tougher conditions this year", 'recession' is not a word that manufacturers would currently recognise." The ONS said a sharp fall in mining and quarrying", which was driven by oil and gas extraction, was primarily responsible for the overall contraction in manufacturing production figures. Simon Rubinson, chief economist at Gerrard," said: ""This outturn (of 0.7%) was well ahead of the market expectations and cast doubt on the scare stories doing the rounds surrounding the current state of the UK economy." And he said the GDP figures may help to "push interest rate expectations a little higher along the curve". "The suggestion from the money markets is that the next move is now more likely to be in an upward rather than a downward direction. This is consistent with our own thinking", said Mr Rubinson. The Bank of England's nine-strong rate-setting committee voted unanimously earlier this month to keep interest rates steady at 4.75%, minutes of the meeting showed on Wednesday.

business 508.txt HealthSouth ex-boss goes on trial The former head of US medical services firm HealthSouth overstated earnings and assets to boost the company's share price, it was claimed in court. Richard Scrushy, 52, is accused of directing" a \$2.7bn (£1.4bn) accounting fraud at the company he co-founded in Alabama in 1984. Prosecutors said he was motivated by wealth - spending about \$200m between 1996 and 2002 while earning much less. Defence lawyers said Mr Scrushy had been deceived by other executives. Several former HealthSouth employees have already pleaded guilty to fraud and are expected to give evidence against Mr Scrushy. "We will present evidence that Richard Scrushy knew about the conspiracy", that he participated in the conspiracy and that he profited," prosecutor Alice Martin told the court. Mr Scrushy is the first chief executive to be tried for breaching the Sarbanes Oxley Act - a law introduced in the wake of the Enron and WorldCom frauds which obliges corporate bosses to vouch for the accuracy of their companies' results. Among the charges he faces are conspiracy to commit fraud, filing false statements and money laundering. After federal agents raided HealthSouth's offices in March 2003, the company said none of its past financial statements could be relied on. The firm has since reorganised its board and management team and currently operates about 1,400 health clinics.

business 509.txt Euro firms miss out on optimism More than 90% of large companies around the world are highly optimistic about their economic prospects, a survey of 1,300 bosses suggests. Their biggest worries are not terror threats, but over-regulation, low-cost competition and the wild ups and downs of oil prices. There is one exception: Firms in Western Europe - but not the UK - are lacking confidence after years of slow growth. When business advisers PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) conducted the same survey two years ago, nearly 30% of bosses were gloomy about their prospects. Global business leaders say that they are facing a two-pronged regulatory assault. After a string of corporate scandals in the United States - from Enron to WorldCom - the Sarbanes-O

xley act forces companies to be much more transparent, but doing all the paperwork costs a lot of time and money. Across Europe, meanwhile, all stock exchange-listed companies are currently in the process of moving to new and complex accounting standards called IFRS. Hacking through the red tape can hardly be avoided, but many chief executives around the world appear to have decided on how to deal with low-cost competitors. Already, about 28% of the bosses polled for the survey say that they have moved parts of their business into low-wage countries, and another 11% plan to do so in the future. Possibly as a result, the worry about low-cost competition has slightly fallen from last year, with just 54% of companies calling it a significant threat"" or ""one of the biggest threats"". But PwC's global chief executive", Samuel DiPiazza, said a growing number of companies were also concerned that moves to outsource work to cheaper countries could both hurt their reputation in their home markets and harm the quality of service they provide to their customers. According to Frank Brown, global advisory leader at PwC , "the trend of large companies to have global operations has one clear upside: ""One risk in one region - for example the Middle East - won't kill your business anymore." Surprisingly", the survey suggests that the rapid decline of the US dollar is not seen as a huge threat anymore, unlike even a year ago," when it was cited as the third-largest problem. Mr DiPiazza said the interviews with chief executives suggested that companies had ""adjusted"" to the new reality of a euro that buys \$1.30 and more", while others had successfully hedged their positions and locked in more favourable exchange rates.

- For the survey, PricewaterhouseCoopers interviewed 1,324 chief executives throughout the world during the last three months of 2004.

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"business 510.txt Lacroix label bought by US firm Luxury goods group LVMH has sold its loss-making Christian Lacroix clothing label to a US investment group. The Paris-based firm has been shedding non-core businesses and focusing on its most profitable brands including Moet & Chandon champagne and Louis Vuitton. LVMH said the French designer's haute couture and ready-to-wear labels had been purchased by the Falc Group for an unspecified sum. The Falc Group bought two cosmetics labels from LVMH in 2003. The sale of the Lacroix label comes as many fashion houses are struggling to make money from their expensive haute couture ranges. The Florida-based Falc group", which also runs a chain of 90 duty free stores in the US, said it planned to expand the brand by opening new stores. Mr Lacroix said he planned to stay at the label he founded in 1987 although exact details are still to be confirmed.

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"entertainment 001.txt Gallery unveils interactive tree A Christmas tree that can receive text messages has been unveiled at London's Tate Britain art gallery. The spruce has an antenna which can receive Bluetooth texts sent by visitors to the Tate. The messages will be ""unwrapped"" by sculptor Richard Wentworth", who is responsible for decorating the tree with broken plates and light bulbs. It is the 17th year that the gallery has invited an artist to dress their Christmas tree. Artists who have decorated the Tate tree in previous years include Tracey Emin in 2002. The plain green Norway spruce is displayed in the gallery's foyer. Its light bulb adornments are dimmed, ordinary domestic ones joined together with string. The plates decorating the branches will be auctioned off for the children's charity ArtWorks. Wentworth worked as an assistant to sculptor Henry Moore in the late 1960s. His reputation as a sculptor grew in the 1980s, while he has been one of the most influential teachers

during the last two decades. Wentworth is also known for his photography of mundane, everyday subjects such as a cigarette packet jammed under the wonky leg of a table.

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," entertainment 002.txt Jarre joins fairytale celebration French musician Jean-Michel Jarre is to perform at a concert in Copenhagen to mark the bicentennial of the birth of writer Hans Christian Andersen. Denmark is holding a three-day celebration of the life of the fairy-tale author", with a concert at Parken stadium on 2 April. Other stars are expected to join the line-up in the coming months," and the Danish royal family will attend. ""Christian Andersen's fairy tales are timeless and universal", said Jarre. For all of us," at any age there is always - beyond the pure enjoyment of the tale - a message to learn." "There are year-long celebrations planned across the world to celebrate Andersen and his work", which includes The Emperor's New Clothes and The Little Mermaid. Denmark's Crown Prince Frederik and Crown Princess Mary visited New York on Monday to help promote the festivities. The pair were at a Manhattan library to honour US literary critic Harold Bloom ""the international icon we thought we knew so well"". ""Bloom recognizes the darker aspects of Andersen's authorship", Prince Frederik said. Bloom is to be formally presented with the Hans Christian Andersen Award this spring in Anderson's hometown of Odense. The royal couple also visited the Hans Christian Anderson School complex, where Queen Mary read The Ugly Duckling to the young audience. Later at a gala dinner, Danish supermodel Helena Christensen was named a Hans Christian Andersen ambassador. Other ambassadors include actors Harvey Keitel and Sir Roger Moore, athlete Cathy Freeman and Brazilian soccer legend Pele.

entertainment 003.txt Musical treatment for Capra film Th e classic film It's A Wonderful Life is to be turned into a musical by the producer of the controversial hit show Jerry Springer - The Opera. Frank Capra's 1946 movie starring James Stewart, is being turned into a £7m musical by producer Jon Thoday. He is working with Steve Brown, who wrote the award-winning musical Spend Spend Spend. A spokeswoman said the plans were in the very early stages "", with no cast, opening date or theatre announced. A series of workshops have been held in London, and on Wednesday a cast of singers unveiled the musical to a select group of potential investors. Mr Thoday said the idea of turning the film into a musical had been an ambition of his for almost 20 years. It's a Wonderful Life was based on a short story, The Greatest Gift, by Philip van Doren Stern. Mr Thoday managed to buy the rights to the story from Van Doren Stern's family in 1999, following Mr Brown's success with Spend Spend Spend. He later secured the film rights from Paramount, enabling them to use the title It's A Wonderful Life.

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," entertainment 004.txt Richard and Judy choose top books The 10 authors shortlisted for a Richard and Judy book award in 2005 are hoping for a boost in sales following the success of this year's winner. The TV couple's interest in the book world coined the term ""the Richard & Judy effect"" and created the top two best-selling paperbacks of 2004 so far. The finalists for 2005 include Andrew Taylor's The American Boy and Robbie Williams' autobiography Feel. This year's winner", Alice Sebold's The Lovely Bones, sold over one million. Joseph O'Connor's Star of the Sea came second and saw sales increase by 350%. The best read award, on Richard Madeley and Judy Finnigan's Channel 4 show, is part of the British Book Awards. David Mitchell's Booker-shortlisted nove

l, Cloud Atlas," makes it into this year's top 10 along with several lesser known works. ""There's no doubt that this year's selection of book club entries is the best yet. If anything", the choice is even wider than last time, said Madely. It was very hard to follow last year's extremely successful list, but we think this year's books will do even better," said Richard and Judy executive producer Amanda Ross. We were spoiled for choice and it was tough getting down to only 10 from the 301 submitted.""

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"entertainment 005.txt Poppins musical gets flying start  
The stage adaptation of children's film Mary Poppins has had its opening night in London's West End. Sir Cameron Mackintosh's lavish production", which has cost £9m to bring to the stage, was given a 10-minute standing ovation. Lead actress Laura Michelle Kelly soared over the heads of the audience holding the nanny's trademark umbrella. Technical hitches had prevented Mary Poppins' flight into the auditorium during preview performances. A number of celebrities turned out for the musical's premiere, including actress Barbara Windsor, comic Graham Norton and Sir Richard Attenborough. The show's director Richard Eyre issued a warning earlier in the week that the show was unsuitable for children under seven, while under-threes are barred. Mary Poppins was originally created by author Pamela Travers, who is said to have cried when she saw Disney's 1964 film starring Julie Andrews. Travers had intended the story to be a lot darker than the perennial family favourite. Theatre impresario Sir Cameron Mackintosh has said he hopes the musical is a blend of the sweet-natured film and the original book.

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"entertainment 006.txt Bennett play takes theatre prizes  
The History Boys by Alan Bennett has been named best new play in the Critics' Circle Theatre Awards. Set in a grammar school", the play also earned a best actor prize for star Richard Griffiths as teacher Hector. The Producers was named best musical, Victoria Hamilton was best actress for Suddenly Last Summer and Festen's Rufus Norris was named best director. The History Boys also won the best new comedy title at the Theatregoers' Choice Awards. Partly based upon Alan Bennett's experience as a teacher, The History Boys has been at London's National Theatre since last May. The Critics' Circle named Rebecca Lenkiewicz its most promising playwright for The Night Season, and Eddie Redmayne most promising newcomer for The Goat or, Who is Sylvia? Paul Rhys was its best Shakespearean performer for Measure for Measure at the National Theatre and Christopher Oram won the design award for Suddenly Last Summer. Both the Critics' Circle and Whatsonstage.com Theatregoers' Choice award winners were announced on Tuesday. Chosen by more than 11,000 theatre fans, the Theatregoers' Choice Awards named US actor Christian Slater best actor for One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest. Diana Rigg was best actress for Suddenly Last Summer, Dame Judi Dench was best supporting actress for the RSC's All's Well That Ends Well and The History Boys' Samuel Barnett was best supporting actor.

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"entertainment 007.txt Levy tipped for Whitbread prize No  
velist Andrea Levy is favourite to win the main Whitbread Prize book of the year award", after winning novel of the year with her book Small Island. The book has already won the Orange Prize for fiction, and is now 5/4 favourite for the £25,000 Whitbread. Second favourite is a biography of Mary Queen of Scots, by John Guy. A panel of judges including Sir Trevor McDonald, actor Hugh Grant and

writer Joanne Harris will decide the overall winner on Tuesday. The five writers in line for the award won their respective categories - first novel, novel, biography, poetry and children's book - on 6 January. Small Island, Levy's fourth novel," is set in post-war London and centres on a landlady and her lodgers. One is a Jamaican who joined British troops to fight Hitler but finds life difficult out of uniform when he settles in the UK. ""What could have been a didactic or preachy prospect turns out to be hilarious", moving humane and eye-popping. It's hard to think of anybody not enjoying it, wrote the judges. The judges called Guy's My Heart is My Own: The Life of Mary Queen of Scots an impressive and readable piece of scholarship," which cannot fail but leave the reader moved and intrigued by this most tragic and likeable of queens"". Guy has published many histories", including one of Tudor England. He is a fellow at Clare College, Cambridge and became a honorary research professor of the University of St Andrews in 2003. The other contenders include Susan Fletcher for Eve Green, which won the first novel prize. Fletcher has recently graduated from the University of East Anglia's creative writing course. The fourth book in the running is Corpus, Michael Symmons Roberts' fourth collection of poems. As well as writing poetry, Symmons Roberts also makes documentary films. Geraldine McCaughrean is the final contender, having won the children's fiction category for the third time for Not the End of the World. McCaughrean, who went into magazine publishing after studying teaching, previously won the category in 1987 with A Little Lower than Angels and in 1994 with Gold Dust.

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"entertainment 008.txt West End to honour finest shows Th  
e West End is honouring its finest stars and shows at the Evening Standard Theatre Awards in London on Monday. The Producers", starring Nathan Lane and Lee Evans, is up for best musical at the ceremony at the National Theatre. It is competing against Sweeney Todd and A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum for the award. The Goat or Who is Sylvia? by Edward Albee, The Pillowman by Martin McDonagh and Alan Bennett's The History Boys are shortlisted in the best play category. Pam Ferris, Victoria Hamilton and Kelly Reilly are nominated for best actress. Ferris - best known for her television roles in programmes such as The Darling Buds of May - has made the shortlist for her role in Notes on Falling Leaves, at the Royal Court Theatre. Meanwhile, Richard Griffiths, who plays Hector in The History Boys at the National Theatre, will battle it out for the best actor award with Douglas Hodge (Dumb Show) and Stanley Townsend (Shining City). The best director shortlist includes Luc Bondy for Cruel and Tender, Simon McBurney for Measure for Measure, and Rufus Norris for Festen. Festen is also shortlisted in the best designer category where Ian MacNeil, Jean Kalman and Paul Arditti will be up against Hildegard Bechtler, for Iphigenia at Aulis, and Paul Brown, for False Servant. The Milton Shulman Award for outstanding newcomer will be presented to Dominic Cooper (His Dark Materials and The History Boys), Romola Garai (Calico), Eddie Redmayne (The Goat, or Who is Sylvia?) or Ben Wishaw (Hamlet). And playwrights David Eldridge, Rebecca Lenkiewicz and Owen McCafferty will fight it out for The Charles Wintour Award and a £30,000 bursary. Three 50th Anniversary Special Awards will also be presented to an institution, a playwright and an individual.

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"entertainment 009.txt Da Vinci Code is 'lousy history' T  
he plot of an international bestseller that thousands of readers are likely to receive as a Christmas present is 'laughable'", a clergyman has said. The Da Vinci Code claims Jesus was not crucified, but married Mary Magdalene and died a

normal death. It claims this was later covered up by the Church. The Bishop of Durham, the Rt Rev Dr Tom Wright," described the novel as a ""great thriller"" but ""lousy history"". The book has sold more than seven million copies worldwide. Despite enjoying Dan Brown's conspiracy theory", the Bishop said there was a lack of evidence to back up its claims. Writing his Christmas message in the Northern Echo," the Bishop said: ""Conspiracy theories are always fun - fun to invent", fun to read," fun to fantasise about. ""Dan Brown is the best writer I've come across in the genre",, but anyone who knows anything about 1st century history will see that this underlying material is laughable." A great deal of credible evidence proves the Biblical version of Jesus' life was true",, according to the Bishop. ""The evidence for Jesus and the origins of Christianity is astonishingly good", he said. We have literally a hundred times more early manuscripts for the gospels and letters in the New Testament than we have for the main classical authors like Cicero," Virgil and Tacitus. ""Historical research shows that they present a coherent and thoroughly credible picture of Jesus", with all sorts of incidental details that fit the time when he lived," and don't fit the world of later legend." Brown's book has become a publishing phenomenon", consistently topping book charts in the UK and US. The Da Vinci Code has been translated into 42 languages and has spawned its own cottage industry of publications, including guides on to how to read the book, rebuttals and counter claims. The book, which has become an international best-seller in little over two years, is set to be made into a film starring Tom Hanks.

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"entertainment 010.txt Uganda bans Vagina Monologues Ugandan authorities have banned the play The Vagina Monologues", due to open in the capital," Kampala this weekend. The Ugandan Media Council said the performance would not be put on as it promoted and glorified acts such as lesbianism and homosexuality. It said the production could go ahead if the organisers ""expunge all the offending parts"". But the organisers of the play say it raises awareness of sexual abuse against women. ""The play promotes illegal", unnatural sexual acts, homosexuality and prostitution, it should be and is hereby banned," the council's ruling said. The show, which has been a controversial sell-out around the world, explores female sexuality and strength through individual women telling their stories through monologues. Some parliamentarians and church leaders are also siding with the Media Council, Uganda's New Vision newspaper reports. The play is obscene and pornographic although it was under the guise of women's liberation", MP Kefa Ssempgani told parliament. But the work's author, US playwright Eve Ensler, says it is all about women's empowerment. There is obviously some fear of the vagina and saying the word vagina", Ms Ensler told the BBC. It's not a slang word or dirty word it's a biological," anatomical word." She said the play is being produced and performed by Ugandan women and it is not being forced on them. The four Ugandan NGOs organising the play intended to raise money to campaign to stop violence against women and to raise funds for the war-torn north of the country. ""I'm extremely outraged at the hypocrisy", the play's organiser in Uganda, Sarah Mukasa, told the BBC's Focus on Africa programme. I'm amazed that this country Uganda gives the impression that it is progressive and supports women's rights and the notions of free speech; yet when women want to share their stories the government uses the apparatus of state to shut us up." "

"entertainment 011.txt Artists' secret postcards on sale Postcards by artists including Damien Hirst and Tracey Emin have sold just hour

s after the opening of the Royal Academy of Arts annual Secrets sale. The identity of the artist remains unknown until each work is bought and the signature is revealed on the back. ""There are still some big names left", such as Mario Testino," said RCA spokeswoman Sue Bradburn. All postcards are priced at £35. The sale opened at 8am on Friday and will close at 6pm on Saturday. Ms Bradburn said there was a big queue at the start of the sale but it had now gone down. She said the people that had bought the famous name postcards had arrived early and had spent time studying each work. They would have known what to look for." The exhibition has been open for viewing since 19 November. Film director Ken Loach", fashion designer Hussein Chalayan and former Blur guitarist Graham Coxon have all designed postcards for the sale. Some of the contributing artists are students or recent graduates of the Royal College of Art and other leading art colleges. Money raised from the sale will go towards the RCA's Fine Art Student Award Fund which supports students with grants and bursaries. The famous sale is now in its 11th year.

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"entertainment 012.txt Neeson in bid to revive theatre Hollywood film star Liam Neeson has held a dinner party in New York to promote Belfast's Lyric Theatre. The Ballymena-born actor said that the theatre on Ridge way Street was in a ""very dilapidated condition"". Lyric chairman David Johnstone has said that rebuilding the theatre"," at a cost of £8m is the only answer. Mr Neeson said that the idea was to get a bunch of ""healthy"" wealthy Irish Americans"" in one room and ask them to help with fundraising. The Oscar-nominated actor", whose films include Schindler's List, Michael Collins and Star Wars: The Phantom Menace," said: ""The Lyric is too important to the cultural and social life of Northern Ireland for this building to crumble and fall apart.

"It gave me a start professionally. Mary O'Malley", the founder of the theatre," gave me my future. ""In those days", in the mid-70s, when I was there," we were doing a play every four weeks. ""Belfast was not a pretty town to be living in. ""There was serious trouble", as you know, but this theatre was like a Be lisha beacon of light and hope six nights a week," doing everything from Shakespeare to Yeats to O'Casey with a group of actors and actresses that affected me very deeply and still do." The Lyric began 50 years ago but the doors opened at its present site on the Stranmillis embankment overlooking the River Lagan in 1968. As well as Liam Neeson", it also launched the careers of Adrian Dunbar and Stephen Rea and playwrights such as Martin Lynch and Gary Mitchell. Speaking to BBC Northern Ireland before the event at New York's SoHo House," Mr Neeson said that his spirit belonged to the Glens of Antrim. And he said that there was one figure from his childhood that he would love to portray on the big screen - Ian Paisley. He said that the DUP leader and preacher was a ""very dynamic"" e xtraordinary figure"". Neeson used to listen to his sermons on a Friday night i n Ballymena. He said: ""What an orator. He was from that old school of bible-th umping righteousness. But it was so dramatic. I found him very powerful. ""I'd love to get a chance to play him some time.""

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"entertainment 013.txt Levy takes Whitbread novel prize range Prize winner Andrea Levy has seen her book Small Island win the Whitbread Novel of the Year Award. She is now favourite to win the overall prize after beating Booker winner Alan Hollinghurst's The Line of Beauty. Geraldine McCaughr ean has picked up the children's fiction award for the third time for Not the End of the World. All the category winners go through to compete for the Whitbre

ad Book of the Year title", which carries with it a £25,000 prize. A panel of judges including Sir Trevor McDonald, actor Hugh Grant and writer Joanne Harris will meet up on 25 January to decide the overall winner, with the announcement being made later that evening. Bookmaker William Hill has placed London-based Levy's novel as the 6/4 favourite to win. Small Island, Levy's fourth novel, is set in post-war England and centres on a landlady and her lodgers. One is a Jamaican who joined British troops to fight Hitler but finds life difficult out of uniform when he settles in London. The judges, who included authors Jenny Colgan and Amanda Craig," were full of praise for her writing. ""What could have been a didactic or preachy prospect turns out to hilarious", moving humane and eye-popping. It's hard to think of anybody not enjoying it," wrote the judges. The first novel section was won by Susan Fletcher for Eve Green, beating the favourite Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell by Susanna Clarke. Fletcher has recently graduated from the University of East Anglia creative writing course. Waterstone's fiction writer buyer Suzie Doore said: It is great to see Susan Fletcher win in the first novel category. As a relatively unknown author this award will give her exposure to a wider and mass audience that she may not have reached and is a perfect example of the influence of the Whitbread. ""Fresh out of university she is certainly one to watch."" In the biography category it was John Guy's The Life of Mary Queen of Scots that was picked as winner. The judges called it ""an impressive and readable piece of scholarship", which cannot fail but leave the reader moved and intrigued by this most tragic and likable of queens"". Guy has published many histories", including Tudor England. He is a fellow at Clare College, Cambridge and became a honorary research professor of the University of St Andrews in 2003. Michael Symmons Roberts' fourth collection of poems scooped the poetry award. His works mixes mysticism, erotica and philosophy through life, death and resurrection. As well as writing poetry, Symmons Roberts also makes documentary films. Children's winner McCaughean, who went into magazine publishing after studying teaching, previously won the Whitbread Prize in 1987 with A Little Lower than Angels and in 1994 with Gold Dust. She has previously been the winner of the Blue Peter Book of the Year.

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"entertainment 014.txt Adventure tale tops awards Young book fans have voted Fergus Crane", a story about a boy who is taken on an adventure by a flying horse, the winner of two Smarties Book Prizes. Paul Stewart and Chris Riddell's book came top in the category for six- to eight-year-olds and won the award chosen by after-school club members. Sally Grindley's Spilled Water, about a Chinese girl sold as a servant, was top in vote of readers aged nine to 11. Biscuit Bear by Mini Grey took the top award in the under-five category. Winners were voted for by about 6,000 children from a shortlist picked by an adult panel. The prize, which is celebrating its 20th year," is billed as ""the UK's biggest children's book award"". Fergus Crane includes text by Stewart and illustrations by Riddell", who also created The Edge Chronicles together. As well as the six to eights prize, it won the 4Children Special Award voted for by after-school club members. Julia Eccleshare, chair of the adult judging panel," said children's literature had ""never looked stronger"" in the prize's 20 years. ""This award counts because the final choice of winners is made by children", who are the toughest critics of all," she said. This year's young judges chose the winners from an exceptionally strong and varied shortlist which showcases the very best in children's books today." Previous winners have included JK Rowling", Jacqueline Wilson and Dick King-Smith.

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"entertainment 015.txt Mutant book wins Guardian prize A book about the evolution of mutants and the science of abnormality has won the Guardian First Book Award 2004. Armand Marie Leroi", a lecturer at London's Imperial College, scooped the £10,000 prize for *Mutants: On the form,"* varieties and errors of the human body. ""It is profoundly cultured and beautifully written in the very best tradition of popular science writing today",," said judge Claire Armistead. The award recognises and rewards new writing across fiction and non-fiction. A panel of literary experts, including novelists Hari Kunzru and Ali Smith, director Sir Richard Eyre and comedian Alexei Sayle chose the winner from a five-strong shortlist. The shortlist included Susanna Clarke's *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell*, a novel about the magic arts at the turn of the 19th Century and *The Places In Between*, Rory Stewart's account of his trek, on foot, across Afghanistan. What we found so impressive about Armand Marie Leroi's book was the scope of its reference", its elegance and its inquisitiveness," said Ms Armistead, chair of the judges and the Guardian literary editor. While the subject matter of *Mutants* unsettled some involved in the judging process", the overwhelming majority found it fascinating," she added. Her words were echoed by Iris director Sir Richard Eyre who called Marie Leroi's work extraordinarily thought provoking"". The award", for first time authors, is open to books from genres including fiction, poetry, biography, memoir, history, politics, science and current affairs. Previous winners include *White Teeth* by Zadie Smith, in 2000, which went on to become a bestseller.

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"entertainment 016.txt Arthur Hailey: King of the bestsellers Novelist Arthur Hailey", who has died at the age of 84, was known for his bestselling page-turners exploring the inner workings of various industries, from the hotels to high finance. Born in Luton, Bedfordshire, on 5 April 1920, Hailey was the only child of working class parents, They could not afford to keep him in school beyond the age of 14. He served as a pilot with the Royal Air Force during World War II, flying fighter planes to the Middle East. It was an occupation that was later to feature in his authorial debut, the television screenplay *Flight into Danger*. Hailey emigrated to Canada in 1947, where he eventually became a citizen. He wanted to be a writer from an early age, but did not take it up professionally until his mid-thirties," when he was inspired to write his first screenplay while on a return flight to Toronto. ""I fell to daydreaming. I visualised the pilots at the controls and wondered what would happen if they both got sick. Could I fly the airplane? I was a rusty wartime pilot who hadn't flown for nine years... "" Hailey later recalled. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation bought *Flight into Danger* for \$600 (£318) and it was shown on TV in April 1956. It was later memorably spoofed in the 1980 comedy *Airplane!*", starring Leslie Nielsen. Hailey worked as a screenwriter for a couple of years, before turning to novels. He went on to produce 11 best-selling books, which were published into 38 languages in 40 countries. *Flight into Danger* was adapted to become Hailey's first novel, *Runaway Zero-Eight* in 1958. *The Final Diagnosis* and *In High Places* followed, both achieving a popular following. But it was not until *Hotel*, in 1965, that Hollywood came calling. The hit novel took four years to write, and stayed on national best-seller lists for a full year. It was turned into a movie in 1967 and later adapted into a glossy soap in the 1980s, starring James Brolin. *Airport* (1968) arguably remains Hailey's best-loved work and prompted the disaster movie genre. The thriller follows events in the sky, and on the ground at a snow-logged airport, when a terrorist boards an airplane with a bomb. The book was adapted into a hit film in 1970, starring Burt Lancaster as the harassed airport manager and Dean Martin as a womanising pilot, alongside Je

an Seberg and Jacqueline Bisset. In a testament to the popularity of the fledgling disaster genre - three sequels followed. The writer was known for his pains taking research into the professions around which each novel was centred," drawing his characters ""from real life"" and taking up to three years to produce each book. ""I have never been able to write quickly or easily. I am too self-critical for that. I am never satisfied," he once said. In 1969, he moved to Nassau in the Bahamas, with his wife Sheila. Wheels (1971), The Moneychangers (1975) and Overload (1979) followed. Despite a lukewarm response from critics, and few literary accolades, Hailey was at the height of his fame in the seventies and continued to attract the attention of Hollywood producers. Strong Medicine, Hailey's blockbuster focusing on the pharmaceutical industry, was turned into a film in 1986, starring Sam Neill, Douglas Fairbanks Jr and a panoply of former soap stars. The 1997 novel Detective proved to be Hailey's final book, when at the age of 77 he decided to retire. Hailey's health began to deteriorate in recent years, twice undergoing heart surgery. He suffered a stroke just two months ago. He died in his sleep on Wednesday, after dinner with his wife and two of his six children at his home in New Providence island. He had a wonderful life. His greatest ambition was to see his name on a book and he certainly achieved that", said his wife, Sheila.

entertainment 017.txt Spark heads world Booker list Dame Muriel Spark is among three British authors who have made the shortlist for the inaugural international Booker Prize. Doris Lessing and Ian McEwan have also been nominated. McEwan and Margaret Atwood are the only nominees to have previously won the main Booker Prize. The new £60,000 award is open to writers of all nationalities who write in English or are widely translated. The prize commends an author for their body of work instead of one book. Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Saul Bellow, Milan Kundera and John Updike also feature on the 18-strong list of world literary figures. But other past winners of the regular Booker Prize, such as Salman Rushdie, JM Coetzee and Kazuo Ishiguro have failed to make the shortlist. The prize, which will be awarded in London in June, will be given once every two years. It will reward an author - who must be living - for continued creativity," development and overall contribution to fiction on the world stage"". An author can only win once. The international award was started in response to criticisms that the Booker Prize is only open to British and Commonwealth authors. Margaret Atwood (Canada) Saul Bellow (Canada) Gabriel Garcia Marquez (Colombia) Gunter Grass (Germany) Ismail Kadare (Albania) Milan Kundera (Czech Republic) Stanislaw Lem (Poland) Doris Lessing (UK) Ian McEwan (UK) Naguib Mahfouz (Egypt) Tomas Eloy Martinez (Argentina) Kenzaburo Oe (Japan) Cynthia Ozick (US) Philip Roth (US) Muriel Spark (UK) Antonio Tabucchi (Italy) John Updike (US) Abraham B Yehoshua (Israel)

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"entertainment 018.txt Versace art portfolio up for sale  
The art collection of murdered fashion designer Gianni Versace could fetch up to £9m (\$17m) when it is auctioned in New York and London later this year. Among the pictures for sale are works by Roy Lichtenstein", Andy Warhol and Henri Matisse. The collection was housed at Versace's six-storey New York townhouse. The 51-year-old designer was shot outside his Florida home in 1997 by suspected serial killer Andrew Cunanan, who later killed himself. The auction, at Sotheby's, will feature 45 contemporary, impressionist and 19th Century paintings. One of the highlights of the sale is Roy Lichtenstein's Blue Nude which has been given an estimate of £1.8m (\$3.4m). Tobias Meyer, Sotheby's worldwide head of contemporary art," said: ""This collection reflects Mr Versace's wide-ranging taste and impeccable eye", and many of the works were commissioned directly from

m the artists. ""Outstanding later examples from champions of the Pop movement", such as Roy Lichtenstein, are juxtaposed with masterpieces from the most visible artists of the 1980's, including Jean-Michel Basquiat and the collaborative genius of Basquiat and Warhol," as well as Francesco Clemente." " Much of the collection will be offered for sale at three auctions in New York in June", with smaller contemporary paintings going under the hammer in London on 22 and 23 June. A sale of Versace's furniture and artworks sold in 2001 fetched £5.5m (\$10.3m).

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"entertainment 019.txt Slater to star in Broadway play Actor Christian Slater is stepping into the role of Tom in the Broadway revival of The Glass Menagerie. Slater", 35, is replacing actor Dallas Roberts in the Tennessee Williams drama, which opens next month. No reason was given for Robert's departure. The role will be played by understudy Joey Collins until Slater joins the show. Slater won rave reviews for his recent performance in One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest in London's West End. He has also starred in a number of films, including Heathers, Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves and more recently Churchill: The Hollywood Years. Preview performances of The Glass Menagerie will begin at New York's Ethel Barrymore Theatre on Thursday. Philip Rinaldi, a spokesman for the show, said the play's 15 March opening date remains unchanged. The revival, directed by David Leveaux, will also star Jessica Lange as the domineering mother, Amanda Wingfield.

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"entertainment 020.txt Public show for Reynolds portrait Sir Joshua Reynolds' Portrait of Omai will get a public airing following fears it would stay hidden because of an export wrangle. The Tate Gallery unsuccessfully tried to buy the picture from its anonymous owner after a ban was issued preventing the painting from leaving the UK. The 18th Century painting has remained in storage but the owner has agreed to allow it to be part of an exhibition. The exhibition of Reynolds' work will be shown at Tate Britain from May. Joshua Reynolds: The Creation of Celebrity will feature prints", caricatures, and sculpture by the 18th Century artist, who painted some of the most famous personalities of his day. Portrait of Omai fetched the second highest amount for a British painting when it was sold at auction for £10.3m in 2001. It was bought by a London dealer who sold it on to a collector. The unnamed collector wanted to take it out of the country, but was barred from doing so by the government because of its historical significance. In March 2004," the Tate managed to raise £12.5m funding to buy the portrait but the owner refused to sell and it has been held in storage since. The portrait is of a young man who was dubbed ""the noble savage"" when he arrived in London from Polynesia. He became a darling of London society and was invited to all the best parties by people who were fascinated by such an exotic character. Sir Joshua painted him after his arrival in 1774", and it became the artist's most famous work after it was first exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1776.

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"entertainment 021.txt Obituary: Dame Alicia Markova Dame Alicia Markova", who has died in Bath aged 94, was the UK's first prima ballerina of the modern age, and, in her heyday, the greatest in the western world. She was born Lilian Alicia Marks in London in 1910. Her parents were comfortably off - her father, a mining engineer, drove a Rolls Royce. When she was eight, her mother took a decision which changed her life. Fearing that she had flat fee

t and weak legs, she arranged for her to have ballet lessons. Very quickly it became apparent that she was something special. She was spotted by the Russian artistic impresario, Sergei Diaghilev, who wanted her to dance for his company, Ballets Russes. She became ill with diphtheria but kept in touch, and, eventually, with a governess in tow, joined Diaghilev in Monte Carlo when she was 14. From here, she toured Europe, playing in all the top venues. It was Diaghilev who changed her name without even consulting her. Her life was one of great excitement. People such as Matisse and Stravinsky became like uncles to her, the latter put in charge of her musical education. Soon after Diaghilev's death in 1929, Alicia Markova returned to England and became Britain's first international ballerina. She helped launch the Ballet Club at the Mercury Theatre (later the Ballet Rambert), the Vic Wells Ballet, and then, with Anton Dolin, the Markova-Dolin Ballet of 1935-37. She also began working with young choreographers such as Anthony Tudor and Frederick Ashton who became huge influences on the direction of ballet in the west. Her version of Giselle, all lightness and grace, is still considered to be among the finest ever. She was also outstanding in The Dying Swan. She was one of the first British ballerinas to take a major part in Les Sylphides. She, above all, helped popularise ballet both in Britain and in America. Alicia Markova spent World War II in the United States where, in a re-formed Ballets Russes, she played to huge audiences. She even appeared in Hollywood movies. In 1950, back in England, she and Anton Dolin jointly established the Festival Ballet. She retired in 1963, "an ""instant decision"" she said", "largely because of a leg injury". Created a Dame", she made a new career for herself as a teacher. She also travelled the world directing ballet companies and putting on shows. She became director of ballet for the Metropolitan Opera Ballet in New York," and for some years was full-time Professor of Ballet and Performing Arts in the University of Cincinnati. A critic once said of Dame Alicia Markova's dancing: "She gave the illusion of moving as if she had no weight to get off the ground."

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"entertainment 022.txt Fears raised over ballet future Fe  
wer children in the UK are following in the dainty footsteps of dancers like Darcey Bussell", and carving out potential careers as ballet dancers. New research from the Royal Academy of Dance (RAD) has found fewer children over the age of 10 are attending ballet classes and taking exams in the discipline. The organisation blames the growing popularity of computer games and other changes in lifestyle. And there are fears that if the trend is not reversed, there could be fewer British ballet stars in the future. The RAD found that the number of youngsters taking their ballet exams drops by almost 70% after the age of 10 or 11. Dance teacher Eve Trew, who has taught ballet for over 48 years," told BBC News she had seen a ""vast"" change over the years. She blamed modern lifestyles for the fall in ballet attendance. ""I think the children of many years ago did not have as many hobbies", she said. The trouble now is that they are wide open to computers," Gameboys and everything else children have got. ""As a result", "there is less time being spent on ballet lessons." Hazel Gilbert",23, an information manager from Newcastle," gave up ballet at the age of 10 and is typical of the problem. ""It's not a very cool thing to do when you go to 'big' school and I think you have to be very focused on ballet to want to carry on doing it", she said. I used to love it," but after a certain age it becomes much more disciplined and I didn't want that. ""I started getting into other things", like swimming and kickboxing," and ballet just wasn't something I wanted to do any more." Ms Trew", who runs a dance school in Gateshead," admitted it would be ""very difficult"" to reverse the trend and said many young ballet dancers were no

longer willing to make the sacrifices to succeed. ""You have to be very dedicated and you have to be very disciplined. ""It is a career that you have got to really want to do because it is such hard work. ""Children these days have not got the time to spend perfecting it... that is very sad."" Currently", only two out of 16 principal dancers at the Royal Ballet - Darcey Bussell and Jonathan Cope - are British, compared to 16 of the 21 principals in 1985. But a spokesman for the English National Ballet told BBC News that although only two out of their 12 principal dancers were British," around a quarter of the company's dancers were from the UK. He said competition at open auditions in London was ""fierce"" between talented dancers from all over the world. The RAD have launched a new competition to try and reverse the decline in British ballet. Dame Antoinette Sibley", president of the RAD, launched the Fonteyn Nureyev Young Dancers competition earlier this week. Aimed at children aged 10 to 13," it is hoped the contest will help keep British ballet evolving. A spokeswoman for the RAD said: ""It is our responsibility to re-ignite the passion and nurture young dancers for the long-term future of ballet. ""We need to provide them with a framework and a goal to work towards",, with constant support and coaching in an environment where they can work with their peers and possibly leading artists and choreographers. ""Perhaps more importantly provide them with the opportunity to experience 'performance' themselves. ""What better way to reignite a passion for ballet than to let them experience the thrill of performance?""

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"entertainment 023.txt Famed music director Viotti dies C  
conductor Marcello Viotti", director of Venice's famous La Fenice Theatre, has died in Germany at 50. Viotti, director of La Fenice since 2002, conducted at renowned opera houses worldwide including Milan's La Scala and the Vienna State Opera. His time at La Fenice coincided with its reopening in 2003 after it was destroyed by fire in 1996. He fell into a coma after suffering a stroke during rehearsals for Jules Massenet's Manon last week. He conducted some of the best orchestras in the world including the Berlin Philharmonic and the English Chamber Orchestra. Viotti was born in Switzerland and studied the piano, cello and singing at the Lausanne Conservatory. His career breakthrough came in 1982 when he won first prize at the Gino Marinuzzi conducting competition in Italy. Viotti established himself as chief conductor of the Turin Opera and went on to become chief conductor of Munich's Radio Orchestra. At La Fenice Viotti was widely acclaimed for his production of the French composer Massenet's Thais and some of his other productions included Giuseppe Verdi's La Traviata and Richard Strauss's Ariadne auf Naxos. The last opera he directed at La Fenice was Massenet's Le Roi de Lahore. Viotti's debut at the New York's Metropolitan Opera came in 2000 with Giacomo Puccini's Madame Butterfly, followed by La Boheme, La Traviata and Fromental Halevy's La Juive. Giampaolo Vianello, superintendent of the Feni ce Theatre Foundation," said: ""I am filled with extreme sadness because", other than a great artist, he is missed as a friend - a main character in the latest joyous times," during the rebirth of our theatre." Viotti's last public perf ormance was on 5 February when he conducted Vincenzo Bellini's Norma at the Vie nna State Opera.

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"entertainment 024.txt Paraguay novel wins US book prize  
A novel set in 19th century Paraguay has won the \$10",000 (£5,390) fiction prize at the US National Book Awards. Lily Tuck's The News From Paraguay is a fict ionalised tale about Paraguayan leader Francisco Solano Lopez and his Irish mis tress. But the annual awards, which were presented in New York on Wednesday, we

re not without controversy. Children's author Judy Blume, who was given an honorary medal, used the ceremony to speak out over censorship. Sales of Blume's books have exceeded 75 million, but her work - which features frank narratives about families, religion and sexuality - is closely watched by the censors. Blume said: ""The urge to ban is contagious. It spreads like wildfire from community to community. Please speak out. Censors hate publicity." Her medal marks the second year in a row the honourary prize went to someone as notable for popular success as literary greatness. Last year's honorary winner", Stephen King, accused the industry during the 2003 ceremony of snobbery against popular writers. But his argument that the award should help sell books instead of honouring excellence is not shared by everyone. This year's fiction panel overlooked high-profile works such as Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America* and instead chose five little-known books, all by New York-based women. One fiction judge, Stewart O'Nan," carried around a note written on a napkin that said: ""I would hope that our caring more for the quality of a work than its sales figures make us a friend of books", not an enemy." The National Book Awards non-fiction prize was awarded to Kevin Boyle's *Arc of Justice*", which focuses on a black family's fight to live in a white Detroit neighbourhood in the 1920s. The award had created a lot of interest this year after the surprise inclusion of the 9-11 Commission Report looking into the events of the 11 September terrorist attacks on the US. Pete Hautman won the young people's literature prize for his novel *Godless*. The winner in the poetry category was Jean Valentine for *Door in the Mountain: New and Collected Poems, 1965-2003*.

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"entertainment 025.txt New Harry Potter tops book chart H arry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince has topped Amazon's book chart less than 24 hours after its release date - 16 July - was announced. Thousands of customers placed pre-orders on the amazon.co.uk website for the sixth book in the series. Rowling revealed she had completed the novel on Tuesday", ahead of the scheduled announcement on 25 December. It will be published simultaneously in the UK, the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. JK Rowling's fifth book in the wizard series, Harry Potter and Order of the Phoenix was Amazon's largest pre-ordered item ever, with 420,000 copies pre-ordered prior to its release in June 2003. Customers who pre-order Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince avoid standing in long queues at bookshops on the day of the book's release next July. ""The fact that the book has already hit number one in our Hot 100 books chart shows how incredibly excited customers are about the sixth Harry Potter", said Amazon's Robin Terrell. Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince takes up the story of Harry Potter's sixth year at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry as Lord Voldemort grows stronger. Rowling has already revealed that the Half-Blood Prince is neither Harry nor Voldemort. And she added that the opening chapter of the book had been brewing in her mind for 13 years. Rowling said she had plenty of time while pregnant to tinker with the manuscript to my satisfaction and I am as happy as I have ever been with the end result"". She also previously revealed that a character will be killed in the sixth book", but she has given no hints as to who it might be. Following publication of the sixth book, just one novel remains to complete the series.

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"entertainment 026.txt UK's National Gallery in the pink The National Gallery", home to some of the UK's greatest artworks, has seen a big jump in visitor numbers. Five million visitors made the London gallery - which houses treasures like Raphael's *Madonna of the Pinks* - the UK's most visite

d museum in 2004. It recorded a 13.8% rise in numbers and was the country's second most visited tourist attraction, behind Blackpool Pleasure Beach. Charles Saumarez Smith, the gallery's director," said he was ""delighted"". He said the number of visitors through the doors had boosted figures to pre-11 September 2001 levels. Mr Saumarez Smith added that the pedestrianisation of Trafalgar Square", where the gallery is located," and strong temporary collections throughout 2004 had led to the strong performance. ""Our 2004 exhibition programme of El Greco", Russian Landscape in the Age of Tolstoy and Raphael: From Urbino to Rome was particularly strong and exceeded all targets," he said. The exceptional quality of the paintings in our permanent collection is also huge draw for the public. ""The expectations of today's visitors are higher than ever and we have kept pace with their demands."" Mr Saumarez Smith said he was confident the gallery could maintain the attendance. ""With important exhibitions of the work of Caravaggio", Stubbs and Rubens in place for 2005, I am confident that the gallery is set for another highly successful year," he added. The figures were prepared by the Association of Leading Visitor Attractions (Alva). It found that the figures had been boosted by an increase in Europeans travelling to the UK on budget airlines. Popular cultural tourist spots such as the Tate Modern and the Natural History Museum all recorded increases of more than 10% in visitor numbers compared with 2003. But for legal or confidentiality reasons some Alva members did not submit figures for 2004, including Buckingham Palace, Windsor Castle, Madame Tussauds and Alton Towers. Alva director Robin Broke said: Visits from Western Europe were up by 10% and from North America by some 9% compared to 2003," while numbers from the rest of the world rose 20%. ""European figures were helped by the rapid growth of low-cost flights to Britain from Europe"," especially from new EU countries.""

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"entertainment 027.txt Lit Idol begins search for author  
The second Pop Idol-style search for literary talent has begun with the help of the brother of Simon Cowell. Writer Tony Cowell is among the judges who will hear aspiring writers read their work aloud. The winner gets a deal with literary agency Curtis Brown. ""I'm not going to be the Mr Nasty of books"," said Cowell, 54, in reference to his brother's caustic remarks on TV shows Pop Idol and The X-Factor. The 2004 winner, Paul Cavanagh, went on to sign a deal with Harper Collins. This year, the competition is specifically looking for a crime writer. Writers must submit up to 10,000 words from the opening chapters of their novels and a synopsis. Professional readers will choose a shortlist of five following the competition closing date on 14 January. The final five will then have to read their work in front of judging panel. A public vote will also take place, which will account for 25% of the final decision. The winner will be announced at the London Book Fair on 14 March next year and could be screened on TV. It's very", very hard to find an agent and extremely difficult, without an agent, to get a publisher to look at your work, said Cowell. People do fall by the wayside and the more avenues we can provide for aspiring authors, the better," he added. Paul Cavanagh, a former university professor and health care consultant from Ontario in Canada, was one of 1,466 aspiring novelists to enter the first contest. He lifted the inaugural Lit Idol prize after reading aloud an excerpt of his work Northwest Passage. Three film studios are said to be interested in buying film rights for the book, even though it is not finished yet.

entertainment 028.txt Potter director signs Warner deal H  
arry Potter director Alfonso Cuaron has signed a three-year deal with Hollywood studio Warner Brothers, according to Variety trade magazine. The Mexican filmmaker, who directed Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban, will produce main

stream movies and smaller Spanish-language films. We had a wonderful experience with Alfonso on Harry Potter", " Warner producer Jeff Robinov told Variety. Cuaron's other films include Mexican movie *Y Tu Mama Tambien*. The 2001 rites-of-passage drama about two teenage boys who embark on a relationship with an older woman, brought Cuaron international attention - and box office glory. It also won him and his brother Carlos, with whom he co-wrote the screenplay, an Oscar nomination for best original screenplay. Warner will distribute Cuaron's films in several languages outside the US. This deal will give us the opportunity to collaborate with Alfonso on movies that make the most of his artistry and vision", and continue to offer him the mainstream worldwide audiences that our studio provides so successfully," said Mr Robinov. His first film for Warner Brothers was 1995's family fantasy movie *A Little Princess*. Based on the novel by Frances Hodgson Burnett, *A Little Princess* tells the story of a young girl who is sent to live in a New York boarding school when her widowed father enlists for war. After the erotic nature of *Y Tu Mama Tambien*, Cuaron was a surprise choice to direct the third Harry Potter film but his dark interpretation was received well by the public and critics alike.

entertainment 029.txt Baghdad Blogger on big screen A film based on the internet musings of the Baghdad Blogger"" has been shown at the Rotterdam Film Festival. The film has been directed by the man who calls himself Salam Pax", the author of the weblog about Iraqi life during and after the war. The movie version comes in the form of a series of shorts made by Pax on a hand-held camera. Baghdad Blogger is among a number of films about Iraq showcased at the Dutch festival, which runs until Sunday. Following the fascination with the writing of Salam Pax - not his real name - he began a regular column in The Guardian newspaper and was given a crash course in documentary film-making. For the film he travelled Iraq to document the changing landscape of the country and the problems it has faced since the invasion, speaking to ordinary Iraqis about their experiences. The festival will also see the screening of Underexposure," one of Iraq's first features to emerge since the toppling of Saddam Hussein. Director Oday Rasheed made the film on discarded 1980s Kodak film taken from the remains for the former Ministry of Culture building. It centres on the lives of families and strangers going about their everyday business as Baghdad is under siege. Rasheed said the title was refers to the isolation felt by Iraqis under Saddam's regime and the difficult time the country is now experiencing. ""Saddam's regime was hell", but now I think the hell has doubled," Rasheed said. The festival was also due to screen murdered Dutch film-maker Theo Van Gogh's film about the treatment of woman under Islam, but it was withdrawn due to safety fears. Van Gogh was shot and stabbed in November 2004, following death threats he received about his film Submission.

entertainment 030.txt US critics laud comedy *Sideways* Road trip comedy *Sideways* has had more praise heaped on it by two US critics' associations, adding to honours it has already picked up. The Chicago Film Critics Association (CFCA) named it winner in five categories including best film and best actor for Paul Giamatti. But the director award went to Clint Eastwood for *Million Dollar Baby*. The Southeastern Film Critics also awarded *Sideways* its best film of the year accolade. Director Alexander Payne was named best director, and he also won best screenplay shared with Jim Taylor. The CFCA awarded Thomas Haden Church the best supporting actor prize and Virginia Madsen the best supporting actress award for their roles in the film. *Sideways* has already been voted best film by critics associations in New York and Los Angeles and has been nominated for a Golden Globe. British actress Imelda Staunton won the CFCA best actress for the gritty abortion drama *Vera Drake*, adding to a growing list of awards she has won for her performance in the Mike Leigh film. Scrubs star Zach

Braff was named best new director for his debut Garden State. Michael Moore's controversial documentary Fahrenheit 9/11 won the best documentary, while A Very Long Engagement won best foreign film. The Chicago critics have yet to name a date for when their awards ceremony will be held.

entertainment 031.txt Dirty Den's demise seen by 14m More than 14 million people saw Dirty"" Den Watts killed off on Friday", marking EastEnders' 20th anniversary, according to unofficial figures. Den's death came 16 years after he was supposedly shot in 1989. But he came back to the show in September 2003. The audience for BBC One's one-hour special averaged 13.7 million and peaked at 14.2 million in the last 15 minutes, overnight figures showed. Den died after being confronted by Zoe, Chrissie and Sam in the Queen Vic. If the ratings are confirmed, the episode will have given the soap its highest audience for a year. The overnight figures showed almost 60% of the viewing public tuned into EastEnders between 2000 and 2100 GMT," leaving ITV1 with about 13%. ""We are very pleased with the figures"," a BBC spokesman said. It shows viewers have really enjoyed the story of Den's demise." The show's highest audience came at Christmas 1986", when more than 30 million tuned in to see Den, played by Leslie Grantham, hand divorce papers to wife Angie. Two years later," 24 million saw him apparently shot by a man with a bunch of daffodils by a canal. More than 16 million viewers watched his return in 2003. The show's ratings have since settled down to about 12 million per episode. Grantham hit the headlines in May after a newspaper printed photographs of him apparently exposing himself via a webcam from his dressing room. He also allegedly insulted four co-stars. He apologised for his ""deplorable actions"" and ""a moment's stupidity"".

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entertainment 032.txt Redford's vision of Sundance Despite sporting a corduroy cap pulled low over his face plus a pair of dark glasses", Robert Redford cuts an unmistakable figure through the star-struck crowds at Sundance. It's a rare downtown appearance for the man who started the annual festival in Park City, Utah back in the 1980s. Now in its twenty-first year, Sundance continues to grow. Some 45,000 people are estimated to have descended on this small ski town with nothing but movies on the mind. It's an opportunity to meet and make deals. Redford wanted Sundance to be a platform for independent filmmakers, but the commercial success of many showcased films have led to criticism that the festival is becoming too mainstream. Smaller festivals like Slamdance and XDance, which take place during the same week in Park City," are competing for Sundance's limelight. But Redford is not worried. ""The more the merrier", he says. The point was to create opportunities for people who may not have them. ""Once independent film had a place where the work could be seen", suddenly the merchants came. With them the celebrities came, then the paparazzi - and suddenly it began to take on a whole new tone, explains Redford. People started to say we had gone mainstream and Hollywood, but actually Hollywood came to us because suddenly there was good business in independent film," he adds. International film-makers have always been celebrated here, but 2005 is the first year a dedicated World Dramatic and Documentary competition is being held. Redford wants the festival to encompass viewpoints he believes the American media fails to reflect, particularly how the US is perceived internationally. He has never hidden the fact that he is a Democrat. But he reserves particular disdain for the current Republican administration. It's the ability to maintain the importance of dissent in a democratic system which right now is under threat with the attitude of this administration", he says. I think many voices are being shut down or accused of being unpatriotic if they want to express another point of view. That's very unhealthy and very dangerous. ""If we take that policy

into the world", "there will be the same victims and the same consequences." " Sundance isn't just one big screening. There are discussion panels and Q&A sessions with directors tackling controversial topics like America's ""culture wars"" and the Iraq war. While Redford wishes the festival to be a forum for dissent", the profile of the audience is fairly monolithic. Educated, middle class and predominantly white Americans comes Sundance," with views from the same end of the political spectrum - anti-war and socially liberal. But Redford knows this and started the Sundance TV Channel in an effort to reach a wider audience. ""When you look at the films here", what we are presenting is very much egalitarian. And it's about good films and good story-telling be it African America, Asian, women, gay," lesbian. ""Sooner or later we will do away with those stereo typical labels and people will say 'it's just a film by so-and so'." "

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"entertainment 033.txt DVD review: Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban This third Harry Potter film brought a change of director and a dramatic visual shake-up that really shines on DVD. Gone are the warm", bright colours found in the two earlier films, Alfonso Cuaron brings in a bleak and cold feel that is simply gorgeous - and looks even better here than in the cinema. It is all part of the progression of Harry's story into darker areas, but you'll spend time just marvelling at the beautiful Hogwarts landscape. This is the first Potter film where you get so lost in the screen adaptation that you forget the book. It is the third year at Hogwarts and studies are interrupted, as they always are, by a calamity that only Harry, Ron and Hermione can put right. It sounds corny. But Harry is no longer the winsome hero, he is a moody teenager and Daniel Radcliffe pulls it off very well. Emma Watson is ever better as Hermione, and the young stars are joined by the usual myriad famous actors including Gary Oldman and Emma Thompson. The film itself is the reason to buy this DVD. But it is laden with behind-the-scenes extras, including funny, if shallow, interviews with all the main cast. But what seems like a long list of features can be swiftly whittled down to the few that you are going to watch. Younger viewers will go for the games which include a Magic You May Have Missed memory test, and Crookshanks chasing off after Scabbers. Adult viewers will ignore those and go straight to the deleted scenes. You will understand why they were deleted but it is fun to see more footage - and not have to hunt through endless menus to find it, as we did on the first Harry Potter DVD. The most interesting pieces are an interview with JK Rowling in Creating The Vision and Conjuring A Scene, a short featurette about the making of the film's big moments.

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"entertainment 034.txt Vera Drake scoops film award Oscar hopefuls Mike Leigh and Imelda Staunton were both winners at the 2004 Evening Standard British Film Awards. Vera Drake - Leigh's 1950s drama about a backstreet abortionist - was named best film and Staunton", who played the title role, was named best actress. Other winners included Paddy Considine, who was crowned best actor for his role in Dead Man's Shoes. Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason was named Evening Standard Readers' Film of 2004 at the central London ceremony. Leigh was presented with his winner's statuette by Timothy Spall and Staunton's award was announced by Patrick Stewart," during the glittering ceremony at The Savoy on Sunday night. Evening Standard film critic Derek Malcolm said: ""He [Leigh] has never made a film that is better controlled and technically more secure... If this isn't one of the films of the year", "I don't know what is." The Alexander Walker Special Award - which honours those who have made a supreme contribution to British film - went to Tim Bevan and Eric Fellner", the co-ch

airmen of Working Title films. The production company is behind films such as My Beautiful Laundrette, Billy Elliot, About A Boy, Shaun of The Dead and Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason. Simon Pegg, who stars in and co-wrote Shaun of the Dead, won the 2004 Peter Sellers Award For Comedy. Other winners included Emily Blunt and Nathalie Press who were jointly named ITV London Most Promising Newcomer Award for their performances in Pawel Pawlikowski's rites-of-passage story, My Summer of Love. Pawlikowski won the best screenplay statuette, while Roger Deakins won the Technical Achievement Award for his cinematography on The Village and The Ladykillers. Guests at the ceremony included Dame Judi Dench, Kim Cattrall, Charles Dance, Bill Nighy and Colin Firth. The awards, which were hosted by Jack Dee, are to be screened on ITV London on Tuesday at 2300 GMT.

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"entertainment 035.txt Hundreds vie for best film Oscar A total of 267 films are eligible for the best film Oscar but only five will be chosen to go forward as nominees. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences has sent out the first ballot papers with the full list of films vying for recognition. Among those expected to receive nominations are The Aviator, Million Dollar Baby and Sideways. Academy members will now vote for their favourites before the final nominees are announced on 25 January. To be eligible for nomination a film must have been shown in a commercial theatre for seven consecutive days before the deadline of 31 December. Director Martin Scorsese's The Aviator, starring Leonardo DiCaprio went on general release on Christmas Day in the US, ensuring it just made the deadline. Studios have already begun lobbying voters, taking out full page adverts in trade publications such as Variety urging them to remember particular films when it comes to choosing what to back. Other movies tipped for possible success include Closer, starring Jude Law and Julia Roberts, Finding Neverland, with Johnny Depp as author JM Barry and Kinsey starring Liam Neeson as the famed sex scientist Alfred Kinsey. Meanwhile, design engineer Takuo Miyagishima will be awarded an Oscar at the Scientific and Technical Awards Dinner on 12 February 2005. Miyagishima is the 18th recipient of the Sawyer Award," which is ""presented to an individual in the motion picture industry whose technological contributions have brought credit to the industry." The main Oscar ceremony will be held in Los Angeles on 27 February.

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"entertainment 036.txt Hanks greeted at wintry premiere Hollywood star Tom Hanks was in London's Leicester Square for the UK premiere of Polar Express. The West End landmark was turned into a festive landscape complete with snow and carol singers to celebrate the arrival of the animated film. ""This is Leicester Square like you've never seen it before," said Hanks, who plays five roles in the movie. Polar Express is based on a children's book which tells the story of a young boy's journey to meet Santa Claus. The 48-year-old actor crossed a three-metre high bridge built in the square, which he said was almost impossible to get across"". Hundreds of fans greeted the star", all wearing Santa hats," and mince pies were on offer. Hanks said that the new film has an ""elegant message"". ""Christmas is a special time of the year and you get out of it what you put into it", added the two-time Academy Award winner. I believe in the spirit of Christmas and I think that's embodied in Santa Claus," he said. Polar Express uses technology similar to that used in Lord of the Rings to bring Gollum to life. The performance capture"" technique enables Hanks to play a number of roles", including the eight-year-old boy who is at the centre of the story, and Father Christmas. It is directed by Robert Zemeckis, who has previously worked with Hanks on Forrest Gump and Castaway.

"/" entertainment 037.txt Film row over Pirates 'cannibals'

Plans to portray Dominica's Carib Indians as cannibals in the sequel to hit film Pirates of the Caribbean have been criticised by the group's chief. Carib Chief Charles Williams said talks with Disney's producers revealed there was ""a strong element of cannibalism in the script which cannot be removed"". The Caribbean island's government said Disney planned to film in Dominica. The Caribs have long denied their ancestors practised cannibalism. Disney was unavailable for comment. ""Our ancestors stood up against early European conquerors and because they stood up...we were labelled savages and cannibals up to today," said Mr Williams. This cannot be perpetuated in movies." Shooting on the sequel is expected to begin in April", with hundreds of Dominicans applying to be extras in the movie. About 3,000 Caribs live on the island of Dominica, which has a population of 70,"000. Many Caribs were killed by disease and war during colonisation up to the 1600s. Mr Williams said he had received support from indigenous groups around the world in his efforts to have cannibalism references removed from the film. But he admitted there were some members of the Carib council who did not support the campaign. He said some did not ""understand our history", "they are weak and are not committed to the cause of the Carib people"". The first Pirates of the Caribbean film took \$305m (£162m) at the box office in the US alone. The cast and crew are to work on two sequels back-to-back", with the first to be released in 2006.

"/" entertainment 038.txt Stars gear up for Bafta ceremony

Film stars from across the globe are preparing to walk the red carpet at this year's Bafta award ceremony. The 2005 Orange British Academy Film Awards are being held at The Odeon in London's Leicester Square. A host of Hollywood stars", including Cate Blanchett, Leonardo DiCaprio, Keanu Reeves and Richard Gere, are expected to attend Saturday's ceremony. Hosted by Stephen Fry, the glittering ceremony will be broadcast on BBC One at 2010 GMT. Other actors expected to add to the glamour of the biggest night in UK film are Gael Garcia Bernal, Imelda Staunton, Diane Kruger, Christian Slater, Anjelica Huston, Helen Mirren and former James Bond star Pierce Brosnan. Hollywood blockbuster The Aviator, starring DiCaprio, leads the field with 14 nominations, including best film. It is up against Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind, Finding Neverland, The Motorcycle Diaries and British film Vera Drake, which has 11 nominations. British hope Imelda Staunton is one of the favourites to land the best actress award for her gritty role as a backstreet abortionist in the small-budget film. Other nominees in the best actress category include Charlize Theron for Monster, Ziyi Zhang for House of Flying Daggers and UK star Kate Winslet, who has two nods for her roles in Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind and Finding Neverland. DiCaprio faces competition from Bernal, Jamie Foxx, Jim Carrey and Johnny Depp in the best actor category. And British actor Clive Owen is hoping to repeat his Golden Globe success with a best supporting actor award for his role in Closer. His co-star Natalie Portman is up against Blanchett, Heather Craney, Julie Christie and Meryl Streep in the best supporting actress category. Mike Leigh is up for the best director award for Vera Drake, alongside Martin Scorsese for The Aviator, Michael Mann for Collateral, Michel Gondry for Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind and Marc Forster for Finding Neverland.

"/" entertainment 039.txt Aviator 'creator' in Oscars snub

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he man who said he got Oscar-nominated movie The Aviator off the ground and signed up Leonardo DiCaprio has been shut out of the Academy Awards race. Charles Evans Jr battled over his role with the people who eventually made the film", and won a producer's credit. But he is not on the list of producers who can win a best film Oscar due to a limit on the number of nominees. The Oscars organisers have picked two of The Aviator's four producers to be nominated for best film. Up to three producers can be named per film but the studios behind The Aviator and Million Dollar Baby failed to trim their credits - so the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences (Ampas) has done it for them. The Aviator's nominated producers are Michael Mann and Graham King - with Mr Evans and Sandy Cilman, Mr Mann's former deputy, left off. Mr Evans sued Mr Mann in 2001, claiming he came up with the idea, spent years developing it and persuaded DiCaprio to play Hughes - but said he was later excluded from the project. The two sides settled out of court in a deal that has remained secret apart from the fact Mr Evans' name has appeared as a producer when the film's credits roll. At the Golden Globes, Mr Evans - who was named among the winners when the film won best drama film - evaded a security guard to have his photo taken with DiCaprio, director Martin Scorsese, Mr Mann and Mr King. Ampas decided to limit the number of producers who could be nominated after Shakespeare in Love's victory in 1999 saw five producers collect awards. The eligible names for The Aviator and Million Dollar Baby were decided by Ampas' producers branch executive committee on Wednesday. The decision also saw Clint Eastwood get his third personal nomination for Million Dollar Baby. He is now named in the best film category as well as being nominated for best director and best lead actor. The Academy Awards ceremony will be held in Hollywood on 27 February. Chinese actress Ziyi Zhang, star of Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, Hero and House of Flying Daggers, is the latest name to be added to the list of presenters on the night.

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"entertainment 040.txt Wine comedy up for six film gongs  
Sideways", a wine-tasting comedy starring Paul Giamatti, is up for six Independent Spirit Awards, the art-house version of the Oscars. The awards are held on 26 February, the day before the Oscars. Spanish drama Maria Full of Grace, about a Colombian woman who becomes a drug courier, got five nominations. Controversial biopic Kinsey, starring Liam Neeson as sex researcher Alfred Kinsey, was one of four films to get four nominations. The awards, now in their 20th year, honour quirky low-budget films, all of which must have a degree of independent financing. Sideways is written and directed by Alexander Payne, who directed the 2002 hit About Schmidt," winning Jack Nicholson his 12th Academy Award nomination. ""These awards", for better or worse, mean everything," said Sideways producer Michael London, adding they were a huge first step"" toward getting recognition from other awards. Among the other films receiving four nominations apiece were Brother to Brother", a drama about a young gay black man forced to live on the streets, Robbing Peter and Primer. Primer, a \$7,000 (£3,650) tale of discovery, won top prize at the Sundance film festival earlier this year. Walter Salles critically acclaimed The Motorcycle Diaries and the forthcoming thriller The Woodsman, starring Kevin Bacon, received three nominations each. Also in the running, with two nominations, are high school comedy Napoleon Dynamite, The Door in the Floor and Garden State - written, directed and starring Scrubs star Zach Braff alongside Natalie Portman. The awards were announced by actors Selma Blair and Dennis Quaid in Los Angeles on Tuesday.

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"entertainment 041.txt No ads for Passion Oscar campaign

Producer Mel Gibson will not be using paid advertisements to promote The Passion of the Christ to voters in next year's Academy Awards. Gibson and his Icon Productions partner Bruce Davey said they would not be campaigning in print", "radio or TV for success at the Oscars in February. ""This film should be judged on its artistic merit", not who spends more money on advertising," Davey said. But DVDs will be sent to Oscar voters, who will be invited to screenings. Icon spent very little on advertising the film, which deals with the last hours of Jesus Christ's life, when it was released earlier this year - instead, it made the film available for special screenings at churches. It went on to gross over \$600m (£322m) in ticket sales worldwide. Over recent years, marketing films to the members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences has become a multi-million dollar industry. Last year, the academy formed a committee to tighten the rules after the campaigns spilled over into personal attacks between studios. Academy president Frank Pierson praised Gibson's move for working to restore the Oscars as a celebration and appreciation of excellence", "and resisting the crass commercialisation that was threatening the integrity of the award"".

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"entertainment 042.txt Berlin honours S Korean director South Korean film director Im Kwon-Taek has received an honorary Golden Bear at the Berlin Film Festival. Im", who has made more than 100 films in a 40-year career," was hailed for his ""remarkable visual beauty", technical innovation," and intellectual depth"". Twenty of his films are screening in a special retrospective during the festival", which runs until 20 February. The veteran film-maker, 68, "won the best director prize at the Cannes Film Festival in 2002 for Chihwaseon. ""Although his films vary in style", they all bear his unmistakable stamp: they are forceful and charged cinematographically, as well as reticent, stylised and musical," organisers said in a statement. Meanwhile, a film version of Bizet's opera Carmen - translated into the South African language Xhosa - has received a warm reception at the festival. U-Carmen eKhayelitsha (Carmen in Khayelitsha), which is one of 21 films up for Berlin's top prize, the Golden Bear, is British director Mark Dornford-May's first feature film. It's the first time any opera has been translated into a black South African language. Xhosa works brilliantly", it's such a musical language," said music director Charles Hazlewood.

entertainment 043.txt Stars pay tribute to actor Davis Hollywood stars including Spike Lee, Burt Reynolds and Oscar nominee Alan Alda have paid tribute to actor Ossie Davis at a funeral in New York. Veteran star Ossie Davis, a well-known civil rights activist, died in Miami at the age of 87 on 4 February 2005. Friends and family, including actress Ruby Dee his wife of 56 years, gathered at the Riverside Church on Saturday. Also present at the service was former US president Bill Clinton and singer Harry Belafonte, who gave the eulogy. He would have been a very good president of the United States", said Mr Clinton. Like most of you here," he gave more to me than I gave to him." "The 87-year-old was found dead last weekend in his hotel room in Florida", where he was making a film. Police said that he appeared to have died of natural causes. Davis made his acting debut in 1950 in No Way Out starring Sidney Poiter. He frequently collaborated with director Spike Lee, starring in seven Lee films including Jungle Fever, Do The Right Thing and Malcolm X. Attallah Shabazz, the daughter of activist Malcolm X," recalled the famous eulogy delivered by Davis at her father's funeral. ""Harlem has come to bid farewell to one of its finest hopes", "she said, quoting the man she knew as Uncle Ossie. Ditto." "Ossie was my hero", and he still is," said Aviator star Alan Alda, a family friend for

over forty years. Ossie was a thing of beauty." "I want so badly someday to have his dignity - a little of it anyway", added Burt Reynolds, Davis's co-star in the 90s TV comedy Evening Shade. Before the midday funeral, scores of Harlem residents formed a queue outside the church to pay their respects to Davis. It is hard to fathom that we will no longer be able to call on his wisdom", his humour, his loyalty and his moral strength to guide us in the choices that are yet to be made and the battles that are yet to be fought," said Belafonte, himself an ardent civil rights activist who had been friends with Davis for over 60 years. But how fortunate we were to have him as long as we did."

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"entertainment 044.txt US actor Ossie Davis found dead US  
actor Ossie Davis has been found dead at the age of 87. Davis", who was married to actress Ruby Dee, was found dead on Friday in his hotel room in Miami Beach, Florida, where he was making a film. Davis, whose 65-year career included credits as a producer, director, actor and writer for stage and screen, was also a civil rights activist. Miami Beach police spokesman Bobby Hernandez said the cause of death appeared to be natural. Davis's body was discovered by his grandson and paramedics at the Shore Club hotel in Miami Beach," where the actor had been shooting the film Retirement. Mr Hernandez said: ""After gaining entry", they found Mr Davis had passed away. ""The cause of death appears to be natural. According to his grandson he was suffering from heart disease." Some of Davis's best known roles included The Joe Louis Story and Gone Are the Days - a film he adapted from his own play", Purlie Victorious. He also appeared in 7 Spike Lee movies, including School Daze, Do the Right Thing and Jungle Fever. His film debut, in 1950, was in the film No Way Out," starring Sidney Poitier and Ruby Dee. Davis and Dee were married for more than 56 years and together received Kennedy Center honours in 2004 for their body of work. The Actors' Equity Association issued a statement calling Davis ""an icon in the American theatre"" and he and Dee ""American treasures"". Davis was also a prominent figure in the civil rights movement and was a voice for racial equality. He was a featured speaker at the funerals of both Martin Luther King Jnr and Malcolm X. Besides Dee", Davis is survived by three children Nora, Hasna and Guy, a blues artist, and seven grandchildren.

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"entertainment 045.txt Jugnot 'tops French actor league'  
Actor Gerard Jugnot - star of the Oscar-nominated film The Chorus - has beaten Gerard Depardieu to become France's best-paid actor of 2004. Jugnot made 5.45m Euros (£3.77m) last year", according to a table drawn up by France's Le Figaro newspaper. In The Chorus (Les Choristes), Jugnot plays an inspiring music teacher at a school for troubled boys in 1949. Despite starring in five films in 2004," Depardieu made 3.35m Euros (£2.31m) putting him third place in the chart. ""His name [Depardieu] is no longer sufficient to guarantee the success of a film", said Le Figaro newspaper. The Chorus, which Jugnot also co-produced, has drawn an audience of nearly nine million people since its release last year. Godzilla star Jean Reno was France's second best-paid actor in 2004, earning 3.55m Euros (£2.45m) . His roles include a recent uncredited cameo in the Oscar-nominated Hotel Rwanda. The highest-ranking woman on Le Figaro's list was Audrey Tautou in 10th place, earning 885,000 Euros (£611,000). She starred in Jean-Pierre Jeunet's A Very Long Engagement (Un Long Dimanche de Fiancailles) and is also lined up to co-star with Tom Hanks in Ron Howard's The Da Vinci Code. The Chorus is nominated for best foreign film at Sunday's Oscar ceremony. On Saturday, it will compete for the title of best film against fellow nominee A Very Lon

g Engagement in France's Cesar film awards.

entertainment 046.txt Howl helps boost Japan's cinemas Ja pan's box office received a 3.8% boost last year, with ticket sales worth 211bn yen (£1.08bn). The surge was led by animated movie Howl's Moving Castle, which took 20bn yen (£102m) to become the biggest film in Japan in 2004. It is expect ed to match the 30.7bn yen (£157m) record of Hayao Miyazaki's previous film Spi rited Away. Japan Motion Picture Producers figures showed that 170 million cine ma admissions were made in Japan in 2004. The Last Samurai, starring Tom Cruis e, was the biggest foreign movie hit in Japan last year, taking 13.8bn yen (£7 0.7m). It was followed by Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban, Finding Ne mo and The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King. The second highest-grossing Japanese film was romantic drama Crying Out Love in the Centre of the World, followed by Be With You and Pocket Monsters Advanced Generation. Japanese films accounted for 37.5% of Japan's box office total last year, with foreign films t aking the remaining 62.5%. This represented a 4.5% gain for the proportion of J apanese films in 2004 compared to 2003. The number of Japanese films released r ose to 310 in 2004 from 287 the previous year. Sales of movies on DVD and video amounted to 497bn yen (£2.54bn) for the year.

entertainment 047.txt Berlin applauds Hotel Rwanda Political thriller Hotel Rwanda was given a rousing reception by spectators at the Be rlin Film Festival on Saturday. The movie's star Don Cheadle also received a s tanding ovation when he stepped onto the stage after the show. The film is the true story of the hotel manager who saved 1,200 Tutsis from death during the Rw andan genocide. The film, showing out of competition in Berlin, is nominated fo r three Oscars, including best actor for Cheadle. Sophie Okonedo, who plays Che adle's wife Tatiana, is nominated for best supporting actress. The film is also in the running for best original screenplay. Cheadle, was joined on stage at Be rlin by Paul Rusesabagina, the hotel manager he plays in the film, Mr Rusesabag ina's wife and his extended family, who fled Rwanda and now live in Belgium. Mr Rusesabagina used his influence as a prominent Hutu businessman to shelter pote ntial victims of the Rwandan genocide, contacting dignitaries including Bill Cl inton, the King of Belgium as well as the French foreign ministry. Hotel Rwanda is one of two films addressing the genocide at the 55th Berlin Film Festival, w hich runs until 20 February. Sometimes in April is a feature by Raoul Peck comp eting for the festival's coveted Golden and Silver Bear awards. The film was ma de exclusively in Rwanda whereas Hotel Rwanda was shot mostly in South Africa, with some scenes made in Kigali.

entertainment 048.txt 'Landmark movies' of 2004 hailed US film professionals have declared Fahrenheit 9/11 and The Passion of the Christ as two of the most significant cultural milestones of 2004. The American Film Institute (AFI) hailed Mel Gibson's biblical epic and Michael Moore's political documentary as inspiring national debate. It claimed both film-makers tossed Ho llywood convention out the window". The Institute also cited the death of acto r Marlon Brando and the changing landscape of TV news in the US. In referring t o Marlon Brando's death on 1 July at the age of 80", "the 13-strong AFI jury co ncluded ""the art of screen acting has two chapters - 'Before Brando' and 'Afte r Brando'. It credited the screen legend's ""raw hypnotic energy"" and his abi lity to create characters like Stanley Kowalski and Terry Malloy ""that will li ve forever in the annals of film history"". The list also acknowledges key infl uences and trends in the world of film and broadcasting. Among current trends", it highlighted the final broadcasts of veteran newscasters Tom Brokaw, Barbara Walters and the impending retirement of CBS news anchor Dan Rather. It its plac e, the AFI fears," is a news landscape where ""newscasters are more personaliti es than journalists"" and balance and integrity are increasingly ignored. The

AFI also questioned ""the long-term viability of evening news broadcasts""", in the light of 24-hour news channels and the internet. The list also draws attention to the growing influence of US broadcasting regulator, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). The institute concluded the threat of regulation, which went into freefall following Janet Jackson's 'wardrobe malfunction' during a live Super Bowl performance in February, ""had a profound effect on television""." "Unsure of how the FCC will rule on an issue", the creative community has begun to self-censor their shows, a disturbing trend in a country founded on free expression," the AFI jury declared. To illustrate their point, the AFI cited ABC affiliates refusal to air Steven Spielberg's film Saving Private Ryan in an unedited form over fears of possible fines.

entertainment 049.txt De Niro film leads US box office Film star Robert De Niro has returned to the top of the North American box office with his film Hide and Seek. The thriller shot straight to the number one spot after taking \$22m (£11.7m) at the box office. De Niro recently spent three weeks at the top with comedy Meet The Fockers, which was at number five this week. Oscar hopefuls The Aviator, Million Dollar Baby and Sideways all cashed in on their multiple nominations with stronger ticket sales. In Hide and Seek, De Niro plays a widower whose daughter has a creepy imaginary friend. Despite lukewarm reviews from critics, the film took more than the expected \$18m (£9.5m). The element of a real actor in a psychological thriller certainly elevated it", said Bruce Snyder, president of domestic distribution at 20th Century Fox. Clint Eastwood's Million Dollar Baby led the Oscar hopefuls with \$11.8m (£6.3m), coming in at number three during its first weekend of wide release. The Aviator, a film biography of Howard Hughes that leads the Oscar field with 11 nominations, was at number six for the weekend with \$7.5m (£4m). Oscar best-picture nominee Sideways entered the top ten for the first time in its 15th week of release. It came in seventh \$6.3 (£3.35m). Last week's top film, Ice Cube's road-trip comedy Are We There Yet?, slipped to second place with \$17m (£9m), while Coach Carter fell two places to number four, taking \$8m (£4.25m) in its third week. Rounding out the top ten were In Good Company - starring Dennis Quaid and Scarlett Johansson - Racing Stripes and Assault on Precinct 13.

entertainment 050.txt Willis sues over movie 'injury' Actor Bruce Willis is suing Revolution Studios over an injury he said he suffered while making Tears of the Sun. Willis is seeking medical expenses after he said he was hit in the head by a firework during the filming of the 2002 movie, produced by the firm. The lawsuit said the star has endured mental and physical injuries as a result of the alleged incident. We are not able to comment on pending litigation", Revolution Studios spokesman Sean Dudas said. In Tears of the Sun Willis plays a US military commander who disobeys orders to try and help save a doctor and patients trapped in the Nigerian jungle. Directed by Antoine Fuqua, the film was poorly received by critics and did not perform strongly at the box office. According to the lawsuit, the injury was suffered during the firing of explosions as part of a special effect. The explosions, known as squibs, were intended to simulate the appearance of bullets striking the ground""." The lawsuit said Willis has endured ""extreme mental", physical and emotional pain and suffering." There were no specific details on the injuries. While Willis does not seek specific monetary damages", the lawsuit noted that the star ""was required to and did employ physicians and other medical personnel""". It stated he will incur additional future medical expenses. The lawsuit said Revolution Studios and special effects foreman Joe Pancake ""had a duty to Willis to ensure that the squibs were inspected", set up, placed and detonated in a safe manner," and to employ technicians who were trained and competent in their use"".

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"entertainment 051.txt Foxx and Swank win US awards Jamie Foxx and Hilary Swank have won the Screen Actors Guild Awards for best male and female film actors", boosting their Oscars hopes this month. Foxx's portrayal of late soul-singer Ray Charles in Ray had already earned him a prestigious Golden Globe award. Swank triumphed for playing a gutsy female boxer in Million Dollar Baby. Modest wine country comedy Sideways knocked out favourites Million Dollar Baby and The Aviator by taking the top prize for best cast performance. The Screen Actors Guild (SAG) represents US film and TV actors. Its winners often go on to win Oscars. In other nominations," Cate Blanchett triumphed as the best supporting actress for her role as Katharine Hepburn in The Aviator. Veteran actor Morgan Freeman took the best supporting actor award for playing a prize-fighter turned gym manager in Million Dollar Baby. ""Thank you for Ray Charles for just living so complex and so interesting", and making us all just come together," said Foxx, accepting his award in Los Angeles on Saturday. He also praised the film director: Thank you for Taylor Hackford for taking a chance with an African-American film. Taylor", "you're my director of the year." "Swank", too," was full of praise for her director and co-star Clint Eastwood. ""I bow down to you", Swank said to the 74-year-old Eastwood. You are a talent beyond compare. If I'm half the person you are and half the talent you are when I'm 74," I will know that I've accomplished something great." " Both Foxx and Swank are now considered to be among the favourites to get Oscars - the Hollywood's ultimate prize. However", Swank has to overcome a strong challenge from Annette Bening, a nominee for the theatre farce Being Julia. Meanwhile, ballots for Oscars - the Hollywood's top honours - were mailed earlier this week to members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. The voting is due to end on 22 February - five days before the ceremony.

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"entertainment 052.txt Spike Lee backs student directors Film-maker Spike Lee says black representation is stronger than ever in cinema and TV but the true power in entertainment lies behind the camera. The She Hate Me director urged students at his old Atlanta university", Morehouse College, " to seek ""gatekeeper positions"" behind the scenes. Lee told them to ""work up the corporate ladder because everybody can't be an actor", "everybody can't make a record"". He spoke as part of a discussion panel", then led a retrospective of his films. Returning to his old university, which educates only African American students," Lee discussed the challenges facing black people in the entertainment industry. ""Even Denzel (Washington)", he's getting \$20m a movie. But when it comes time to do a movie, he has to go to one of those gatekeepers," Lee said. He told aspiring young film-makers in the audience not to ignore non-traditional routes to getting a movie made, including raising funds independently and releasing films straight to DVD. It's a huge market", "the 47-year-old director said. It's not something that should be looked upon as a stepchild." "Lee has made more than 25 films", including Jungle Fever, Do the Right Thing, Summer of Sam and 1986 hit She's Gotta Have It.

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"entertainment 053.txt Horror film heads US box office A low-budget horror film produced by Evil Dead director Sam Raimi has topped the North American box office. Boogeyman", which focuses on a man who returns to his childhood home to confront his traumatic past, took \$19.5m (£14.9m) in three days. Last week's chart-topper, the Robert de Niro thriller Hide and Seek, fell

to number four. Other new entries included *The Wedding Date*, a comedy starring Will and Grace's Debra Messing, at number two. The road-trip comedy *Are We There Yet?* and multiple Oscar nominee *Million Dollar Baby* completed the top five. Other Oscar contenders, including *The Aviator* and *Sideways*, continued to perform strongly at the box office. *The Aviator* has taken \$75m (£40m) so far, while *Sideways* has taken \$46.8m (£24.8m) in a more limited release. *Boogeyman*, which cost just \$7m (£3.5m) to make," performed well even though it was not screened to critics before release - normally a sign that a film will get bad reviews or perform poorly at the box office. ""I certainly believe it's a genre where people are going to be more moved by the marketing materials for the movie than by what the critics say"," said Rory Bruer, head of distribution for Sony Pictures, which released the film in the US. Overall the weekend box office was strong despite the fact that it was American football's Super Bowl weekend - a time when cinema admissions generally fall. This year, the top 12 films grossed around \$91m (£48.3m), compared to 2004's Super Bowl weekend when the total box office was \$73.4m (£38.9m).

entertainment 054.txt Mumbai bombs movie postponed The release of a film about the Mumbai (Bombay) blasts in 1993 has been postponed following protests by those on trial for the bombings. Investigating the blasts which killed more than 250 people and wounded 1,000, the film *Black Friday* had been due to open across India on Friday. But 36 people accused in connection with the blasts said it should not be screened until the trial is over. Mumbai High Court postponed the film's launch until 3 February. *Black Friday* is based up on the novel of the same name written by journalist S Hussain Zaidi, which looks at the 15 explosions which rocked Mumbai on 12 March 1993. Director Anurag Kashyap said the film's release should not be delayed as the book has already been on sale for two years. If you have not gone against the book"," then how can you go against the movie?"" Mr Kashyap's lawyer Mihir Desai said. This is the second time that those accused in connection with the blasts have sought legal intervention regarding the film. They previously asked that a line from the movie's poster"," which claimed the film portrayed ""the true story of the Bombay bomb blasts""", be removed. Their lawyer, Majeed Memon," said: ""We had argued that how can a film say it is telling the true story when the court itself is struggling to find the truth? ""So we said they should remove the line from their promotional posters and they did give us an assurance that they would do so." The Mumbai bombings case is one of India's longest-running trials. A special court was set up to hear the case and regular hearings have taken place there for the last nine years", with more than six hundred witnesses questioned.

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"entertainment 055.txt DVD review: I"," Robot Only one man recognises that robots are a threat to humanity - but that's fine because it only takes one man to save the day in the thriller *I", Robot*. Will Smith co-stars alongside more CGI robots than you can count and as a thrill-a-minute kind of action film, it's perfectly adequate. You'll have forgotten it all tomorrow but you'll have a fun night with the film and all the extras. There is a one-disc version that has commentaries and a *Making Of* but the two-disc adds more. Unusually for this kind of film, the extras don't solely concentrate on the special effects. They're covered but there's also a general Production Diary and a Post-Production feature. Remember the National Lottery's draw machines Arthur and Guinevere? They were more accurate than this glossy Hollywood version of the tale. But as long as you're not expecting a documentary, live with it: King Arthur is a fun, exciting, totally shallow experience and looks excellent. Clive Owen is the brooding King, Keira Knightly rises above her costume and Ray Winst

one gives it all some grit. It's at its best in its battle scenes which are well done and are also the best part of the Making Of extra. Less flashy than a David Attenborough show and less detailed than a Simon Schama one, the BBC series British Isles nevertheless turned out to be quite engrossing. Admit it, the fact that this is one of the shows Alan Titchmarsh left Ground Force to present did mean that you expected something equally frothy. But Titchmarsh turns out to know his subject and the sight of our present-day landscape being peeled back to reveal the past was fascinating. He's now written an accompanying book, too.

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"entertainment 056.txt Brando 'rejected Godfather role' Late film star Marlon Brando is said to have repeatedly turned down his Oscar-winning role in The Godfather. The actor's friend Budd Schulberg told Vanity Fair magazine that Brando's assistant suggested he read the novel. The actor repeatedly refused", throwing the book at her and saying: ""For the last time", "I won't glorify the mafia"". But Brando", who died last July at the age of 80, eventually took the role of Don Corleone," winning him an Oscar in 1973 which he notoriously refused. The actor sent a young woman dressed in Native American costume to refuse the award on his behalf and to draw attention to the plight of Native Americans. Schulberg told the magazine that Brando's assistant realised the film star had warmed to the idea of The Godfather role when he sported a drawn-on pencil moustache and asked: ""How do I look?"" His assistant", Alice Machak, said that he looked like George Raft, an actor famed for playing gangsters on the silver screen. Every time she went to see Brando from then on, she added, he was wearing a different gangster-style moustache. Brando was asked to screen test for the role in The Godfather, as studio executives were said to be reluctant for the actor to play the part following problems on the set of Brando's previous film Mutiny on the Bounty . In fact Brando's Academy Award triumph revived his career. The actor was nominated for an Oscar the following year for his role in Bernardo Bertolucci's Last Tango in Paris. Before his death, Brando granted gaming company Electronic Arts the rights to use his voice and image in a video game based on the Godfather film and book and recorded voice-overs which closely resembled his role as Don Corleone. Brando's co-stars from The Godfather, James Caan and Robert Duvall, will also reprise their roles for the video game, it was confirmed on Wednesday.

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"entertainment 057.txt Dutch watch Van Gogh's last film The last film to be made by the slain Dutch director Theo van Gogh", called 06/05, has been premiered in The Hague. Members of Van Gogh's family and celebrities attended the screening of 06/05, based on the murder of the anti-immigration politician Pim Fortuyn. Van Gogh was shot and stabbed to death in Amsterdam six weeks ago. A Dutch-Moroccan man suspected of radical Islamist links has been charged. The killing, and Fortuyn's death in 2002, convulsed the Netherlands. Many Dutch people have questioned their country's self-image as a peaceful, tolerant nation in the wake of the murders, which triggered heated debate about immigration. An animal rights activist was sentenced to 18 years in prison last year for killing Fortuyn. Earlier this year, Van Gogh made a film accusing Islam of promoting violence against women. It caused outrage among Muslims and death threats were made against him. The film 06/05 will become available on the internet on Wednesday and go on general release in Dutch cinemas in January. Van Gogh's movie mixes real images of the day of Fortuyn's murder with a fictional plot about Dutch intelligence services conspiring to silence the politician. The story unfolds through the eyes of a freelance photographer who unwittingly takes

pictures revealing the involvement of Dutch authorities in Fortuyn's murder. Photographer Jim de Booy then goes on the run from secret service agents who burgle his home and threaten his family.

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"entertainment 058.txt Berlin hails European cinema Organisers say this year's Berlin Film Festival", which opens on Thursday with period epic Man to Man, will celebrate a revitalised European cinema. Of the 21 films in competition for the Golden and Silver Bear awards," more than half are from Europe with France particularly well represented. Festival director Dieter Kosslick says this strong showing signals ""a new consciousness for European films"". ""They're on an incredible winning streak", he told the Reuters agency. This isn't to say there aren't any good American films," he continued. It's just that there are more good European films." However", Mr Kosslick refused to accept that widespread opposition to the Iraq war had turned audiences against Hollywood imports. ""There is no anti-American mood", he said. Some 350 films will be screened at this year's festival, with a further 300 shown at the European Film Market that runs alongside it. More than a dozen celebrities are scheduled to attend, among them Will Smith, Kevin Spacey and Keanu Reeves. But Mr Kosslick says more would be coming had the Academy Awards not been brought forward to 27 February. I'm not worried that we won't be able to fill the red carpet with stars", he said, though he admitted the festival may be moved to January next year to avoid a similar clash. The 10-day Berlinale runs until 20 February.

"entertainment 059.txt Sky takes over Oscar night mantle Sky has signed a major new deal to broadcast this year's Academy Awards, taking over from three years of live Oscar coverage on the BBC. Sky said it was honoured to have won exclusive broadcasting rights"" and promised to cover the event ""in a way no other broadcaster could"". The BBC denied it had lost a bidding war," saying it had ""decided to pass the mantle to another broadcaster"". The ceremony", hosted by newcomer Chris Rock, takes place on 27 February 2005. Sky's coverage will launch with the nominations on 25 January and will include themed programming across Sky channels including Sky News," Sky Travel and the Biography Channel. There will also be a month-long season of Oscar-winning films on Sky Movies in the run up to the event and live uninterrupted coverage on the night. ""We are honoured to have won the live and exclusive broadcasting rights for The Academy Awards", said Sky Networks' Sophie Turner Laing. Sky is the natural place to see the biggest and most prestigious film event of the year," and will cover the event in a way that no other broadcaster could." Sky first scooped Oscar rights from the BBC in 1999"," but the BBC won them back in 2001 when Sky was forced to pull out of a bidding war due to financial constraints. "BBC viewers will of course be able to watch quality coverage of the 2005 Academy Awards on the BBC's bulletins and news programmes", a spokesman said. Among the films tipped to do well at this year's Academy Awards are Martin Scorsese's The Aviator, Jean-Pierre Jeunet's A Very Long Engagement and the Ray Charles biopic, Ray.

"entertainment 060.txt Snicket tops US box office chart The film adaptation of Lemony Snicket novels has topped the North America box office chart, displacing Ocean's 12. A Series of Unfortunate Events, starring Jim Carrey, took \$30.2m (£15.5m) in its debut weekend. Ocean's 12 fell to number two while new entry Spanglish entered the chart at number three, taking \$9m (£4.6m). A Series of Unfortunate Events also stars Scottish comedian Billy Connolly, while Carrey takes on a number of different roles in the surreal film. The only other new entry in the top 10 was re-make, Flight of the Phoenix, at number eight, starring Dennis Quaid. Carrey entertained crowds at the UK premiere of Lemo

ny Snicket in London on Friday. The actor grabbed co-star Meryl Streep and whisked her around Leicester Square. Based on the cult children's books by author Daniel Handler, the film follows three children who are orphaned when their parents die in a fire. They are taken in by their wicked uncle Count Olaf, played by Carrey, who schemes to get his hands on their fortune.

entertainment 061.txt Director Nair's Vanity project Indian film director Mira Nair has said she was thrilled to be given the chance to make William Makepeace Thackeray's novel *Vanity Fair* - as the book has been a favourite through her life. The book is one of the classics of English literature - the story of scheming 19th Century social climber Becky Sharp, played in the film by Reese Witherspoon. Nair said that she jumped at the chance to work on the film, which she has - controversially - made in a Bollywood style, including two song-and-dance routines in the film's second half. It was serendipity really - I was offered *Vanity Fair* by the studio Focus Features", who had distributed *Monsoon Wedding*, Nair told BBC World Service's Masterpiece programme. They offered me their next-best thing," not realising that *Vanity Fair* had actually been one of my favourite novels since I was 16 years old in an Irish Catholic boarding school in India." Since her 1988 debut feature *Salaam Bombay!* - nominated for the Best Foreign Language Oscar and winner of Best First Feature at Cannes - Nair has become one of India's most famous and respected directors. She is not restricted to Bollywood", however - she followed *Salaam Bombay!* with *Mississippi Masala*, starring Denzel Washington, and *The Perez Family*, her first Hollywood film. Her career peaked with *Monsoon Wedding* in 2001, which won the Golden Lion award at Venice. Nair's Indian-style adaptation of *Vanity Fair*, however," has been attacked by critics in the US - where it only reached number eight at the box office in its opening week - who described the Bollywood elements as ""jarring."" The film has a new ending"," with Becky Sharp running off for a new life in India. But Nair said that her film had picked up on the way Thackeray - who was born in India but moved to England as a young man - had seen the world. ""First", when I was 16, it was Becky Sharp, who is a completely memorable character, because I recognised myself in her - I recognised all the ladies who did not want to be ladies, who wanted to buck the system that they were in, she said. But it was the sort of novel I somehow kept at the side of my bed for many years," and I would dip into every now and then and suddenly get completely mesmerised again. ""As I got older and read it", I think it was Thackeray's clarity - his clear-sightedness about his own society, the fact that he was born in India but came to England as a young man - that gave him the eyes of an outsider," and yet he was an insider. ""That perspective was something I really loved." Nair also defended her decision to cast an American actress - Reese Witherspoon - as Becky Sharp", despite the fact that all the rest of the cast are British or Irish. ""I cast intuitively - in my films I cast as many non-actors as I cast actors", she said. For me," it is intuition - I have to fall in love with an actor. It is a visceral response. ""Thackeray describes Becky Sharp as a minx. Also she's described as someone who's tiny"," red-headed and thin. Reese had that completely minx-like irresistibility about her." Having won the role because she seemed physically perfectly suited to the part", however, Witherspoon then became pregnant. But Nair said that, though this had created the need for some filming tricks," it had in fact also helped the film. ""It was a self-fulfilling prophecy - when I first met her husband [actor Ryan Philippe]", I said 'knock her up, won't you, I need some flesh on the girl', she joked. I'm not a fan of the underfed Los Angeles actor at all. This was, for me, about Becky Sharp being, eventually," a full-blown woman through the course of the film. ""I love the luminosity that pregnancy brings", I love the fleshiness," I love the ample bosom - it gave me much more to play with." Nair explained how camera tr

icks had been used to disguise Witherspoon's "bump" in various scenes - including hiring a number of young boys in costumes to stand in front of her. "She runs", she gets off coal carts, she jumps off horses - she does everything, Nair said. But there's also a certain carriage with horses that is going to wipe the screen at a certain moment," because of the bump."

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"entertainment 062.txt Spirit awards hail Sideways The comedy Sideways has dominated this year's Independent Spirit Awards", winning all six of the awards for which it was nominated. It was named best film while Alexander Payne won best director and best screenplay, along with writing partner Jim Taylor. It also won acting awards for stars Paul Giamatti, Thomas Haden Church and Virginia Madsen. Sideways is tipped to do well at Sunday's Oscars, with five nominations. The awards, now in their 20th year, are given to films made outside the traditional studio system, and are traditionally held the day before the Oscars. Other winners included Catalina Sandino Moreno, who took best actress for her role as a drug smuggler in the Colombian drama Maria Full of Grace. Moreno is also nominated for best actress at the Oscars. The best first screenplay award went to Joshua Marston for Maria Full of Grace. Scrubs star Zach Braff won the award for best first feature for Garden State, which he wrote, directed and starred in. Oscar-nominated euthanasia film The Sea Inside from Spain won best foreign film, while Metallica: Some Kind Of Monster was awarded best documentary. Actor Rodrigo de la Serna took the best debut performance prize for The Motorcycle Diaries. The awards are voted for by the 9,000 members of the Independent Feature Project/Los Angeles, which includes actors, directors, writers and other industry professionals. Last year's big winner, Lost In Translation, went on to win the Oscar for best original screenplay, for writer-director Sofia Coppola.

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"entertainment 063.txt Tautou film tops Cesar prize nods French film A Very Long Engagement has received 12 nominations for France's Cesar film awards", despite a recent ruling it was "not French enough". The World War I romantic drama starring Audrey Tautou", was recently ruled "too American" by a Paris court as it was partially backed by Warner Bros. But the Cesar organisers modified their rules to allow the film to compete. The film", directed by Jean-Pierre Jeunet, received best actress, picture and director nominations. Last November a court judged the film was too American to compete in French film festivals. Two associations of French producers challenged Jeunet's right to French government subsidies, because Warner Bros was a backer. The ruling meant the movie - which was filmed in France and used French actors and technicians - was not eligible to compete for French prizes. But Alain Terzian, president of Cesar organisers, the Academie des Arts et Techniques du Cinema, said the changes in eligibility rules, which allow films "of French expression", were made three months prior to the court decision. Other films in the best film category include Police drama 36, Quai Des Orfevres, Arnaud Desplechin's Kings And Queen, Abdellatif Kechiche's L'Esquive and France's number one film at the 2004 box-office The Chorus. Best actors are Daniel Auteuil for 36, Mathieu Amalric for Kings And Queen, Gerard Jugnot for The Chorus, Philippe Torreton for L'Equipier and Benoit Poelvoorde for Podium. Tautou will compete against Maggie Cheung , Emmanuelle Devos, Yolande Moreau and Karin Viard for best actress. Michael Moore's Fahrenheit 9/11, The Motorcycle Diaries, Lost in Translation, Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind and 21 Grams are all vying in the best foreign film prize. The awards ceremony will be held on 26 February. This year, Will

Smith, star of I, Robot, Independence Day and Men In Black, will be given an honorary Cesar, along with French singer/actor, Jacques Dutronc.

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"entertainment 064.txt Hollywood ready for Oscars night H  
ollywood is preparing for the biggest night in the film world's calendar", the 77th Academy Awards, on Sunday. A host of stars are expected to grace the red carpet outside Los Angeles' Kodak Theatre, including Johnny Depp, Cate Blanchett and Leonardo DiCaprio. British actors in attendance include nominees Clive Owen, Imelda Staunton, Kate Winslet and director Mike Leigh. The Aviator leads the shortlist, but critics believe the night may belong to Clint Eastwood's Million Dollar Baby. A recent poll of US pundits found Eastwood's boxing drama had become the new favourite to win best film over the Howard Hughes biopic. If the 74-year-old does win, he will become the oldest person ever to be named best director at the ceremony. UK critics still favour The Aviator for best film, but believe the best director title will generate a close fought battle between Eastwood and Martin Scorsese. Scorsese has never won the best director prize, despite four previous nominations for films including Raging Bull, Goodfellas and Gangs of New York. Eastwood has won best director once before, for Unforgiven in 1993. Most experts predict the twice-nominated Jamie Foxx will win best actor for his portrayal of singer Ray Charles, while Vera Drake star Imelda Staunton looks likely to lose out in the best actress field to Hilary Swank in Million Dollar Baby. The UK's highest hopes remain with Clive Owen, who has scooped both the Golden Globe and the Bafta for his supporting role in Closer. Actor and comedian Chris Rock will host the event," which will be broadcast with a seven-second time delay to allow censors to cut out any unsuitable content. ""We have the bleep machine ready", but bleeps will be used as needed," producer Gil Cates told reporters. However, he added that he strongly disapproved of the growing tendency to censor live broadcasts on US TV. He also played down fears that Rock, who is known for using strong language in his stand-up routines, might cause controversy on the night. The 40-year-old comic has already promised not to swear live on air during the show. Chris has a sense of humour and everything he says is really said humorously", Cates said. You need a movie star and someone who is a stand-up comic so they can deal with the vicissitudes of the show." Security will also be tight", with police employing a system to detect sarin nerve gas. ""We are pulling out all the stops", said John Miller, chief of counterterrorism at the Los Angeles Police Department. The show is a symbol of American culture and has the potential to be a high-visibility target", he added. Meanwhile, organisers have erected a canopy over the red carpet following an out-break of torrential rain in Los Angeles over the past week. Cates said the covers would be removed if the threat of wet weather receded. Details have also emerged of the contents of this year's gift bags, which are given to nominees and presenters on the night. This year's bags will include a gift certificate for a luxury beach resort, a pair of mink eyelashes and a kitchen set with a year's supply of tea and coffee. The event will be televised by the ABC network from 1700 local time (0100 GMT), and on Sky Movies in the UK from 0130 GMT.

entertainment 065.txt Animation charms Japan box office 0  
scar-winning director Hayao Miyazaki's latest film has set a new Japanese box office record, with 1.5bn yen (\$14.3m) in two days, according to reports. Howl's Moving Castle is the follow-up to Miyazaki's Spirited Away, which won best animation at last year's Oscars. It is based on the children's book by English writer Diana Wynne Jones. It has registered the highest opening weekend takings of any Japanese film in the country, according to trade publication Screen Daily. The film is about an 18-year-old girl who is trapped in an old woman's body

after being put under a spell by a witch. Its two-day takings represented 1.1 million cinema admissions, Screen Daily said. The film's distributor Toho expects 40 million people to see it in total - almost one third of the country's population - it added. The film won the Golden Osella for outstanding technical contribution at this year's Venice Film Festival.

entertainment 066.txt US box office set for record high T  
icket sales at the US box office are predicted to break records this year, with figures expected to reach \$9.4 billion, beating 2002's all-time high. Overall figures could be dampened by the lack of a Christmas hit like last year's Oscar-winning Lord of the Rings. Traditionally, ticket sales during the festive season account for 20% of the annual total. Although admissions have actually fallen this year, the predicted high is down to increasing ticket prices. According to Exhibitor Relations President Paul Dergarabedian, the average cost of a cinema ticket could be as high as \$6.25 in 2004, compared to \$5.80 in 2002. This year some of the biggest hits such as The Passion of the Christ and Fahrenheit 9/11 came from outside the major studios which are usually responsible for the key blockbusters. Many of the films that did well (with audiences) are not necessarily the films that made a lot of money", " said Mr Dergarabedian. He added that surprise hits had come from some of the more art-house offerings such as Napoleon Dynamite and critical hit Sideways. Sony Pictures, responsible for hits like Spiderman 2 and The Grudge, are expected to top domestic market share for the second time in three years, with \$1 billion-plus in sales for the third consecutive year. Sony Pictures Entertainment vice chairman, Jeff Blake said: We had a really diverse slate this year", " and... certainly we pulled off one of the surprises with Grudge." Horror movie The Grudge cost Sony \$10 million to make but brought in \$110 million. It's the latest in a recent trend for Hollywood studios to back the upper and lower ends of the market", whilst ignoring the middle. Warner Inc are likely to end the year in second place on market share with around \$1.25 billion, with Disney at number three.

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"entertainment 067.txt Low-budget film wins Cesar A film that follows a group of alienated youth in a Paris suburb as they prepare to perform an 18th Century play has won France's top cinema award. L'Esquive earned a Cesar prize for its director", Tunisian-born Abdellatif Kechiche, and its young star, the 18-year-old actress Sara Forestier. It saw off competition from big-budget French epic, A Very Long Engagement, and the box-office hit, The Chorus. US film Lost in Translation won the award for best foreign feature. The wistful romantic comedy directed by Sofia Coppola has already won several awards, including an Oscar for best screenplay in 2004. Its late release in France made it a contender for this year's Cesars. The low-budget L'Esquive depicts the travails of a group of youth getting ready to perform a school play by the 18th-Century dramatist, Marivaux. The actors are mostly amateurs and the action is set in the impoverished suburbs of Paris," home to thousands of immigrants from North Africa and their children. Kechiche said he made the film because he ""wanted to show people we don't normally see at the cinema""". A Very Long Engagement", a World War I drama featuring Audrey Tautou, won five Cesar awards. The Chorus, a film about a schoolteacher who introduces an unruly classroom to the pleasures of classical singing, won two awards - for best music and best sound. US actor Will Smith, who won an honorary award at the ceremony," thanked his family and his ""hero""", Nelson Mandela, in his speech.

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"entertainment 068.txt Tautou 'to star in Da Vinci film'

French actress Audrey Tautou", star of hit film Amelie, will play the female lead in the film adaptation of The Da Vinci Code, it has been reported. The movie version of Dan Brown's best-selling novel is being directed by Ron Howard and also stars Tom Hanks. Tautou will play Hanks' code-cracking partner, according to various newspapers. She is currently starring in A Very Long Engagement, directed by Jean-Pierre Jeunet. Jeunet was also responsible for directing Tautou in Amelie in 2001, which launched the actress into the mainstream. She also starred as the lead role in critically-acclaimed film Dirty Pretty Things in 2002. Oscar-winning director Ron Howard chose Tautou for the part, preferring a French actress to a big name Hollywood star. UK actress Kate Beckinsale had been widely tipped as a possibility for the role alongside Vanessa Paradis and Juliette Binoche. The thriller upon which the movie is based has sold more than 17 million copies and is centred on a global conspiracy surrounding the Holy Grail mythology. The Louvre Museum, scene of the gruesome murder at the beginning of the novel, recently gave permission for filming to take place there, showbusiness newspaper Variety reported. The \$100m movie will be produced by Columbia/Sony Pictures and is due for release on May 19, 2006 in the United States and France.

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"entertainment 069.txt Foxx and Swank take actors awards

Jamie Foxx and Hilary Swank have won the Screen Actors Guild Awards for best male and female film actors", boosting their Oscars hopes this month. Foxx's portrayal of late soul-singer Ray Charles in Ray had already earned him a prestigious Golden Globe award. Swank triumphed for playing a gutsy female boxer in Million Dollar Baby. Modest wine country comedy Sideways knocked out favourites Million Dollar Baby and The Aviator by taking the top prize for best cast performance. The Screen Actors Guild (SAG) represents US film and TV actors. Its winners often go on to win Oscars. In other nominations," Cate Blanchett triumphed as the best supporting actress for her role as Katharine Hepburn in The Aviator. Veteran actor Morgan Freeman took the best supporting actor award for playing a prize-fighter turned gym manager in Million Dollar Baby. ""Thank you for Ray Charles for just living so complex and so interesting", and making us all just come together," said Foxx, accepting his award in Los Angeles on Saturday. He also praised the film director: Thank you for Taylor Hackford for taking a chance with an African-American film. Taylor"," you're my director of the year." Swank", too," was full of praise for her director and co-star Clint Eastwood. ""I bow down to you", Swank said to the 74-year-old Eastwood. You are a talent beyond compare. If I'm half the person you are and half the talent you are when I'm 74," I will know that I've accomplished something great."" Both Foxx and Swank are now considered to be among the favourites to get Oscars - the Hollywood's ultimate prize. However", Swank has to overcome a strong challenge from Annette Bening, a nominee for the theatre farce Being Julia. Meanwhile, ballots for Oscars - the Hollywood's top honours - were mailed earlier this week to members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. The voting is due to end on 22 February - five days before the ceremony.

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"entertainment 070.txt Children vote Shrek 2 best film Young UK film fans voted animated Hollywood hit Shrek 2 best film at the children's Bafta awards on Sunday. More than 6",000 children voted in the only category chosen by fans. Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban, runner-up in the poll, was the choice of the Bafta experts who named it best feature film. BBC One Saturday morning show Dick and Dom In Da Bungalow won two awards - best entertainment and best presenters for Richard McCourt and Dominic Wood. Former Play

school presenter Floella Benjamin was awarded the Special Award for outstanding creative contribution to children's film and television. She first appeared on Playschool 25 years ago and was made an OBE in 2001 for services to broadcasting. South American-themed cartoon Joko! Jakamoko! Toto! won the honour for preschool animation and its writer Tony Collingwood for original writer. Debbie Isitt won the award for best adapted writer for her work with Jacqueline Wilson's The Illustrated Mum, which won the award for best schools drama. Schools' Factual (primary) - Thinking Skills: Think About It - Hiding Places Schools' Factual (secondary) - In Search of the Tartan Turban Pre-School Live Action - Balamory Animation - Brush Head Drama - Featherboy Factual - Serious Desert Interactive Bafta - King Arthur International category - 8 Simple Rules for Dating my Teenage Daughter

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, "entertainment 071.txt UK debut for Kevin Spacey movie Hollywood stars Kevin Spacey and Kate Bosworth attended the British premiere of new film", Beyond the Sea, in London's Leicester Square on Thursday. Spacey, 45, wrote, directed and starred in the film," inspired by the life of 1950s crooner Bobby Darin. ""This is my tribute to someone I think was a remarkable talent", " said Spacey, who, as Darin, sings all 18 songs on the film soundtrack. Bosworth, 21, plays Darin's wife - real life Hollywood actress Sandra Dee. I knew absolutely nothing about Bobby Darin before this film", but now I'm a huge fan," said Bosworth, who attended the premiere with British boyfriend Orlando Bloom. There is darkness and tragedy in the story", " and it was a dream for me to land this part." " Actress Sandra Dee continues to live in Los Angeles as a virtual recluse", " but has given her approval to the biopic. ""She called me last week and said she loved it", " said Spacey, who was joined at the premiere by members of the boy band Westlife. Spacey, a double Oscar-winner, has long been fascinated by the story of singer Bobby Darin. The voice behind Mack the Knife, Dream Lover and Beyond the Sea, fought childhood illness to become one the biggest stars of the 1950s, but died aged 37 from the heart condition that had troubled him all his life. Bobby Darin was one of the greatest entertainers the world has ever known", and yet, because he died young, he's been kind of forgotten," said Spacey at the premiere. Making this film was the most fun I've ever had in my entire life." " The movie also stars British actors Bob Hoskins and Brenda Blethyn", as Darin's mother.

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, "entertainment 072.txt Box office blow for Alexander Director Oliver Stone's historical epic Alexander has failed in its bid to conquer the box office", entering the US film charts at number six. The swords and sandals blockbuster, rumoured to have cost more than \$150m (£79m) to make, earned just \$13.5 (£7m) over three days at the US box office. Due to the Thanksgiving holiday, the film opened on Wednesday, bringing its total takings to \$21.6m (£11.4m). Top of the box office for a second week was action movie National Treasure. The family adventure, starring Nicolas Cage, took \$33.1m (£17.1m), ahead of animated comedy The Incredibles - now in its fourth week in the charts - which took \$24.1m (£12.7m). Last week Oliver Stone's film met with scathing reviews from US critics. The film stars Irish actor Colin Farrell as one of history's most celebrated leaders - a relentless and arrogant warrior who conquered much of the known world by the age of 25. In particular," its portrayal of Alexander as a bisexual has met with a hostile reception and the threat of legal action from Greek lawyers. ""Though the battles have the blood-and-sinew bravado you ex

pect from Oliver Stone", this three-hour buttnumbathon is hamstrung by a hectoring grandiosity," wrote one reviewer in Rolling Stone magazine. Others poured scorn on Farrell's bleached hair and Angelina Jolie's unwieldy accent, which Variety called a combination of Mata Hari and Count Dracula"" . But novelist Gore Vidal defended the film", saying it was ""barrier-breaking"" for its frank depiction of bisexuality. In Sweden last Thursday", to pick up a lifetime achievement award at the Stockholm International Film Festival," Stone expressed the hope that Alexander might be better appreciated in Europe. ""One of the reasons I am being honoured here is Europeans tend to see me a little differently than they do in the US", said the director behind JFK, Platoon and Born on the Fourth of July. He added Alexander was not an easy movie", but then I've never made easy movies"".

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"entertainment 073.txt Ray DVD beats box office takings 0  
scar-nominated film biopic Ray has surpassed its US box office takings with a combined tally of \$80m (£43m) from DVD and video sales and rentals. Ray's success on DVD outstripped its \$74m (£40m) US box office total", earning more than \$40m (£22m) on the first day of the DVD's release alone. Ray has been nominated in six Oscar categories including best film and best actor for Jamie Foxx. The film recounts the life of blues singer Ray Charles, who died in 2004. In its first week on home entertainment release the film was the number one selling DVD, with the limited edition version coming in at number 11. Sony horror film The Grudge, starring Michelle Gellar, was the US' second best-selling DVD, with Jennifer Lopez and Richard Gere's romantic comedy Shall We Dance? at number three. Foxx's critically acclaimed performance as Ray has already earned him a Screen Actors Guild Award for best actor, as well as a prestigious Golden Globe. Ray director Taylor Hackford, responsible for the classic 1982 film An Officer and a Gentleman, has also received an Oscar nomination in the best director category. The film's three other Oscar nominations are for costume, film editing and sound mixing.

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"entertainment 074.txt Ocean's Twelve raids box office 0c  
ean's Twelve", the crime caper sequel starring George Clooney, Brad Pitt and Julia Roberts, has gone straight to number one in the US box office chart. It took \$40.8m (£21m) in weekend ticket sales, according to studio estimates. The sequel follows the master criminals as they try to pull off three major heists across Europe. It knocked last week's number one, National Treasure, into third place. Wesley Snipes' Blade: Trinity was in second, taking \$16.1m (£8.4m). Round ing out the top five was animated fable The Polar Express, starring Tom Hanks, and festive comedy Christmas with the Kranks. Ocean's Twelve box office triumph marks the fourth-biggest opening for a December release in the US, after the three films in the Lord of the Rings trilogy. The sequel narrowly beat its 2001 predecessor, Ocean's Eleven which took \$38.1m (£19.8m) on its opening weekend and \$184m (£95.8m) in total. A remake of the 1960s film, starring Frank Sinatra and the Rat Pack, Ocean's Eleven was directed by Oscar-winning director Steven Soderbergh. Soderbergh returns to direct the hit sequel which reunites Clooney, Pitt and Roberts with Matt Damon," Andy Garcia and Elliott Gould. Catherine Zeta-Jones joins the all-star cast. ""It's just a fun", good holiday movie," said Dan Fellman, president of distribution at Warner Bros. However, US critics were less complimentary about the \$110m (£57.2m) project, with the Los Angeles Times labelling it a dispiriting vanity project"". A milder review in the New York Times dubbed the sequel ""unabashedly trivial"".

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"entertainment 075.txt Indie film nominations announced M  
ike Leigh's award-winning abortion drama Vera Drake has scooped seven nominations at this year's British Independent Film Awards. But the Venice winner faces stiff competition from Shane Meadows' critically acclaimed Dead Man's Shoes", which received eight nominations. Also in the running for a clutch of awards are My Summer of Love and the stalker drama Enduring Love. The winners will be announced at a ceremony in London on 30 November. The winners of the awards will be chosen by a jury chaired by Cold Mountain director Anthony Minghella and including actresses Cate Blanchett and Helena Bonham-Carter. The awards, which recognise independent film-making in Britain," were established seven years ago. ""This year's nominees reflect the growing strength and diversity of British independent filmmaking", said BIFA founder and director Elliot Grove. Commenting on the diversity of the nominated films, he added: Our selection committee had a harder time than ever narrowing down the field." Joining Vera Drake and Dead Man's Shoes in the running for best film are My Summer of Love", climbing documentary Touching the Void and zombie comedy Shaun of the Dead. Geoffrey Rush wins a best actor nomination for his role as Peter Sellers in the recent biopic The Life & Death of Peter Sellers. The Australian star faces competition from Daniel Craig (Enduring Love), Phil Davis (Vera Drake), Ian Hart (Blind Fight) and Dead Man's Shoes' star Paddy Considine. Considine is also nominated for a best supporting actor award for My Summer of Love. A rare US nominee, Scarlett Johansson, is among this year's best actress contenders for her role in Girl with a Pearl Earring. Fellow nominees include Imelda Staunton (Vera Drake), Natalie Press (My Summer of Love), Anne Reid (The Mother) and Eva Birthistle (Ae Fond Kiss...). Shane Meadows and Kevin McDonald, both former winners of the Douglas Hickox Award (for Best Directorial Debut) won best director nominations. Seasoned film-makers Roger Michell, Mike Leigh and Pavel Pavlikovsky challenge them to the award. Harry Potter author JK Rowling will receive a special award for her contribution to the industry.

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"entertainment 076.txt Fockers fuel festive film chart Co  
medy Meet The Fockers topped the festive box office in North America", setting a new record for Christmas Day. The sequel took \$44.7m (£23.2m) between 24 and 26 December, according to studio estimates. It took \$19.1m (£9.9m) on Christmas Day alone, the highest takings on that day in box office history. Meet The Fockers is the sequel to Ben Stiller comedy Meet The Parents, also starring Robert De Niro, Blythe Danner, Dustin Hoffman and Barbra Streisand. Despite the success of Meet The Fockers," takings were down 26.5% on 2003's figures - which was blamed on Christmas falling over a weekend this year. ""When Christmas falls on a weekend", it's bad for business," said Paul Dergarabedian, president of Exhibitor Relations, which compiles box office statistics. The weekend's top 12 films took an estimated \$121.9m (£63.3m), compared with \$165.8m (£86.1m) last year, when the third Lord of the Rings film dominated the box office. Meet The Fockers knocked last week's top film, Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events, down to third place, with \$12.5m (£6.5m). Comedy Fat Albert - co-written by Bill Cosby - entered the chart in second place after opening on Christmas Day, taking \$12.7m (£6.6m). The Aviator, starring Leonardo DiCaprio as Howard Hughes, took \$9.4m after expanding from 40 to 1,796 cinemas on Christmas Day.

entertainment 077.txt DVD review: Spider-Man 2 It's a universal rule that a film can either be a superhero special effects extravaganza or it can be good. But Spider-Man 2 breaks that rule in two. It's not fantasti

cally deep but you get quickly drawn into the tale of Spidey versus Doc Ock and more so into the fate of poor Peter Parker. Gigantic action set pieces seamlessly work with more brooding personal torment and it all looks stunning. A few effects look false but Tobey Maguire, Kirsten Dunst and Alfred Molina make this compelling. The other universal rule is that DVDs of superhero films will have Making Of features only about the effects. This disc covers those special effects enough but as just one part of a detailed look at the film. Then there are commentaries, trailers and a blooper reel. Sometimes quality comes in bulk: this set contains no less than 34 John Wayne films ranging from the Westerns and war movies to *The Quiet Man*. Now is that a Christmas present or what? Give this to someone on 24 December and you won't see them again until early in the New Year. It's not truly a complete collection and leans more toward Wayne's earlier films: there's no *True Grit*, for instance, though there is *Hellraisers*. The films look well transferred to DVD, though none has extras. It was very daft but it knew it was and somehow this famous 1979 series became a cult favourite that's been long awaited on DVD. This set has the first season of *Buck* (Gil Gerard) and *Wilma's* (Erin Gray) tongue-in-cheek adventures and it's all as camp and gaudy as you remember. But it's also a disappointment. The US DVD has this and the more po-faced second season - and you can import it for just about the same price. The bigger omission, though, is that there are no extras. That's particularly disappointing because originally there were meant to be commentaries and stars Gerard and Gray had agreed to do them.

entertainment 078.txt Baby becomes new Oscar favourite CL  
int Eastwood's boxing drama Million Dollar Baby has become the new favourite to win best picture at the Oscars on Sunday. According to pundits, the film has overtaken previous favourite The Aviator, with Eastwood also tipped to take the best director award. Its star Hilary Swank is favourite to win best actress while Jamie Foxx is tipped to win best actor for Ray. Million Dollar Baby has seven nominations while The Aviator has 11. The Aviator has scored a best director nomination for Martin Scorsese, who has never won an Oscar, while stars Leonardo DiCaprio and Cate Blanchett are both nominated for acting Oscars. If you look at the Oscars race", The Aviator should be ahead, said awards pundit Tom O'Neil. It is the most nominated film," and the most nominated movie has won best picture 18 times out of the last 20 years. ""But the reality is Million Dollar Baby is the dark horse. People feel emotionally about it and Clint is a beloved Hollywood chum of the Academy voters", he said. Anne Thompson of the Hollywood Reporter said that Million Dollar Baby was heart-wrenching"". ""It's very emotional", it even makes grown men cry, she said. The Aviator is a gorgeous movie," but it's colder." In the acting categories", Foxx is regarded as almost unbeatable for his performance as Ray Charles in Ray. ""The performance is based on a real person who was a showbusiness hero with a handicap", who recently died," O'Neil said. He has unstoppable momentum among the voters."" Hilary Swank is the favourite to win best actress for the second time in six years. She previously won in 1999 for her performance in Boys Don't Cry. In the supporting categories", Cate Blanchett is tipped to win for her performance as Katharine Hepburn in The Aviator, while Morgan Freeman is favourite to take home his first ever Oscar, for Million Dollar Baby. The Oscars will take place at Hollywood's Kodak Theatre on 27 February.

"entertainment 079.txt Russian film wins BBC world prize  
Russian drama The Return (Vozvrashchenie) has been named winner of the BBC Four World Cinema Award. The film tells the story of two adolescent boys who are subjected to a harsh regime when their strict father returns after a 10-year absence.

nce. Directed by Andrey Zvyagintsev", The Return previously won the 2003 Golden Lion award at the Venice Film Festival. The prize was presented at an awards ceremony held in London on Thursday and hosted by Jonathan Ross. The winner was chosen by a panel which included X Files actress Gillian Anderson, critic Roger Clarke and Touching the Void director Kevin McDonald. Ross, who is the presenter of BBC One's Film 2005, was also involved in the deliberations. A shortlist of six films from around the world had been drawn up from which the panel chose. Other nominees included the Motorcycle Diaries, Zatoichi and Hero. A viewer poll saw director Zhang Yimou's martial arts epic Hero emerge as the favourite with 32% of votes cast. Tragedy struck the production of The Return when one of the young stars, 15-year-old Vladimir Girin, drowned in a lake where some of the film's scenes were set. The winner of the World Cinema Award last year was the French animated feature Belleville Rendezvous

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"entertainment 080.txt US TV cuts nudity from BBC film A US TV network is editing BBC Films' Dirty War to avoid showing the front of a nude woman being scrubbed down after a fictional chemical attack. It is not worth showing ""non-essential"" nude scenes when indecency complaints are ""aggressively pursued"" by US TV watchdogs", said PBS' Jacoba Atlas. Dirty War - screened uncut on BBC One last September - depicts a dirty bomb attack on the City of London. It is also being screened uncut on US cable channel HBO on 24 January. PBS said it will use extra footage for its broadcast," showing the woman ""from a more discreet angle"" instead. The US Federal Communications Commission fined CBS \$550",000 (£306,"814) last autumn for singer Janet Jackson's ""wardrobe malfunction""", during which her breast was exposed during a dance routine with Justin Timberlake. Many US networks and broadcasters are now more nervous about airing nudity, violence or bad language. Ms Atlas said PBS could put itself financially at risk if it showed the uncut version of Dirty War," and it could also deter many of its 170 individual stations from airing ""an important film""."You want to pick your battles", she said. She added that PBS, which is a private, non-profit media enterprise owned and operated by the nation's 349 public television stations, is bolder about screening non-fiction or historical programming. PBS is seen in virtually all US homes with TV, and describes itself as a trusted community resource"" serving nearly 100 million people each week.

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"entertainment 081.txt Oscars race enters final furlong T he race for the Oscars entered its final stages as the deadline for voters to choose their winners passed. The 5",808 Academy voters had until Tuesday afternoon to return their ballots - any late submissions will not be included in the count. The next five days will be spent counting the voting forms and preparing the winners' envelopes. Best actor nominee Leonardo DiCaprio is to present a statuette for the first time at the LA ceremony on Sunday. The 30-year-old actor, who is nominated for playing Howard Hughes in The Aviator, will join other hopefuls such as co-star Cate Blanchett, Natalie Portman and Kate Winslet as Oscar presenters. The only people who will know the Oscar winners before they are revealed at the ceremony will be the auditors who are in charge of looking after the ballot count. After collating the results, they are responsible for sealing the results in the famous golden envelopes which will be revealed by a host of celebrity presenters at the ceremony. Former Academy Award winners Gwyneth Paltrow, Dustin Hoffman and Halle Berry will also present prizes. The event at the Kodak Theatre will be attended by 3,300 people, including some of the best-known stars in Hollywood.

nown names in film, and organisers say they expect it will be watched on television by one billion people around the world. One current concern is the torrential rain which has lashed Los Angeles for the past week, flooding suburbs and causing mudslides. It is hoped the forecast for Sunday, for cool weather but no rain," will prove accurate. "'The last time it rained on Oscars night was in the mid-to-late 1980s", said Oscars communications director John Pavlik. We have had rain up until the day before the show many times, but for some reason the Oscar gods always shine on Sunday and we hope they will do so again this year," he added.

entertainment 082.txt Aviator 'creator' in Oscars snub Th  
e man who said he got Oscar-nominated movie The Aviator off the ground and signed up Leonardo DiCaprio has been shut out of the Academy Awards race. Charles Evans Jr battled over his role with the people who eventually made the film, and won a producer's credit. But he is not on the list of producers who can win a best film Oscar due to a limit on the number of nominees. The Oscars organisers have picked two of The Aviator's four producers to be nominated for best film. Up to three producers can be named per film but the studios behind The Aviator and Million Dollar Baby failed to trim their credits - so the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences (Ampas) has done it for them. The Aviator's nominated producers are Michael Mann and Graham King - with Mr Evans and Sandy Cilman, Mr Mann's former deputy, left off. Mr Evans sued Mr Mann in 2001, claiming he came up with the idea, spent years developing it and persuaded DiCaprio to play Hughes - but said he was later excluded from the project. The two sides settled out of court in a deal that has remained secret apart from the fact Mr Evans' name has appeared as a producer when the film's credits roll. At the Golden Globes, Mr Evans - who was named among the winners when the film won best drama film - evaded a security guard to have his photo taken with DiCaprio, director Martin Scorsese, Mr Mann and Mr King. Ampas decided to limit the number of producers who could be nominated after Shakespeare in Love's victory in 1999 saw five producers collect awards. The eligible names for The Aviator and Million Dollar Baby were decided by Ampas' producers branch executive committee on Wednesday. The decision also saw Clint Eastwood get his third personal nomination for Million Dollar Baby. He is now named in the best film category as well as being nominated for best director and best lead actor. The Academy Awards ceremony will be held in Hollywood on 27 February. Chinese actress Ziyi Zhang, star of Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, Hero and House of Flying Daggers, is the latest name to be added to the list of presenters on the night.

entertainment 083.txt Cage film's third week at US top Ni  
colas Cage movie National Treasure has topped the US and Canada box office for the third week in a row. National Treasure made \$17.1m (£8.8m) in ticket sales from Friday to Sunday, according to studio estimates, taking its total to \$110.2m (£56.7m). Comedy Christmas with the Kranks, starring Tim Allen and Jamie Lee Curtis, was in second place. The Polar Express entered in third place while Jude Law film Closer made its debut at number six. Oliver Stone's big-budget epic Alexander, starring Colin Farrell, followed last week's disappointing sixth-place opening with a slump to seventh place and takings of \$4.7m (£2.4m). Critics have savaged the three-hour epic, which reportedly cost \$150m (£77m) to make. National Treasure, which sees Cage's character Ben Gates chase a hidden fortune, has been made by Disney Studios. It is Cage's fourth collaboration with Jerry Bruckheimer, who is usually noted for his male-orientated action films.

entertainment 084.txt Oscar nominees gear up for lunch Le  
onardo DiCaprio, Jamie Foxx and Hilary Swank are among those due to attend this year's Oscar nominees luncheon on Monday. They will join more than 100 nominees from the 24 Oscar categories at the annual event, which will take place at th

e Beverly Hilton hotel, Los Angeles. British hopefuls, including Kate Winslet, Imelda Staunton and Sophie Okonedo are also expected to attend. This year's Oscar ceremony will be held on Sunday 27 February. Martin Scorsese's *The Aviator* is leading the field at this year's Oscars with 11 nominations, while other multiple nominees include *Million Dollar Baby* and *Sideways*. Oscar nominees Swank and Foxx were among the winners at the Screen Actors Guild awards at the weekend, one of the many ceremonies held in the run-up to the Oscars. Swank won Best Actress for *Million Dollar Baby* while Foxx triumphed for his performance as Ray Charles in the biopic *Ray*. *Sideways* was also among the winners, taking the prize for best cast performance. The next major film award ceremony of the season is the Bafta awards, which take place at London's Odeon Leicester Square on 12 February. Many of those nominated for Oscars including DiCaprio, Foxx and Staunton - an Oscar nominee for her performance in *Vera Drake* - have also been nominated for Baftas.

entertainment 085.txt Church anger over Bollywood film Roman Catholic organisations in India have demanded the withdrawal of a film that depicts a priest having an affair with a girl half his age. Indian television channels are now refusing to run the promotional material for the film, *Sins*, a head of its release on Friday. The director of the film, Vinod Pande, says the movie is not offensive and has refused to withdraw it. Catholics are planning a protest in Mumbai (Bombay) on Wednesday. The president of one of Mumbai's main Catholic organisations, Dolphy D'Souza, says the portrayal of an ordained priest as a man of loose moral character has hurt the religious sentiments of India's Catholic community. He called the film pornographic and sensational". Mr D'Souza", who is also the vice-president of the Catholics' national body," has accused the director of the film of portraying a priest in bad light for commercial gains. Catholics have urged Mr Pande to withdraw the film to show respect to the Christian community's hurt sentiments. ""Religion needs to be a personal affair and should not be a subject for entertainment or for commercial use", J oseph Dias, general secretary of the Catholic Secular Forum, said in a statement. But Mr Pande said that if the critics were to see the film they would not protest against it and would not insist on its withdrawal. He says he has no plans to cancel the film ahead of its scheduled screening on Friday. It's about forbidden love. There was no agenda whatsoever to hurt anyone", he said. The BBC's Zubair Ahmed in Mumbai says that the controversial film shows a priest in steamy scenes with a girl half his age. She apparently goes to him for help but he falls in love with her. It takes place in the picturesque southern Indian state of Kerala. The film has already been cleared by the Censor Board with an 'A' (adults only) certificate. Mr D'Souza says he is shocked at the Censor Board's decision to clear the film. Our correspondent says that India's TV channels have so far refused to be dragged into the controversy and have not screened the film's promotional material. Most of the Catholic community's anger has come after watching newspaper advertisements and hoardings of the film. Christians make up about two per cent of India's population of more than a billion people.

entertainment 086.txt Bookmakers back *Aviator* for Oscar The *Aviator* has been tipped by UK bookmakers as the favourite to win the best film award at this year's Oscars. Ray star Jamie Foxx is clear favourite in the best actor category while *Million Dollar Baby*'s Hilary Swank is tipped to win the best actress prize. Bookmakers predict Cate Blanchett will be named best supporting actress. William Hill and Ladbrokes have given *The Aviator* 4/9 and 8/13 odds of winning best film, with *Million Dollar Baby* in second place at 9/4. Bet Direct and Bet 365 also tip *The Aviator*, with the majority of bookmakers regarding *Finding Neverland* as the outsider. The *Aviator* is also widely tipped to win the best director prize for Martin Scorsese. British star Clive Owen is seco

nd favourite at William Hill to take the best supporting actor award, for his performance in Closer. The favourite in that category is Sideways star Thomas Hayden Church. Vera Drake star Imelda Staunton has 5/1 odds of winning the best actress Oscar at Bet 365 and William Hill, ahead of fellow UK star Kate Winslet who has odds of 25/1 at William Hill. Mike Leigh is the outsider in the best director category for Vera Drake, a position he holds jointly with Ray's Taylor Hackford at bookmakers VC Bet. This year's Academy Awards will be handed out in Hollywood on 27 February. X Factor judge Sharon Osbourne will present Sky television's live coverage of the event. Meanwhile, Clive Owen's best supporting actor nomination has led a bookmaker to shorten his odds of becoming the next James Bond. He has moved from 4/1 to 5/2 favourite to play 007, with Hugh Jackman and Ewan McGregor joint second favourite. Clive Owen's nomination has sparked a betting frenzy from James Bond fans", who feel that his heightened global recognition will have done his chances of becoming the next Bond a world of good," said William Hill spokesman Rupert Adams.

entertainment 087.txt Global release for Japan hit film 0  
scar-winning animator Hayao Miyazaki's latest film, Howl's Moving Castle, is to be released in 50 countries around the world, its distributor has said. Howl's Moving Castle set a Japanese box office record last week, taking 1.5bn yen (£7.7m) in its first two days. Miyazaki won an Oscar earlier this year for Spirited Away, Japan's first Academy Award for nearly 50 years. Howl's Moving Castle is based on a children's fantasy novel by UK author Diana Wynne Jones. It tells the story of an 18-year-old woman who ages dramatically after falling under a witch's spell. She heads to a moving castle kept by Howl, a wizard, and searches for a way to become normal again. A spokesman for distributor Toho said the film has received strong interest from domestic audiences and foreign media and viewers alike"". ""We have a good feeling about this film. We saw very good viewer response", he added. The film's worldwide release will start in South Korea on 24 December, and France on 12 January.

entertainment 088.txt Ocean's Twelve raids box office 0  
cean's Twelve, the crime caper sequel starring George Clooney, Brad Pitt and Julia Roberts, has gone straight to number one in the US box office chart. It took \$40.8m (£21m) in weekend ticket sales, according to studio estimates. The sequel follows the master criminals as they try to pull off three major heists across Europe. It knocked last week's number one, National Treasure, into third place. Wesley Snipes' Blade: Trinity was in second, taking \$16.1m (£8.4m). Rounding out the top five was animated fable The Polar Express, starring Tom Hanks, and festive comedy Christmas with the Kranks. Ocean's Twelve box office triumph marks the fourth-biggest opening for a December release in the US, after the three films in the Lord of the Rings trilogy. The sequel narrowly beat its 2001 predecessor, Ocean's Eleven which took \$38.1m (£19.8m) on its opening weekend and \$184m (£95.8m) in total. A remake of the 1960s film, starring Frank Sinatra and the Rat Pack, Ocean's Eleven was directed by Oscar-winning director Steven Soderbergh. Soderbergh returns to direct the hit sequel which reunites Clooney, Pitt and Roberts with Matt Damon, Andy Garcia and Elliott Gould. Catherine Zeta-Jones joins the all-star cast. It's just a fun", good holiday movie," said Dan Fellman, president of distribution at Warner Bros. However, US critics were less complimentary about the \$110m (£57.2m) project, with the Los Angeles Times labelling it a dispiriting vanity project"". A milder review in the New York Times dubbed the sequel ""unabashedly trivial"".

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"entertainment 089.txt Oscar nominee Dan O'Herlihy dies I  
rish actor Dan O'Herlihy", who was nominated for best actor at the 1955 Oscars,

has died at the age of 85. O'Herlihy, whose Oscar nomination was for Luis Bunuel's *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, died at his home in Malibu, California, a spokesman said. The actor began his film career in the 1940s, playing Macduff to Orson Welles' *Macbeth* in 1948, and was also a regular in on the Dublin stage. He later appeared in *Robocop* and its sequel and cult TV show *Twin Peaks*. He played the CEO of Omni Consumer Products in 1987's *Robocop* and *Robocop 2* three years later, and was saw mill owner Andrew Packard in *Twin Peaks*, also in 1990. Despite his Oscar nomination, he had few other lead roles and became a familiar supporting actor on TV and in film. The year he was nominated, the Academy Award was won by Marlon Brando for *On the Waterfront*.

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"entertainment 090.txt Berlin cheers for anti-Nazi film A German movie about an anti-Nazi resistance heroine has drawn loud applause at Berlin Film Festival. Sophie Scholl - The Final Days portrays the final days of the member of the White Rose movement. Scholl",21, was arrested and beheaded with her brother, Hans," in 1943 for distributing leaflets condemning the ""abhorrent tyranny"" of Adolf Hitler. Director Marc Rothemund said: ""I have a feeling of responsibility to keep the legacy of the Scholls going.""" "We must somehow keep their ideas alive", he added. The film drew on transcripts of Gestapo interrogations and Scholl's trial preserved in the archive of communist East Germany's secret police. Their discovery was the inspiration behind the film for Rothemund, who worked closely with surviving relatives, including one of Scholl's sisters, to ensure historical accuracy on the film. Scholl and other members of the White Rose resistance group first started distributing anti-Nazi leaflets in the summer of 1942. They were arrested as they dropped leaflets at Munich University calling for a day of reckoning"" with Adolf Hitler's regime. The film focuses on the six days from Scholl's arrest to the intense trial which saw Scholl initially deny the charges and ended with a defiant appearance. It is one of three German films vying for a top prize at the Festival. A South African film version of Bizet's tragic opera *Carmen* shot in Cape Town in the Xhosa language has also premiered at the Berlin Festival. The film is entitled U-Carmen e Khayelitsha or *Carmen* in Khayelitsha after the township in which the story is set. It is performed by a 40-strong music and theatre troupe in their debut film performance. The film is the first South African feature in 25 years and only the second to be nominated for a Golden Bear Award.

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"entertainment 091.txt Wine comedy wins critics' award Quirky comedy *Sideways* was named the best film of the year by the Los Angeles Film Critics Association. The US movie also picked up four other accolades including best director for Alexander Payne and supporting actor for Thomas Haden Church. British actress Imelda Staunton has again been recognised for her role in *Vera Drake*", winning best actress, while Liam Neeson won best actor for *Kinsey*. The awards will be handed out on 13 January at a ceremony in Las Vegas. *Sideways* tells the story of two men who take a road trip through California's wine regions and also stars Paul Giamatti. Virginia Madsen was also named best supporting actress for her performance in the film. *House of Flying Daggers*, directed by Yimou Zhang, was named best foreign language film, while the animation award went to *The Incredibles*. Unusually, the runners-up in categories were also named with Clint Eastwood's *Million Dollar Baby* just missing out on the best film award. The best director runner-up was Martin Scorsese for *The Aviator*. A career achievement award will be handed to veteran actor and comic Jerry Lewis at the

ceremony next year.

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"entertainment 092.txt Actor Foxx sees Globe nominations  
US actor Jamie Foxx has been given two nominations for Golden Globe awards", with Meryl Streep, Morgan Freeman and Cate Blanchett also up for prizes. The stars were shortlisted on Monday for supporting roles, with the main nominations still to come. Foxx has starred in Collateral and Ray. Clive Owen, David Carradine and Natalie Portman are also up for awards. The Golden Globes, Hollywood's second most prominent awards, are the first major nominations to be announced. Last year, The Lord Of the Rings: The Return Of the King was named best drama movie while Lost In Translation won best musical or comedy. Sean Penn, Charlize Theron, Tim Robbins and Renee Zellweger all won acting awards - mirroring the eventual Oscars outcome. The Golden Globes ceremony will take place on 16 January, with the Oscars following on 27 February.

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"entertainment 093.txt Godzilla gets Hollywood fame star  
Movie monster Godzilla has received a star on Hollywood's Walk of Fame", honouring both his 50th birthday and the launch of his 28th film. An actor dressed as the giant creature breathed smoke over photographers on Monday as Godzilla received the 2,271st star on Hollywood Boulevard. ""Godzilla should thank you for this historical and monumental star", said Final Wars producer Shogo Tomiyama. But unfortunately, he cannot speak English," he added. Hollywood's honorary mayor, Johnny Grant, said: I do hereby proclaim this Godzilla Day in Hollywood. ""He's loose", he's wild, and I'm getting the hell out of here," he added. The premiere of Godzilla: Final Wars at Grauman's Chinese Theatre followed the ceremony on Hollywood Boulevard. The monster was joined by co-stars including Japanese pop star and actor Masahiro Matsuoka. Director Ryuhei Kitamura said it may not be Godzilla's final outing, as it has been billed. That's what the producer says. But the producer's a liar", he said. [Godzilla's] been working for the last 50 years. So," I think Godzilla just deserves a vacation." And producer Shogo Tomiyama added: ""So long as Godzilla can fascinate people", I believe he will be resurrected by new generations of filmmakers in the future." Godzillafirst appeared in 1954 as a prehistoric lizard woken by atomic bomb tests.

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"entertainment 094.txt God cut from Dark Materials film T  
he director and screenwriter of the film adaptation of Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials is to remove references to God and the church in the movie. Chris Weitz", director of About a Boy," said the changes were being made after film studio New Line expressed concern. The books tell of a battle against the church and a fight to overthrow God. ""They have expressed worry about the possibility of perceived anti-religiosity", Weitz told a His Dark Materials fans' website. Pullman's trilogy has been attacked by some Christian teachers and by the Catholic press as blasphemy. Weitz, who admitted he would not be many people's first choice to direct the films, said he regarded the film adaptation as the most important work of my life"". ""In part because it is one of the few books to have changed my life", he told bridgetothestars.net. The award-winning trilogy - Northern Lights, The Subtle Knife and The Amber Spyglass - tell the story of Oxford school child Lyra Belacqua. She is drawn into an epic struggle against the Church, which has been carrying out experiments on children in an attempt to remove original sin. As the books progress the struggle turns into a battle to overthrow the Authority, a figure who is God-like in the books. Weitz, who direc

ted American Pie and About A Boy, said New Line feared that any anti-religiousity in the film would make the project unviable financially"". He said: ""All my best efforts will be directed towards keeping the film as liberating and iconoclastic an experience as I can. ""But there may be some modification of terms." Weitz said he had visited Pullman", who had told him that the Authority could ""represent any arbitrary establishment that curtails the freedom of the individual", whether it be religious, political, totalitarian, fundamentalist, communist," what have you""". He added: ""I have no desire to change the nature or intentions of the villains of the piece", but they may appear in more subtle guises." There are a number of Christian websites which attack the trilogy for their depiction of the church and of God", but Pullman has denied his books are anti-religious. His agent told the Times newspaper that Pullman was happy with the adaptation so far. ""Of course New Line want to make money", but Mr Weitz is a wonderful director and Philip is very supportive. ""You have to recognise that it is a challenge in the climate of Bush's America",

entertainment 095.txt Aviator wins top Globes accolades T  
he Aviator has been named best film at the Golden Globe Awards, with its star Leonardo DiCaprio named best actor. Hollywood veteran Clint Eastwood took the best director prize for Million Dollar Baby while its star Hilary Swank was best actress. Quirky comedy Sideways was named best screenplay and best comedy. Ray star Jamie Foxx was best actor in a musical/comedy while Briton Clive Owen and Natalie Portman won prizes for best supporting roles in Closer. The Aviator, in which DiCaprio plays millionaire Howard Hughes, edged ahead of its rivals at the Beverly Hills ceremony by winning the best original score prize. This gave it a total of three awards while Million Dollar Baby, Sideways and Closer took two Golden Globes each. Accepting his best dramatic actor prize, DiCaprio described director Martin Scorsese as one of the greatest contributors to the world of cinema of all time"". Annette Bening won best actress in a musical/comedy for Being Julia while Spanish movie The Sea Inside was named best foreign language film. Swank", who previously won the Golden Globe and Oscar for Boys Don't Cry," paid tribute to Million Dollar Baby director and co-star Clint Eastwood. ""You guided us so brilliantly", while you also, in my humble opinion, gave the performance of your career," she said. Foxx was nominated for three awards but was beaten to the best supporting actor title by Owen and the best actor in a TV movie prize by Geoffrey Rush in The Life and Death of Peter Sellers. A BBC co-production, The Life and Death of Peter Sellers was also named best TV movie. Mick Jagger and Dave Stewart won the best original song award for Old Habits Die Hard from movie re-make Alfie, while Ian McShane was named best actor in a TV drama for his lead role in Deadwood. Other UK hopes Kate Winslet and Imelda Staunton went home empty-handed despite lead actress nominations for Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind and Vera Drake respectively. Winning a Golden Globe is said to improve a film or performer's chance of subsequently winning an Academy Award. Unlike the Oscars, the Golden Globes split awards by genre - one prize for dramas and the other for musicals and comedies. The Globes also honour the best in television, with suburban series Desperate Housewives named best TV comedy show. Actress Teri Hatcher beat fellow Desperate Housewives stars Marcia Cross and Felicity Huffman to the best comedy actress prize. Hatcher thanked the show's cast, crew and a network who gave me a second chance at a career when I couldn't have been a bigger 'has been'"". Cosmetic surgery series Nip/Tuck beat The Sopranos and Deadwood to the best television drama title. Arrested Development star Jason Bateman was named best TV actor in a musical or comedy series. The Golden Globes are awarded by the Hollywood Foreign Press Association", comprising film reporters based in Los Angeles and working for overseas outlets. Robin Williams, a five-time Globe winner for such films as The Fisher King and

Good Morning, Vietnam, received the Cecil B DeMille award for career achievement. He dedicated his prize to Superman actor Christopher Reeve, who died last year.

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"entertainment 096.txt Singer's film to show at festival  
A documentary which takes a candid look at the life of chart-topping singer George Michael will be shown at this year's Berlin Film Festival. A Different Story will screen in the Panorama section of the festival", which runs from 10-20 February. It features the singer talking about both his career and his personal life, from his days in Wham! through to more recent events. Michael will attend the festival to introduce the screening on 16 February. Director Southan Morris and executive producer Andy Stephens will also attend the festival. The 93 minute film will see Michael discussing his early days in Wham! along with his later career, including his legal battles with record label Sony and his stance against the Iraq war and American politics. It will also touch upon his turbulent personal life," including his arrest in a Beverly Hills park toilet in 1998 for ""lewd behaviour""", and the death of his boyfriend Anselmo Feleppa from Aids. The film, which includes previously unseen footage of the singer also features contributions from Michael's former Wham! partner Andrew Ridgeley, as well as ex-Wham! backing singers Pepsi and Shirlie. Other contributors include Sting, Mariah Carey, Elton John, Noel Gallagher, Geri Halliwell and Simon Cowell. This year's festival will open with Man To Man, a historical epic starring Joseph Fiennes and Kristin Scott-Thomas. It will be one of 21 films competing for the festival's top prize, the Golden Bear. Other films in competition will include The Life Aquatic, a quirky comedy starring Bill Murray, and the biopic Kinsey, which features Liam Neeson. The full programme will be announced on 1 February.

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"entertainment 097.txt Surprise win for anti-Bush film Michael Moore's anti-Bush documentary Fahrenheit 9/11 has won best film at the US People's Choice Awards", voted for by the US public. Mel Gibson's The Passion of the Christ won best drama, despite both films being snubbed so far at US film awards in the run-up to February's Oscars. Julia Roberts won her 10th consecutive crown as favourite female movie star. Johnny Depp was favourite male movie star and Renee Zellweger was favourite leading lady at Sunday's awards in LA. Film sequel Shrek 2 took three prizes - voted top animated movie, top film comedy and top sequel. In television categories, Desperate Housewives was named top new drama and Joey, starring former Friends actor Matt LeBlanc, was best new comedy. Long-running shows Will and Grace and CSI: Crime Scene Investigation were named best TV comedy and TV drama respectively. Nominees for the People's Choice Awards were picked by a 6,000-strong Entertainment Weekly magazine panel, and winners were subsequently chosen by 21 million online voters. Fahrenheit 9/11 director Michael Moore dedicated his trophy to soldiers in Iraq. His film was highly critical of President George W Bush and the US-led invasion of Iraq," and Moore was an outspoken Bush critic in the 2004 presidential campaign inwhich Democratic challenger John Kerry lost. ""This country is still all of ours", not right or left or Democrat or Republican," Moore told the audience at the ceremony in Pasadena, California. Moore said it was an historic occasion"" that the 31-year-old awards ceremony would name a documentary its best film. Unlike many other film-makers", "Passion of the Christ director Mel Gibson has vowed not to campaign for an Oscar for his movie. ""To me", really, this is the ultimate goal because one doesn't make work for the elite, Gibson said backstage at the event. To me," the people have spoken.""

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"entertainment 098.txt Da Vinci film to star Tom Hanks Actor Tom Hanks and director Ron Howard are reuniting for The Da Vinci Code", an adaptation of the international best-selling novel by Dan Brown. Distributor Sony Pictures said production will begin next year, with a planned release in May 2006. Hanks will play Robert Langdon, who is trying to solve the murder of a member of an ancient society that has protected dark secrets for centuries. It will be Hanks' third collaboration with Howard. They previously worked together, along with Howard's producing partner Brian Grazer, on Splash and Apollo 13. Hanks is one of Hollywood's most bankable stars, with his presence in a movie almost guaranteeing box office success. Brown's book has become a publishing phenomenon, consistently topping book charts in the UK and US. It has sold more than eight million copies worldwide in little over two years. It is a classic whodunit, which centres on a global conspiracy surrounding the Holy Grail mythology and places heavy emphasis on symbols and cryptography. Its protagonist is a Harvard professor likened to a contemporary Indiana Jones, who also appeared in Brown's first book Angels and Demons. The tale mixes art history with mythology, semiotics with medieval history.

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"entertainment 099.txt Controversial film tops festival A controversial film starring Hollywood actor Kevin Bacon as a convicted paedophile won top honours at the London Film Festival on Thursday. The Woodsman won the Satyajit Ray Award", named after the Indian director. The low-budget film, directed by Nicole Kassell," is about a convicted child molester trying to rebuild his life after 12 years in jail. Judges said the film tackled the contentious subject with ""great insight and sensitivity"". Previous films to take the prize include the Oscar-winning Boys Don't Cry", which was about the true life story of murdered transsexual Brandon Teena. British writer-director Amma Asante won the UK Film Talent Award this year for her debut feature A Way Of Life. Set in South Wales, the film is about a teenage single mother who becomes embroiled in a tense stand-off with a Turkish neighbour. Also on Thursday night, the Fipresci International Critics Awards went to Aaltra, a Belgian film about the handicapped; and the Sutherland Trophy, which was won by Jonathan Caouette for his film Tarnation. The festival closed with a screening of the film I Heart Huckabees, starring Jude Law and Dustin Hoffman and directed by Three Kings film-maker David O Russell. The festival this year also included the first European screening of the new Pixar animation The Incredibles, and the British film Bullet Boy, starring So Solid Crew rapper Asher D.

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"entertainment 100.txt Fockers retain film chart crown Comedy Meet The Fockers has held on to the number one spot at the North American box office for a second week. It took \$42.8m (£23.7m) at the weekend", making its overall takings more than \$163m (£90m) in 12 days, according to studio estimates. It took \$19.1m (£9.9m) on Christmas Day alone, the highest takings on that day in box office history. The sequel to the Ben Stiller comedy Meet The Parents stars Robert De Niro, Dustin Hoffman and Barbra Streisand. The success of Meet the Fockers could help produce record box office revenue for 2004, said Paul Dergarabedian," president of the industry's tracker Exhibitor Relations. ""We've had a much stronger than anticipated final week of the year that helped the industry end on a high note", said Mr Dergarabedian. Meet the Fockers also broke the box office records for the most money taken on New Year's Eve, when i

t made \$12.2m (£6.2m), and New Year's Day, when it took \$18m (£9.4m). The previous New Year's Eve record was set in 2000 by Cast Away with \$8.5m (£4.5m). The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King had held the New Year's Day title with \$12.8m (£6.7m). However, Christmas takings were down 26.5% on 2003's figures - which was blamed on Christmas falling over a weekend this year. This weekend's top 12 films took an estimated \$125.4m (£65.8m), a 4.3% increase on the same weekend last year. But there were no major releases last week to provide competition to Meet the Fockers or Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events, which finished in second place with \$14.7m (£7.7m). The Aviator, starring Leonardo DiCaprio as Howard Hughes, ended up in third position after taking \$11.2m (£5.9m). Comedy Fat Albert - co-written by Bill Cosby - moved down the chart to fourth place after taking \$10.7m (£5.6m).

entertainment 101.txt Sundance to honour foreign films In international films will be given the same prominence as US films at next year's Sundance Film Festival, with movies dominated by the theme of war. The independent film festival will feature two new international cinema competitions, during its 20-30 January season in Utah. Forty-two films will debut at Sundance, including The Liberace of Baghdad by British director Sean McAllister. The prestigious festival was founded by actor Robert Redford in 1981. "We have always had an international component", but from next year they will enter a jury competition," festival director Geoffrey Gilmore said. We wanted to give world cinema more emphasis and have now put it on par with the American dramatic and documentary competitions." Twelve films competing in the new world cinema documentary category focus on countries and people under siege. The Liberace of Baghdad features an Iraqi pianist hiding in a hotel as he waits for a visa", while Finnish film The Three Rooms of Melancholia looks at the war in Chechnya. Shake Hands With The Devil: The Journey of Romeo Dallaire tells of a UN mission to Rwanda during the 1994 genocide, while French-Israeli production Wall looks at Israel's controversial security wall separating it from the Palestinian territories. The 16 films competing in the new world cinema dramatic category include works from Germany, South Korea, Angola, China, Denmark and Australia. Several Hollywood stars feature in the festival's American independent drama category, including Keanu Reeves and Benjamin Bratt. Vince Vaughn stars in quirky movie Thumbsucker while 21 Grams actress Naomi Watts plays a budding Hollywood actress in Ellie Parker. The top Grand Jury prize at this year's festival went to low budget sci-fi thriller Primer, written and directed by Shane Carruth. Morgan Spurlock earned the directing award for Super Size Me, which became an international box office hit.

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"entertainment 102.txt Day-Lewis set for Berlin honour Actor Daniel Day-Lewis is to be presented with an award for his career in film at the Berlin Film Festival. The 47-year-old", whose credits include his Oscar-winning performance in My Left Foot, will be presented with the Berlinale Camera award on 15 February. The honour, awarded since 1986," honours figures in cinema that the festival feels ""particularly indebted to"". Man to Man", a historic al epic starring Kristin Scott Thomas, opens the German festival on 10 Februar y. A candid documentary about the life and career of singer George Michael, A Different Story will also be screened at the 10-day event. Day-Lewis has competed four times at the Berlin Film Festival, with films In The Name Of The Father (1994), The Crucible (1997)," The Boxer (1998) and Martin Scorsese's Gangs O f New York (2003). The festival praises him for his ""sensational start"" with roles in My Beautiful Launderette and costume classic A Room With A View"," and a ""great number of celebrated roles"" in subsequent productions. Japan's oldes

t film studio will also be honoured along with Day-Lewis. Shochiku film studio s", which was founded 110 years ago, will become the first cinematic institution to receive the Berlinale Camera award. Famous Japanese directors including Akira Hurosawa have had films produced at the studio.

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"entertainment 103.txt Downloads enter US singles chart D  
igital music downloads are being included in the main US singles chart for the first time. Billboard's Hot 100 chart now incorporates data from sales of music downloads", previously only assigned to a separate download chart. Green Day's Boulevard of Broken Dreams is currently number two in Billboard's pop chart, and tops its digital chart. Download sales are due to be incorporated into the UK singles chart later this year. Digital sales in the US are already used to compile Billboard's Hot Digital Sales chart. They will now be tallied with sales of physical singles and airplay information to make up its new Hot 100 chart. Its second new chart - the Pop 100 - also combines airplay, digital and physical sales but confines its airplay information to US radio stations which play chart music. In addition to Green Day, other artists in the current US digital sales top 10 include Kelly Clarkson, The Game and the Killers. Sales of legally downloaded songs shot up more than tenfold in 2004, with 200 million track purchased online in the US and Europe in 12 months, the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI) reported last month. In the UK sales of song downloads overtook those for physical singles for the first time at the end of last year. The last week of December 2004 saw download sales of 312,000 compared with 282,000 physical singles, according to the British Phonographic Industry. The UK's first official music download chart was launched last September, compiling the most popular tracks downloaded from legal UK sites - including iTunes, OD2," mycokemusic.com and Napster. Westlife's Flying Without Wings - a 1999 track reissued for the occasion - was the first number one of the UK download chart. A spokesman for the British Phonographic Industry (BPI) said the first combined UK download and sales chart was due to be compiled ""within the first half of this year""." "Work is going on across the music business right now to make sure the new chart works to plan", he said. The BPI spokesman described the UK music download chart, compiled by the Official Charts Company, as having been a great success"" since its launch. ""It has provided a focus for the industry and has really driven interest in downloads among music fans", he said.

entertainment 104.txt Glasgow hosts tsunami benefit gig T  
he top names in Scottish music are taking part in a benefit concert in aid of the victims of the Asian tsunami. All 10,000 tickets for Saturday's concert, featuring Franz Ferdinand, Belle and Sebastian and Travis, at Glasgow's SECC sold out in 36 hours. Mull Historical Society, Deacon Blue, Idlewild, Texas, Mogwai and Teenage Fanclub are among the other acts performing at the concert. Organisers hope to raise at least £250,000 from the show. It follows a Cardiff gig starring Eric Clapton, Keane and Jools Holland, which raised more than £1.25m. And it is taking place on the same night as a tsunami benefit show in Bristol, which will see Massive Attack and Portishead share a stage for the first time. Colin MacIntyre, of Mull Historical Society, was playing another gig on the same day but said he was determined to make the Glasgow benefit. He said: I think we were all affected by seeing the reports coming from the Far East. ""We all know somebody who was there", but more than that it was that we had never seen a wave of destruction, a natural disaster," like this in my generation. ""I'm lucky as an artist to be able to perform at something like this.""  
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"entertainment 105.txt Pop band Busted to 'take a break'  
Chart-topping pop band Busted have confirmed that they plan to ""take a break"", following rumours that they were on the verge of splitting. A statement from the band's record company Universal said frontman Charlie Simpson planned to spend some time working with his other band," Fightstar. However they said that Busted would ""reconvene in due course"". The band have had eight top three hits", including four number ones, since they first hit the charts in 2002. Their singles include What I Go To School For, Year 3000, Crashed The Wedding, You Said No, and Who's David? The band, which also includes members Matt Jay and James Bourne, made the top ten with their self-titled debut album, as well as the follow-up, A Present For Everyone, in 2003. They won best pop act and best breakthrough act at the 2004 Brit Awards and were nominated for best British group. Most recently they topped the charts with the theme from the live-action film version of Thunderbirds, which was voted Record Of The Year on the ITV1 show. The band have capitalised on a craze for artists playing catchy pop music with rock overtones. The trio are seen as an alternative to more manufactured artists who are not considered credible musicians because they do not write their own songs or play their own instruments. However, recent rumours have suggested that Simpson has been wanting to quit the band to focus on Fightstar. He now plans to take Fightstar on tour.

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"entertainment 106.txt Streets have 'album of the year' T  
he Streets", aka British rapper and songwriter, Mike Skinner have topped a poll to find the year's best album. A Grand Don't Come for Free beat Keane's Hope and Fears in second place with Franz Ferdinand's self-titled album third," in the Q magazine poll. Skinner uses blunt beats under streetwise lyrics about such things as falling in love and drink and drugs. Q Magazine said: ""A Grand Don't Come for Free captured the country's mood in a way no one could have predicted." A Grand Don't Come for Free is the second album from The Streets. It followed Original Pirate Material. Q Magazine also had praise for the runners-up in the poll. Keane's Hopes and Fears"," was described as a ""revelatory debut"" which showed ""they had songwriting flair to spare"". It also said Franz Ferdinand's album sounded ""natural"" unforced (and) under-produced"". Rock band U2's latest album How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb came fourth while Razorlight's Up All Night was in fifth place. Others notables on the list included Dizzee Rascal in at number 12 and The Zutons at 20. Estelle came in at 39", Joss Stone was 40th and Jamelia took the 44th place.

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"entertainment 107.txt Manics in charge of BBC 6 Music Th  
e Manic Street Preachers are to take over the helm of BBC digital radio station 6 Music for a week in December. The Welsh band", whose hits include Design For Life and If You Tolerate This, have already chosen which records to play between 6 and 12 December. Their albums of the day include Who's Next by The Who and U2's Joshua Tree. The group will also perform their own live session. They follow in the footsteps of Radiohead, who took over the station for a week last year. Bass player Nicky Wire will join Phil Jupitus on his morning show on Monday 6 December, while vocalist and guitarist James Dean Bradfield will appear on Andrew Collins' afternoon show on Thursday 9. The group have also chosen documentaries to air, such as The Leonard Cohen Story and Guitar Greats - Jimmy Page. The live concert session tracks they have picked include The Specials' Rat Race recorded at Hammersmith Odeon in London and Public Enemy's Fight The Power and Rebel Without A Pause. The band will also answer questions e-mailed in by 6 Mus

ic listeners.

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"entertainment 108.txt Media seek Jackson 'juror' notes R  
eporters covering singer Michael Jackson's trial in California have asked to see questionnaires completed by potential jurors. Lawyers for news organisations said it was ""really vital"" for the responses of 250 potential jurors to be made public ""to serve as a check on the process"". Santa Barbara County Superior Court is due to consider the request on Monday. Mr Jackson denies child molestation. It is estimated his trial will cost Santa Barbara county up to \$4m (£2.13m). Meanwhile Michael Jackson's mother has said she is ""100% certain"" her son did not commit the child abuse charges he faces. The court is currently selecting 12 jurors and eight stand-by jurors for the trial," a process delayed until at least Thursday after a member of the star's legal team was hit by family illness. Defence lawyers argued against the bid by Associated Press and other news organisations to have potential jurors' responses made public. ""The release of the completed jury questionnaires does not serve any purpose other than to add to the sensationalist coverage of this case," a motion by Mr Jackson's lawyers stated. The estimated total costs of the trial, expected to last five months, range from \$2.5m (£1.33m) to \$4m (£2.13m) of local taxpayers' money. Those estimates do not include costs to the city of Santa Maria, the Superior Court or for the investigation and prosecution of the case. The cost of security and other needs around the courthouse has been estimated at \$40,000 (£21,000) per day, said Jason Stilwell, a special projects manager at the county administrator's office. Mr Jackson, 46, denies plying a boy with alcohol and molesting him. His mother Katherine Jackson told US TV network Fox News on Sunday that her pop star son told her he was innocent. I believe that for one reason - I know his character", she said. He loves children. You don't molest anything that you love." Describing Mr Jackson as ""a good person""", the mother-of-nine said she feared he would not be given a fair trial. ""I can't sleep thinking about what these wicked people might try to do to him", she said.

entertainment 109.txt Band Aid retains number one spot Th  
e charity single by Band Aid 20 has held on the chart top spot for a second week, strengthening its chances of becoming the Christmas number one. Do They Know It's Christmas, featuring artists including Chris Martin and Jamelia, held off Kylie Minogue to remain the week's biggest single. Next week's chart will reveal who will have the festive chart-topper Minogue's latest release I Believe in You went in at number two, pushing down Ice Cube's You Can Do It to three. Destiny's Child also slipped one place to four with Lose My Breath, followed by Girls Aloud at five with the Children in Need record I'll Stand By You. The only other new entry in the top 10 came from Robbie Williams track Misunderstood, a new track written for his Greatest Hits album. There were no new releases in the entire top 40 album charts as record companies put out all the big releases early hoping to cash in on the lucrative Christmas market. U2's How to Dismantle a Bomb remains at number one for a third week in a row, followed by Williams' Greatest Hits. Opera band Il Divo have moved up one place with their eponymous album to number three. Maroon 5's album Songs About Jane has moved up to number seven despite being released 47 weeks ago. And the Abba Gold greatest hits album has crept back into the top 40 more than nine years after it was first released.

entertainment 110.txt Rap boss arrested over drug find Ra  
p mogul Marion Suge" Knight has been arrested for violating his parole after he was allegedly found with marijuana. He was arrested in Barstow", California, on Saturday following an alleged traffic offence. He is expected to be transfer

red to a state prison while a decision is made on whether he should be released. Mr Knight, founder of Death Row Records, served a 10-month jail term in 2004 for punching a man while on parole for an assault conviction. Police said Mr Knight was stopped on Saturday after performing an illegal U-turn and a search of his car allegedly found marijuana. He is also accused of not having insurance. A 18-year-old woman in the car was arrested for providing false information and having a fake ID card. She was later released. It was his second alleged violation, having previously served half of a nine-year sentence for breaking the terms of his parole. Mr Knight, 39, was jailed in October 1996 following his involvement in a fight with a rival gang just hours before rapper Tupac Shakur was killed in a Las Vegas drive-by shooting. He was driving Shakur's car at the time and was shot in the head. At the time he was on probation for assaulting two musicians. Mr Knight, a former bodyguard, set up Death Row records in the early 1990s with Shakur and Dr Dre among his protegees. But the label has always been dogged by allegations it supports gang culture and fuels the east and west coast rap rivalry.

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"entertainment 111.txt Elton plays Paris charity concert  
Sir Elton John has performed at a special concert in Paris to raise money for the victims of the Asian tsunami. The British singer played to a 2,700-strong audience on Sunday at the French capital's Bastille opera house. The concert was also part of an attempt to bring a broader range of events to the famous venue. Money raised will go to the Fondation pour l'Enfance (Foundation for Childhood) which aims to rebuild a children's shelter in Sri Lanka. Sir Elton played hits from his vast back catalogue to a sell-out crowd which included former French president Valery Giscard d'Estaing and his wife Anne-Aymone. The veteran pop star played piano accompaniment throughout the concert which lasted for three hours without an interval. He told the crowd: "'Throughout the years', I've done a lot of drugs and alcohol. It's true that I was a nightmare," impossible. For the last 14 years I've been normal. Now my drug is called David'" - a reference to David Furnish", his partner. The crowd, who greeted each song with a standing ovation, also included French singer Charles Aznavour and British ambassador Sir John Holmes. Sir Elton has also teamed up with Phil Collins to record a version of Eric Clapton's 1991 hit Tears In Heaven to raise money for the relief fund. A release date has yet to be set for the recording, which was organised by Sharon Osbourne.

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"entertainment 112.txt Elvis set to top UK singles chart  
Rock 'n' roll legend Elvis is set to top the UK singles chart on Sunday", 27 years after his death. The re-release of hit song Jailhouse Rock was out-selling X Factor winner Steve Brockstein's cover of Against All Odds by 2,000 copies on Tuesday. If the record does make the top spot, it will be Elvis' 19th UK number one. The last time he topped the charts was with the remix of the little-known song A Little Less Conversation, which was number one in June 2002. If Jailhouse Rock does reach number one on Sunday, it will be the 999th in the history of the UK pop charts. The song first topped the charts in 1958. Chart analysts say Elvis could score the 1000th number one as well. His record One Night will be released the following week, followed the week after by A Fool Such As I," as part of his record company SonyBMG's new Elvis campaign. It has called it "'the most ambitious singles release campaign in the history of the UK record industry'".

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"/" entertainment 113.txt Wal-Mart is sued over rude lyrics  
The parents of a 13-year-old girl are suing US supermarket giant Wal-Mart over a CD by rock group Evanescence that contains swear words. The lawsuit", filed in Washington County," alleges Wal-Mart deceived customers by not putting warning labels on the cover. Trevor Skeens alleges Wal-Mart knew of the offending word because it had censored it on its music sales website. Wal-Mart said it was investigating the claims but had no plans to pull the CD. Wal-Mart has a policy of not stocking CDs which carry parental advisory labels. Mr Skeens said he bought the Anywhere But Home CD for his daughter and was shocked to hear the swearing when it was played in their car. ""I don't want any other families to get this", expecting it to be clean. It needs to be removed from the shelves to prevent other children from hearing it," said Mr Skeens of Brownsville. The lawsuit seeks to force Wal-Mart to censor the music or remove it from its stores in Maryland. It also seeks damages of up to \$74,500 (£38,660) for every customer who bought the CD at Maryland Wal-Marts, and also naming record label Wind-Up Records and distributor BMG Entertainment in the legal action. While Wal-Mart sets high standards", it would not be possible to eliminate every image, word or topic that an individual might find objectionable," Wal-Mart spokesman Guy Whitcomb told the Herald-Mail of Hagerstown.

entertainment 114.txt Pete Doherty misses bail deadline S  
inger Pete Doherty will have to spend the weekend in jail because he could not come up with £150,000 bond money for his bail on time. The former Libertines singer had been granted bail with curfew restrictions at Highbury Corner Magistrates Court on charges of robbery and blackmail. But his lawyer said the money could not be raised on time. Mr Doherty, 25, was arrested following an alleged incident in a London hotel on Wednesday evening. Musician Alan Wass, 23, also of north London, appeared in court accused of the same offences. Magistrates imposed a range of bail conditions on Mr Doherty including a curfew between 2200 and 0700, except when he attends a drug rehabilitation centre. He was told he would not be able to leave his home without being accompanied by a security firm. He must also surrender his passport and report daily to a local police station. Mr Wass was also given a curfew and told to surrender his passport. Mr Doherty left The Libertines at the end of June 2004, but continued performing with his band Babyshambles. The singer, who has been linked to supermodel Kate Moss, was arrested after police were called to the Islington hotel in response to claims that a man had been assaulted. A man in his 30s was later taken to University College Hospital, London, with facial injuries, before being discharged. A lawyer representing Mr Doherty and Mr Wass said outside court the pair strenuously denied the charges.

entertainment 115.txt Rapper Snoop Dogg sued for 'rape' U  
S rapper Snoop Dogg has been sued for \$25m (£13m) by a make-up artist who claimed he and his entourage drugged and raped her two years ago. The woman said she was assaulted after a recording of the Jimmy Kimmel Live TV show on the ABC network in 2003. The rapper's spokesman said the allegations were untrue"" and the woman was ""misusing the legal system as a means of extracting financial gain"". ABC said the claims had ""no merit"". The star has not been charged by police. The lawsuit", filed in Los Angeles on Friday," says the woman's champagne was spiked and she was then assaulted. The rapper's spokesperson said: ""Snoop will have the opportunity to prove in a court of law that [the alleged victim] is opportunistic and deceitful. ""We are confident that in this case",, [the alleged victim's] claims against Snoop Dogg will be rejected." The lawsuit names Snoop Dogg - real name Calvin Broadus - plus three associates", The Walt Disney Company and its parent company ABC Inc. The woman waited two years to sue beca

use she was trying to negotiate a settlement with the media companies, her lawyer, Perry Wander," said. Disney and ABC ""failed to provide a safe working environment for my client", he said. The legal action comes after the rap star sued a woman who claimed they tried to blackmail him to keep quiet about an alleged assault. The 32-year-old rapper has enjoyed six US top 10 albums since bursting onto the music scene with hit songs like What's My Name? and Gin and Juice in 1993.

entertainment 116.txt Legendary music studio to close The New York music studio where John Lennon spent his final hours is to close next month. The Hit Factory, which opened 37 years ago, has played host to some of the biggest stars in music, including Paul Simon, Madonna and David Bowie. However, the rise in digital recording has affected business at the studio, which is relocating to smaller premises in Miami. Lennon recorded his final album Double Fantasy at the studio in 1979. The studio was founded by Jerry Ragovoy in 1968. In 1975 it was sold to fellow producer Edward Germano, who turned it into a 100,000 square foot studio with seven recording rooms and live mastering suites. His first client was Stevie Wonder, who recorded part of his classic album Songs In The Key Of Life there. Other well-known albums to be recorded or partially recorded at the studio include Bruce Springsteen's Born In The USA, the Rolling Stones' Emotional Rescue and Paul Simon's Graceland. Michael Jackson, Billy Joel, Jay-Z and Beyonce are also among artists who have used the Hit Factory in the past, as well as 50 Cent who survived an attempt on his life as he left the premises in 2000. The studio made history in 1994 when it won a record 41 Grammy nominations for songs recorded, mastered or mixed there, including the soundtrack to the Whitney Houston film The Bodyguard.

entertainment 117.txt Rapper Jay-Z becomes label boss Rap star Jay-Z is to become a record company executive after being put in charge of one of hip-hop's most influential labels, Def Jam. Jay-Z, who said he would make no more music after 2003's The Black Album, will become the company's president and chief executive from January. Def Jam's parent company, Universal, made the appointment after buying Jay-Z's Roc-A-Fella label. Def Jam's artists include LL Cool J, DMX, Ludacris, Ja Rule and Ashanti. Jay-Z will continue to run Roc-A-Fella, which he founded with Damon Dash in 1995 and has Kanye West and Beanie Sigel on its roster. Universal said on Wednesday it had bought the 50% of Roc-A-Fella it did not already own. Antonio LA" Reid", chairman of The Island Def Jam Music Group," said: ""I can think of no-one more relevant and credible in the hip-hop community to build upon Def Jam's fantastic legacy." He hoped Jay-Z would ""move the company into its next groundbreaking era""", he added. Jay-Z, real name Shawn Carter," said: ""I have inherited two of the most important brands in hip-hop"," Def Jam and Roc-A-Fella. ""I feel this is a giant step for me and the entire artist community." One of the most successful and respected rap stars of the last eight years", Jay-Z's hits have included Hard Knock Life, Dirt Off Your Shoulder and 03 Bonnie and Clyde with his girlfriend Beyonce Knowles. He said he would retire after The Black Album, but has just released a new album and been on an ill-fated tour with R Kelly. Def Jam was founded in 1984 by Russell Simmons and producer Rick Rubin and signed artists including Run-DMC, The Beastie Boys and Public Enemy.

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"entertainment 118.txt REM concerts blighted by illness U S rock band REM have been forced to cancel concerts after bass player Mike Mills was taken to hospital suffering from ""severe flu-like symptoms"". The band were forced to cut short Monday night's show in Sheffield"," and have cancelled Tuesday's Glasgow date. Mills could ""hardly stand up"," let alone play""", sai

d an REM spokesman," who added he is now ""resting"" in hospital. The remainder of the band played a short acoustic set on Monday. Tuesday's gig has been rescheduled for 15 June. Those who had a ticket for the show in Glasgow are being advised to retain their ticket stub so they can attend the new date. The band's spokesman said that they would review their remaining dates on a ""day-to-day basis""", based on doctors' advice to Mills. ""Obviously we all want Mike to get better", and clearly we all want to play the shows. Rest assured we will do so as soon as possible," he said. The band were still hopeful they would be able to make their Wednesday date, added the spokesman. REM played acoustic versions of their hits Losing My Religion, I've Been High, Leaving New York and The One I Love to the Sheffield Arena audience on Monday. The band had originally been scheduled to play four dates in the UK as part of a world tour. In 1995 former drummer Bill Berry collapsed in Switzerland while the band was on tour, having suffered a ruptured aneurysm. He made a full recovery, only to leave the band two years later.

entertainment 119.txt Ring of Fire hit co-writer dies Merle Kilgore, co-writer of the country hit Ring of Fire, has died of congestive heart failure aged 70. He started out as a singer and songwriter before going into music management, looking after country star Hank Williams Jr. He wrote Ring of Fire with June Carter Cash, the future wife of Johnny Cash who went on to score his most popular hit with the track. Kilgore had heart surgery in 2004 and was also diagnosed with lung cancer. His death has been attributed to treatment he was undergoing for the cancer. His first self-penned top 10 hit was Dear Mama in 1959. One of the first songs he wrote for other artists was Wolverton Mountain, which sold 10 million copies when recorded by Claude King. He then wrote Ring of Fire with June Carter Cash, which was about her unrequited love for Johnny, who she later married. It was first recorded by her younger sister Anita Carter before Johnny went on to make such a success of it. June Carter Cash previously said it upset her husband when Kilgore talked about the song without crediting her and believed he should not have been credited on it. Last year, Kilgore turned up an awards dinner in a wheelchair expecting to honour Hank Williams Jr, but instead he was the surprise recipient of a lifetime achievement award from the International Entertainment Buyers Association.

entertainment 120.txt 'My memories of Marley...' To mark the 60th anniversary of the birth of reggae star Bob Marley, Rob Partridge - Marley's former head of press at Island Records - remembers the man behind the legend. Partridge worked with Marley from 1977 until the Jamaican musician's death in 1981. : I joined Island Records in 1977 and the first week I was there I worked on his show at the Rainbow Theatre. It was one of the last dates he did in London." : The album Exodus came out in 1977 and that provided five hits and confirmed his global superstar status. ""By 1979 he was the biggest touring attraction in the world. I remember going to see dates in Milan and Turin and they were enormous concerts." : Bob was one of the most mesmeric people I've ever had the privilege to work with. ""He must have had an iron will to succeed. Bob was a very driven individual. You realised from the start there was a manifest destiny within him that he believed in. He didn't suffer fools gladly. At the risk of stating the obvious", he was an extraordinary song writer and his stage act was perhaps the greatest I've ever seen. I saw him many times." : ""I recall in 1978 he came to the UK for Top of the Pops and a Daily Mirror journalist did a half-hour interview. It was interrupted to do a rehearsal. He came back into the dressing room to resume the interview but saw a World Cup match on TV. ""He sat down in front of the TV and after 10 minutes it was obvious he wasn't going to move. That was the end of it. The Mirror had a very truncated interview. ""The last time I saw him was in London in 1980. I arranged for him to

o play four days of football indoors in Fulham. ""Bob was a good player. We are talking about Jamaican-style football. He was an attacking midfield player. His team assembled wherever his gigs were. We played in Brazil against some World Cup-winning players."": It was always a struggle for him to connect with Black America. Reggae did not correspond with disco in the 70s. But Bob in the 1990s became one of the great icons in America and the Third World. ""In 1991", ten years after his death," he sold more records than at any time during his life. ""We saw Black America taking Bob into their hearts for the first time."": ""Bob", in worldwide terms, is the greatest music star there has ever been. If you went to Africa he would be recognised everywhere," in places John Lennon or Elvis wouldn't be. ""No disrespect to the other artists but a case can be made for him as the greatest"," the best and the most influential artist in popular music."": Well 1981 was to be the year he toured Africa with Stevie Wonder. He had only performed in Zimbabwe and Guinea before. ""Of course the 1981 tour never happened," but the whole of Africa would have embraced him. We can't speculate but he was at the height of his powers and just 36 years old. I had no sense his career was going to go downhill."": ""Bob was endlessly optimistic about the way Africa would turn out. He realised that nothing was perfect but he had total belief in the power of mankind. ""I'm sure if he were alive today he would believe Africa would firstly become politically free and secondly be able to defeat the Aids epidemic."": ""The final tune of his final album was Redemption Song - one of the most incredible classics of all time.""

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"entertainment 121.txt Belle named 'best Scottish band' B  
elle & Sebastian have been named the best Scottish band of all time after a three month-long public poll. The group beat Travis and Idlewild into second and third place respectively. Franz Ferdinand", who recently picked up five Brit Award nominations, ended up in 15th place, while the Eurythmics wound up at a lowly 38. Other Scottish acts, such as the Mull Historical Society who also featured in the top 50, performed at a party in Glasgow where the result was announced. Scottish-based band Snow Patrol, who finished 14th in the vote and have been nominated for a pair of Brit Awards, were among the performers who covered well-known Scottish pop songs at the party on Wednesday night. Indie stalwarts Belle & Sebastian have enjoyed a chart career stretching back to 1997. They were the surprise winners of the Brit Award for best breakthrough act two years later. Scottish bands from earlier musical eras also made it into the final list, including 1970s tartan boy band the Bay City Rollers and goth favourites the Jesus and Mary Chain. Scottish magazine The List recently compiled a list of the top 50 Scottish bands of all time," but left the final decision to the public. The magazine's music editor Mark Robertson said: ""The idea behind the project was simple - to rediscover the very best of Scottish music", from the finest musical talent spanning from the age of 70s rock through to 80s pop," right up to today's international stars."": ""Everyone has strong opinions about this and we wanted to open it up to the public to decide," he added. BBC Radio Scotland presenter Vic Galloway, who has been involved in the project, said it had been great fun"" to look back at Scotland's musical heritage and take note of up-and-coming Scottish acts.

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"entertainment 122.txt Dance music not dead says Fatboy D  
J Norman Cook - aka Fatboy Slim - has said that dance music is not dead"," but has admitted it is currently going through a ""fallow patch"". The commercial failure of the latest albums by Britain's two biggest dance acts - Fatboy Sli

m's Palookaville and The Prodigy's Always Outnumbered Never Outgunned - has been coupled with the closure of many "superclubs", and the folding of three dance music magazines. Last month the Brit Awards announced they would no longer be awarding a Best Dance Act prize, with the Brits committee announcing that dance music is no longer where it's happening in music." These developments lead some to suggest that dance was finished as a popular music genre. Cook acknowledged that much change in the dance world in the four years since his last album", Halfway Between The Gutter And The Stars," but he stressed this did not mean the dance scene was permanently over. ""Every week when I was making the album", I was reading articles about the demise of dance music - and obviously that affects you somewhat, he told BBC World Service's The Ticket programme. I personally don't believe it's either dead or going to die," but it's going through a bit of a fallow patch. ""So I think", consciously or subconsciously, reading every week that dance music was dead I would think 'right,' scrub that track the n'." Although his album sales in the UK are down - Palookaville stayed in the UK top 75 for just three weeks - Cook has achieved recent global success with his beach parties. And event on Brighton sea front in 2002 attracted 250,000, people, while a later one in Rio achieved a crowd of 360,000. The DVD of the Rio set was the biggest seller of that year. ""With a crowd that big", if the weather's nice, the atmosphere before I even go is so good that about halfway through the first record I think 'I've got them', Cook said. I'm always really really nervous before the big ones - they had to give me Valium before Rio," because two hours before I was literally just pacing the floor. ""For some reason", especially now I've got a reputation for it," the atmosphere and the joie de vivre that's already going on means all I have to do is play 'up' records." He promised more such parties in more locations around the world - despite problems after the Brighton event", which ended in chaos with many revellers finding themselves stranded as transport ground to a halt. One man also died of a heart attack," and a woman fell to her death during the free party. ""We're having to widen our horizons from just beaches", because there's landlocked countries that want to get involved, Cook said. We're doing Rio at the carnival, at the Maracana," and Sao Paolo - our new gig is famous football stadiums." The DJ admitted", however, that his massive worldwide success had a downside, with intense media interest in his personal life. In particular, he said he had struggled to cope with tabloid intrusion during the temporary break-up of his marriage to Radio One presenter Zoe Ball," after she was linked with DJ Dan Pepe. ""The tabloid thing has been difficult at times", Cook said. Especially the me-and-Zoe-Gate - it's quite scary." He said that he had been ""determined"" that what had happened with Ball did not affect the album. ""At first I was doing deliberately jolly tunes so that people wouldn't think I was depressed", he explained. Then I thought," 'that's not right'." And he highlighted a bizarre coincidence - that one song written before they split had turned out to have a great deal more meaning than intended. ""I said to Zoe", 'I did this track called My Masochistic Baby Went And Left Me," do you mind if it's on the album?"" he recalled. ""She said", 'yeah, it's hilarious," because your masochistic baby did leave you'." Cook also added that he had some ways of coping with the intense paparazzi pressure", which accumulates at the end of the private road he lives on - where Paul McCartney is a neighbour. ""It's almost like prisoners rattling the bars with their mugs", Cook explained. If there's a pap at the end of the road, everyone knocks on each other's doors - Paul comes round, and we warn him," because we don't know who they're after.""  
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he new video of former Westlife singer Brian McFadden has been pulled after a Dublin school complained about being associated with his song Irish Son. St Finian's High School says it is clearly identified in the video", while McFadden never went there. McFadden makes claims that he was beaten at his own school in the song's lyrics," saying it had ""cell blocks"". The performer's record label Sony BMG has withdrawn the video and issued replacements to television stations. The label believed the school name was fictitious until they received the complaint. They have said the reference to the school was unintentional and coincidental. The head of Christian Brothers' school St Fintian's", Richard Fogarty," said the video implied that the 24-year-old pop star had attended his school and was abused there. ""The school has always treated its pupils with respect"," Mr Fogarty said in a statement. McFadden makes specific references to the Christian Brothers in his song, but did not attend St Fintian's. Corporal punishment was outlawed in Irish schools in 1982 when McFadden was two years old. McFadden, whose debut solo album is released next week, has said that every song is autobiographical and a true story"". Alcoholism and domestic violence are among the other topics dealt with in his songs", half of which have been written with Robbie Williams' former collaborator, Guy Chambers. McFadden, who quit chart-topping group Westlife in March, went to number one in September with his first solo single Real To Me. He enjoyed 12 chart-toppers with the boy band before parting company with them.

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"entertainment 124.txt Byrds producer Melcher dies at 62 Record producer Terry Melcher", who was behind hits by the Byrds, Ry Cooder and the Beach Boys, has died aged 62. The son of actress Doris Day, he helped write Kokomo for the Beach Boys, which was used in the movie Cocktail, earning a 1988 Golden Globe nomination. He also produced Mr Tambourine Man for the Byrds, as well as other hits such as Turn, Turn Turn. Melcher died on Friday night at his home in Beverly Hills, California, after a long battle with skin cancer. He joined Columbia Records as a producer in the mid-1960s, and also worked with Gram Parsons and the Mamas and the Papas. Earlier in his career, Melcher had hits as part of duo called Bruce & Terry, with future Beach Boy Bruce Johnston, which evolved into the Rip Chords group. Melcher also worked closely with his mother, producing The Doris Day Show and helping to run her charitable activities. In 1969 his name became linked with the Charles Manson murders, which saw the deaths of actress Sharon Tate and four of her friends at a home which Melcher once rented. Rumours circulated that Melcher - who knew Manson - was the killer's real target, because he had turned him down for a record contract. But Los Angeles police discounted the rumours, pointing out Melcher had moved to Malibu, and Manson knew of his new address.

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"entertainment 125.txt Snow Patrol feted at Irish awards Snow Patrol were the big winners in Ireland's top music honours", the Meteor Awards, picking up accolades for best Irish band and album on Thursday. The Belfast-born, Glasgow-based band collected the prizes at the ceremony at Dublin's Point Theatre. Westlife won the award for best Irish pop act, voted for by the public, beating former member Brian McFadden. Franz Ferdinand picked up best international band and album while Paddy Casey collected best Irish male. Singer-songwriter Casey beat Brian McFadden and Damien Rice. Juliette Turner was named best Irish female. In the international categories, Morrissey beat Eminem, Usher and Robbie Williams to best male while PJ Harvey pipped Kylie Minogue, Joss Stone, Anastacia and Natasha Bedingfield to the female crown. The 8,000 fans at

the ceremony were treated to performances from US rapper Snoop Dogg," Brian McFadden with Delta Goodrem and The Thrills featuring Rolling Stones star Ronnie Wood. Snow Patrol's success came after a year in which they made a chart breakthrough with their third album Final Straw. ""I think a lot of bands should go through a wee bit of a kicking before they make a success", singer Gary Lightbody and drummer Jonny Quinn said. It has been good for us," but also hard for us over the past six years." Snow Patrol will support U2 on their European tour later this year - but U2 were not nominated for best Irish band and album.

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"entertainment 126.txt Doves soar to UK album summit Manc  
hester rock band Doves have entered the UK album chart at number one with their new release", Some Cities. The trio replace flamboyant US act Scissor Sisters at the top. The album follows single Black and White Town, which reached number six. R&B star Nelly has the new number one single with Over and Over, which sees him team up with Tim McGraw. Girls Aloud, Akon and Kaiser Chiefs all have new singles in the top ten, as do Futureheads and Usher. The latest Elvis Presley re-release, (Marie's The Name) His Latest Flame, entered the chart at number three, one place ahead of Girls Aloud's Wake Me Up. Hip-hop performer Akon's Locked Up is at number five, while hotly-tipped Leeds band Kaiser Chiefs have their second chart hit at number six with Oh My God. Futureheads' cover of Kate Bush's Hounds of Love entered the chart at number eight, while Usher's Caught Up was a new entry at number nine. In the album chart, operatic quartet Il Divo's eponymous debut rose 23 places to number six, while crooner Tony Christie's Definitive Collection is a new entry at number 10, making it the highest-charting album of the singer's career.

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"entertainment 127.txt Downloads enter US singles chart D  
igital music downloads are being included in the main US singles chart for the first time. Billboard's Hot 100 chart now incorporates data from sales of music downloads", previously only assigned to a separate download chart. Green Day's Boulevard of Broken Dreams is currently number two in Billboard's pop chart, and tops its digital chart. Download sales are due to be incorporated into the UK singles chart later this year. Digital sales in the US are already used to compile Billboard's Hot Digital Sales chart. They will now be tallied with sales of physical singles and airplay information to make up its new Hot 100 chart. Its second new chart - the Pop 100 - also combines airplay, digital and physical sales but confines its airplay information to US radio stations which play chart music. In addition to Green Day, other artists in the current US digital sales top 10 include Kelly Clarkson, The Game and the Killers. Sales of legally downloaded songs shot up more than tenfold in 2004, with 200 million tracks purchased online in the US and Europe in 12 months, the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI) reported last month. In the UK sales of song downloads overtook those for physical singles for the first time at the end of last year. The last week of December 2004 saw download sales of 312,000 compared with 282,000 physical singles, according to the British Phonographic Industry. The UK's first official music download chart was launched last September, compiling the most popular tracks downloaded from legal UK sites - including iTunes, OD2, mycokemusic.com and Napster. Westlife's Flying Without Wings - a 1999 track reissued for the occasion - was the first number one of the UK download chart. A spokesman for the British Phonographic Industry (BPI) said the first combined UK download and sales chart was due to be compiled ""within the first half of this year""." "Work is going on across the music business right now t

o make sure the new chart works to plan", he said. The BPI spokesman described the UK music download chart, compiled by the Official Charts Company, as having been a great success"" since its launch. ""It has provided a focus for the industry and has really driven interest in downloads among music fans", he said.

entertainment 128.txt Top gig award for Scissor Sisters N  
ew York band Scissor Sisters have won a gig of the year award for their performance at this year's V Festival. The award was voted for by listeners of Virgin Radio, which compiled a top 10 which was mostly dominated by newcomers on the music scene this year. The quirky disco-rock band beat The Red Hot Chili Peppers who came second for their Hyde Park performance in June. Virgin Radio DJ Pete Mitchell said: This year has seen an amazing array of talent come into the mainstream." He added: ""The Scissor Sisters are one of the most original"," eccentric bands to come through and it's no surprise the British public are lapping up their performances." Newcomers Keane came in third place for their August gig at the V Festival", followed by Maroon 5 and Snow Patrol. Music veterans The Who and David Bowie, both earned places on the list, at number eight and 10 respectively. At number seven was Oxfam's Make Fair Trade gig at London's Hammersmith Apollo in October, which featured performances by REM, Razorlight and Coldplay's Chris Martin. Glasgow's Franz Ferdinand earned a place at number nine for their home-town performance in April. The annual survey was voted for by nearly 4,000 listeners.

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"entertainment 129.txt Brits return Keane to number one B  
rits success has helped return Keane's award-winning album Hopes and Fears back to the top of the UK album chart. The debut album", which took the best British album title at the Brits on Tuesday, moved up seven places from number eight to number one. Also capitalising on Brits success were the Scissor Sisters whose eponymous album moved three places to number two. U2's latest single Sometime's You Can't Make It On Your Own took the top spot in the singles chart, ahead of Elvis. The track, from their current album How To Dismantle An Atomic Bomb, pushed Eminem's Like Toy Soldiers from number one to number three. Elvis' Wooden Heart, which entered the chart at number two, is the sixth in a series of 18 reissues to mark the 70th anniversary of Presley's birth. There are currently six re-released Elvis' tracks occupying spots in the top 40 singles chart including Are You Lonesome Tonight at number 20, It's Now or Never at number 27 and Jailhouse Rock at number 37. Soldier, by Destiny's Child, Ti and Lil Wayne, debuted at number four, while Almost Here, the duet from former Westlife star Brian McFadden and Delta Goodrem, fell from number three to number five. There was more follow up to Brits success for Franz Ferdinand won best rock act and best British group last week. Their self-titled album moved from 13 to number four. Last week's number one album Tourist, by Athlete, fell to number three.

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"entertainment 130.txt Charity single for quake relief Si  
ngers including Sir Cliff Richard and Boy George are recording a charity single to help raise funds for victims of the Asian tsunami. They hope the song will raise more than £2m for the relief fund. The song", titled Grief Never Grows Old and described as a melancholy ballad, was written by radio DJ Mike Read. Former Boyzone singer Ronan Keating may also take part if a studio can be found close to where he is holidaying in Switzerland. Other music stars being approached include Robin and Barry Gibb of The Bee Gees, jazz sensation Jamie Cullum, Chris Rea and Olivia Newton-John. Sir Cliff has recorded his vocal part in Barbados," while Boy George has recorded his in New York. Read wrote the song before t

he Boxing Day tragedy but had thought it was too gloomy to release. Now he plans to have it recorded by a collection of pop stars under the name One World Project. ""It's a natural home for it because people kept saying to me", 'it's such a good song', but it's such a sad song," Read said. He said the song was a slow ballad and would work with around 10 singers, rather than a sing-along"" like the Band Aid 20 single raising money for famine relief in Africa. The backing track has already been recorded and organisers hope it can be finished within the next week to get it into record shops as soon as possible. Read went to the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC)", which is co-ordinating the British relief effort," with the idea the day after Boxing Day. ""I was totally shocked at the enormity and suddenness of the disaster and in tears on seeing the orphaned children wandering aimlessly in search of their parents", he said. Read said all the funds raised by the record would go to the DEC. I'd only be pleased in terms of what it meant for sales if it got to number one," he added. The charity welcomed the news of the single and said money raised would help its agencies working in the affected region to rebuild survivors' lives and livelihoods.

entertainment 131.txt Franz man seeks government help

Franz Ferdinand frontman Alex Kapranos has called for more government help for musicians, while taking part in an Edinburgh Lectures discussion. For any cultural output to thrive there needs to be some kind of state input to that as well", he said. But Kapranos warned against musicians being too closely linked with MPs, at the University of Edinburgh event. I think the role of musicians is to question politicians rather than to go to bed with them", he said. Kapranos joined the prestigious lecture series to discuss Scotland's role in making 21st Century music. There are elements of our musical output which require sustenance because they aren't self-sufficient," he said. But so-called commercial music would benefit from investment as well." He warned musicians against being allied to a particular party", however. "I don't know if having tea with politicians is always a good idea." Kapranos and his Glasgow four-piece band have been nominated for five prizes at next week's Brit Awards", including best group and best album. Their self-titled debut album won last year's Mercury Music Prize and spawned three top 20 singles. He told the 300-strong audience at the University's Reid Hall that musicians should listen to a wide range of music and should not be restricted by stereotypes. "We say 'I like this'. Because I listen to Nirvana and Korn I am a troubled individual", I'm riddled with angst because I listen to Chopin and Debussy, I listen to Kylie Minogue and Scissor Sisters because I'm upbeat and I like to party," I listen to Wagner because I like the smell of napalm in the morning." Kapranos said there was a general "hostility" towards classical music", adding: "There is very little done to break that hostility other than Classic FM." He concluded: "We define ourselves as a nation by the way we encourage our creativity." Fellow speaker and classical composer James MacMillan agreed: "We need to rediscover our ability to listen." Previous speakers at the Edinburgh Lectures series have included former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and author Professor Stephen Hawking. Kapranos described his appearance on Wednesday as ""more daunting by a long way"" than their upcoming Brits performance. "I don't really care about the Brits", he said. It's going to be great to go down but I have actually had to exercise part of my brain tonight." I think the government should do more to help up-and-coming artists be discovered by scrapping the entertainment licences for live venues. Also they should do more to help independent record labels have a louder voice within an industry dominated by commercialised major labels. Rather than expecting the government - i.e. the taxpayer - to fork out", why don't some of the megastars put something back in? Some of Britain's wealthiest people are musicians who have raked it in from albums, concerts etc. There are far more impor-

tant demands on government funds. If they can fund football, why not fund music? Areas of the arts are funded by government and lottery grants, so why not music? We already have the opera receiving huge grants and it would clearly be beneficial for diversity in music to have the same opportunities in other areas of the music. The only problem would be how to judge what merits state cash. The government has enough problems funding schools and health services. If Alex Kapranos genuinely thinks a multi-billion pound industry should also have government funding then his own education was seriously lacking and more money should be put into that. As a Scot living in England, I appreciate the value of Scottish music and culture being a success, so I can see no problem with it! Franz Ferdinand, Travis and Snow Patrol are just recent examples of the success Scottish music can have in the world, so we should do what we Scots are good at and support our own goods! I think the issue is more fundamental: should the government be spending money on subsidising a multi-million pound industry when health and education are in such a sorry state? The answer is most definitely no. Those people who are lucky enough to pursue their passion to get their pay cheque shouldn't be looking for government subsidies. I know that if I was lucky enough to be able to pursue my dream of show jumping I would want to finance myself until I was in a position to pursue corporate sponsorship. Yes the government should fund music - it brings joy to the masses. There are already thousands of state-funded musicians out there sitting around," twiddling their thumbs on the ""new deal"". Getting the government even more involved would only waste money that could be put to better use. As long as the Government was funding real talent it would be a great move. I would hate to see more Pop Idol-type funding of music though", as it would only serve to reinforce the stereotypes that Alex talked about. Only if the proposals make financial sense. Franz Ferdinand must be paying serious amounts of tax on their record sales - if they'd had a government grant to get started they'd have more than paid it back by now, so the Treasury would be making far more than it paid out. However," the government has better things to spend its money on than to give charity to everyone who decides they're a musician. The government shouldn't ""fund"" music - it should ""invest"" in music and those investments should be treated like any other investment. I think the government needs to provide facilities and for young groups and bands to form and practise. The equipment is not cheap and can be well beyond the means of many people. However", I do feel this should be the extent of their role, to provide the conditions for the talent to flourish and let it go from there. I do agree that the government should help to fund music but there is also a responsibility held by record companies! They generally always opt for the tried and tested and tend not to want to break any moulds or risk losing any money which ultimately, the directors are in the business for! If labels were more willing to put money forward towards smaller breakthrough acts then the government wouldn't have to fork out a great deal. Yeah, why not? Music should be government funded, particularly the work of modern composers and veteran bands/artists and stuff. Pop music pretty much rules the earth, so more attention should go to the other fraternities I agree with funding the arts to make it more accessible to the public but I am not convinced that pop music requires financial support from the taxpayer. There is a great deal of money generated through pop music - perhaps a tax on pop could be ploughed into the public performance of other forms of music for everyone to enjoy. Perhaps we could financially penalise really bad Pop Idol-style music - that is," the music industry sector without any artistic merit or originality whatsoever and that which is specifically designed to line the pockets of music producers. Call it a tax on music ""pollution""", if you like. Though I really like Franz Ferdinand, I have to disagree with Mr Kapranos. Once government gets their hand into the private sect

or, it will destroy the creative and possibly controversial avenues the artist pursues. Many years ago, this was the case with the US NEA, when the government started to question what was considered art for the money they were allotting. The solution Mr Kapranos should pursue would be privately-funded organizations, like Save the Music in the US.

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"entertainment 132.txt Hard act to follow for OutKast US  
rap duo OutKast's trio of trophies at the MTV Europe Awards crowns a year of huge success for the band. The latest triumph adds to the three Grammys and four American MTV gongs won earlier in this year. Andre 3000 and Big Boi's album Speakerboxxx/The Love Below has been critically acclaimed since its release and sold in large quantities around the world. The double album - which saw the pair produce one disc each - topped the charts in the US at the same time as single Hey Ya! It took another track from the exponents of southern hip-hop - The Way You Move - to displace it from the top spot. The Georgia pair's year of critical and commercial triumph leaves them with a tough act to follow - what can be next for a musical act that has done it all? G Money", a presenter on the BBC's urban music station 1Xtra," thinks a hiatus is inevitable after such a sustained period of exposure - giving the band time to think about other interests. "They might be more appearances outside the band", such as producing for other artists," while they have a number of fringe music projects. ""Andre 3000 would like to go into acting", so we might see him a film, while Big Boi already has a dog-breeding business," says the DJ. But in a couple of years they will be back with another album which will be a collaboration unlike their double CD. "Their greatness has become clear with Speakerboxxx/The Love Below. We haven't seen the last of them", he adds. OutKast's musical career spans 10 years and they have enjoyed commercial and critical success in the past, with their debut Southernplayalisticadillacmuzik going platinum. But it took until 2001 for the pair to score their first hit in the UK with Ms Jackson, while their album Stakonia saw their fame spread beyond the US. 1Xtra's G Money says it took the latest album, released in 2003, for him to be assured of their genius". "They have always been experimental", some of it has worked and some hasn't," he adds. But G Money acknowledges that making the next move for a band that has reached a pinnacle can be tough. What can you do next when you've done it all?" he says. With ten years of success behind them and worldwide fame", it seems that OutKast is not a name that is likely to be forgotten in a hurry.

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"entertainment 133.txt Sir Paul rocks Super Bowl crowds S  
ir Paul McCartney wowed fans with a live mini-concert at American football's Super Bowl - and avoided any Janet Jackson-style controversies. The 62-year-old sang Hey Jude and other Beatles songs in a 12-minute set at half-time during the game in Florida. Last year", Jackson exposed a breast during a dance routine, causing outrage among millions of TV viewers and landing the CBS TV network a fine. Sir Paul, however, did nothing more racy than remove his jacket as he sang. Organisers were widely considered to be playing it safe this year by booking 62-year-old Sir Paul for his second Super Bowl show. Three years ago, he was invited to perform at the first Super Bowl after the September 11 attacks and performed his specially-written song Freedom. This time, he started off the show, at the Alltel Stadium in Jacksonville, Florida, with the Beatles numbers Drive My Car and Get Back. He then performed a mellow version of Live And Let Die, the James Bond theme he recorded with the band Wings. Finally, he closed the show with a rousing version of Hey Jude. The former Beatle resisted any temptation to

o refer to Janet Jackson's headline-grabbing performance last year," instead keeping banter between songs to a minimum in order to squeeze as much music as he could into his slot. The singer removed his black jacket halfway through the show - but any fans hoping for a second ""Nipple-gate"" were to be disappointed as he kept his red sweatshirt on underneath. Earlier", the Black Eyed Peas and Alicia Keys had provided the night's other high-profile entertainment by performing in a pre-game show. Black Eyed Peas singer Fergie was dressed in a tight orange top and purple hotpants, but nothing in her performance was likely to upset TV watchdogs. After the controversy last year - which saw CBS fined a record \$550,000 (£292,000) by federal regulators - Super Bowl organisers had turned to producer Don Mischler to oversee this year's half-time show. His previous production credits included Olympic opening and closing ceremonies. The Super Bowl is watched by an audience of 144.4 million in the US, with many of the people watching said to tune in specifically to see the entertainment put on around the event. Michael Jackson, Aerosmith, Diana Ross, Gloria Estefan and Phil Collins are among the stars who have previously graced the Super Bowl stage.

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"entertainment 134.txt Rock group Korn's guitarist quits  
The guitarist with US rock band Korn has quit the music business", saying he made the decision after experiencing a religious awakening. Brian 'Head' Welch told a radio station in California that his bandmates respected his decision to leave. A replacement guitarist has yet to be named by Korn," who are currently at work on their eighth studio album. Welch added that he would appear at a church in Bakersfield to explain how he ""got to this place in life"". The remaining members of Korn", who are known for their hardcore brand of rock," said they hoped Welch ""finds the happiness he is looking for"". The 34-year-old made reference to the band's aggressive brand of music and its young fans in his parting statement. ""Anger is a good thing", and if kids want to listen to Korn, good, but there's happiness after the anger, he told his local radio station in Bakersfield. I'm going to show it through my actions, how much I love my fans," added Welch. Korn have enjoyed a moderate degree of chart success in the UK, with 10 singles breaking into the Top 40. Their best performance to date in the UK has been 2002's Here To Stay, which reached number 12, while their album Untouchables, released in the same year, made it to number four.

"entertainment 135.txt Vibe awards back despite violence T  
he US Vibe awards will be held again next year despite a stabbing which happened during the ceremony. Vibe magazine president Kenard Gibbs said the attack earlier this month in Santa Monica was sickening"". He said not holding the awards would be counter to the work the magazine has done to promote hip hop music. Rapper Young Buck has been charged after allegedly stabbing a man who hit Dr Dre as he was about to receive a lifetime achievement award. The rapper", whose real name is David Darnell Brown, is due in court on 20 December after being arrested on one charge of attempted murder and a second charge of assault with a deadly weapon. The performer is one of the members of 50 Cent's G-Unit group, which is signed to Dr Dre's record label. The man who was stabbed, Jimmy James Johnson, suffered a collapsed lung and is in a stable condition at a Los Angeles hospital. Mr Johnson allegedly approached Dr Dre, who was seated at a table in front of the stage, and appeared to ask for an autograph before punching him. During the ensuing scuffle - which involved many of the 1,000-strong crowd - Mr Johnson was stabbed as he was being dragged away by security staff,

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"entertainment 136.txt 'Christmas song formula' unveiled

A formula for the ultimate Christmas single has been revealed by chart bible British Hit Singles and Albums. The recipe includes a reference to Father Christmas", sleigh bells, a children's choir and a charity element. The song should also include Christmas in the title," wishes for peace on earth and lots of airplay at office parties. ""There are common musical elements linking nearly all the big Christmas number ones of recent times", said editor David Roberts. The book's analysts commissioned chart prank group Moped to create the first Christmas single using the whole formula - the song is called Gonna Have a No 1 This Christmas by Moped Vs Santa. Everybody says that Christmas number ones are formulaic," but Gonna Have a Number One this Christmas is the first song to crack the formula and combine all these elements into one ultimate Christmas track"" said Mr Roberts. ""Surprisingly", there's no Santa listed among the 8,0, top 75 chart performers in the book," so this is our chance to help Santa to his rightful place in British recording history." Big festive hits over the years include Band Aid's Do They Know It's Christmas?", Slade's Merry Christmas Everybody, Wham's Last Christmas and Sir Cliff Richards' Mistletoe and Wine. Band Aid 20's remake of Do They Know It's Christmas is set to be confirmed as number one in the charts on Sunday.

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"entertainment 137.txt Glastonbury fans to get ID cards F  
ans who buy tickets for this year's Glastonbury festival will be issued with photo ID cards in an attempt to beat touts", "it has been confirmed. The cards will include a photograph of the ticket-holder plus an electronic chip with their details to prevent tickets being sold on or forged. Tickets for the June event are expected to go on sale in April. ""There is only one place in the world where you will be able to get tickets", festival organiser Michael Eavis said. That will be the official source. If you get them anywhere else," you won't get in." Fans not wanting to carry the entrance card could present their passport or driving licence instead", he added. More than 153,000 people are expected to travel to Mr Eavis' Somerset farm from 24-26 June, but the event's rising popularity has meant an extremely high demand for tickets in recent years. When the ID card idea was floated," Mr Eavis' daughter Emily said it would be ""quite a big step in terms of ticketing for events"" if implemented and they were ""going as far as we can"" to cut touting. ""As long as it's approached in the right way", it might really work, it might really change the system," she said. In 2004, all 112,000 tickets for the public sold out in 24 hours. They were personalised with the names of purchasers, who were asked to bring identification, such as a driving licence, passport or household bill. But some forgot to take the right information while some touts simply offered to supply their own bills along with the ticket bearing their name. No details of this year's line-up have been confirmed but rumours have suggested U2 and Coldplay may be among the headliners.

entertainment 138.txt Queen recruit singer for new tour T  
he remaining members of rock band Queen are to go on tour next year with former Free and Bad Company singer Paul Rodgers taking Freddie Mercury's place. Guitarist Brian May has said he expects to be on the road with Rodgers and drummer Roger Taylor from April. May said: Suddenly the Queen Phoenix is rising again from the ashes and will take precedence over... our lives." Queen have played with many different singers since Mercury's death in 1991 but have reportedly not toured. May performed with Rodgers at a concert to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Fender Stratocaster guitar in London in September. ""We were both so amazed at the chemistry that was going on in [Free hit] All Right Now", that suddenly it seems blindingly obvious that there was 'something happening her

e,""" May wrote on his website. They teamed up again for a concert to mark the ir induction into the UK Music Hall of Fame"," and were joined by Taylor. ""The show went so incredibly well from our point of view", and we got so many rave reactions from out there, we decided almost then and there that we would look at a tour together," May wrote. Queen went to number one in 2000 with a version o f We Will Rock You sung by boy band 5ive and they have also played with Robbie Williams, Will Young and Bob Geldof. Queen bassist John Deacon has currently re tired from the stage. Rodgers was singer with early 1970s rockers Free, who had a global hit with All Right Now, before forming Bad Company, a successful super group"" with members of King Crimson and Mott the Hoople. He has also been in T he Firm with Led Zeppelin's Jimmy Page and The Law with The Small Faces and The Who drummer Kenny Jones.

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"entertainment 139.txt U2 to play at Grammy awards show I  
rish rock band U2 are to play live at the Grammy Awards presentation in the US next month", organisers have said. Other acts to play include soul singer Alicia Keys, country singer Tim McGraw and punk band Green Day at the event on 13 F ebruary in Los Angeles. U2 are nominated twice for their recent single Vertigo, including a nomination for best rock song. This year the Grammys have been domi nated by rap star Kanye West, who is in contention for 10 awards. US comedian E llen Degeneres and singer Christine Milian will present awards at the event. La st week Grammy producers announced the show will be hosted by rap star and Chic ago actress Queen Latifah. It will be held at the Staples Center. U2 had number one success in the album charts on both sides of the Atlantic in November when their latest studio album, How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb, topped the US and U K charts. The band, who are also dominated for best international album at this year's Brit Awards, are to undertake a major world tour this year, their first for four years.

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"entertainment 140.txt Rock band U2 break ticket record U  
2 have smashed Irish box office records with ticket sales for their Dublin conc erts", after more than 150,"000 were sold within 50 minutes. Tickets for the t wo concerts at the city's Croke Park stadium were released at 8am on Friday mor ning. ""Nothing like it has ever been seen in Ireland before", " said Justin Gre en, spokesman for organisers MCD Promoters. We could have sold a million ticket s." The Dublin dates on June 24 and 25 form part of the worldwide Vertigo tou r. The tour begins in San Diego on 28 March and will cover 13 US cities. The ba nd will also play 24 European gigs", " finishing in Lisbon in August. Mr Green said that ticket outlets had been ""bombarded"" by U2 fans. ""Unfortunately the re's thousands and thousands of disappointed fans all over the country which is disappointing", but there's only two dates confirmed," he said. Many fans campe d on the streets of the Irish capital for three days to ensure they were first in line at Ticketmaster in St Stephen's Green Shopping Centre, where the ticket s went on sale on Friday. However the majority of tickets, priced at between 5 9.50 and 80 euro each, were sold online. Earlier this week, Bono announced that the band would play two shows at the venue, which holds almost 80,000 people, d ue to the phenomenal demand for tickets.

entertainment 141.txt Police praise 'courageous' Ozzy Roc k star Ozzy Osbourne has been praised by police for very courageously"" tacklin g a burglar who stole jewellery from his house. The singer grabbed an intruder who then jumped 30ft (10m) from a first floor window as the star gave chase at his Buckinghamshire home on Monday. ""I acted on impulse", Osbourne said. In hi

ndsite," it could have been a lot worse. It could've got really ugly." "A £10 0",000 reward has been offered for information leading to a conviction. His wife Sharon, who called the police, said her wedding rings were taken from her bedside table as she slept. The heavy metal star said he could have met the same fate as late Beatle George Harrison," who was repeatedly stabbed in a break-in in 1999. ""I could have been badly injured or shot or anything", " Osbourne said. I just thank God that no-one got injured." " He added he was glad the intruders were not hurt. ""I wouldn't want anyone to get injured." " The singer did not want to talk in detail about his actions but when asked whether he would do the same again replied: ""Is the Pope a Catholic?" " The incident happened at 0400 GMT on Monday in Chalfont St Peter. Detective Inspector Paul Miller of Thames Valley Police said it appeared a man used a ladder to get into the house through a first floor bedroom window. ""Whilst selecting items of jewellery", the burglar was disturbed by Ozzy who very courageously tackled this burglar and pursued him from the house," he said. Ozzy said he was just coming to grips"" with what had happened and his opinion of the UK had been lowered after 12 relatively trouble-free years in the US. ""We lived in Los Angeles where people get shot every day and have been trailed by lots of different stalkers - and yet we come back to England and I'm very disappointed." " At a press conference on Tuesday", " Sharon Osbourne gave details of nine stolen items. They included a diamond wedding ring and two handmade wedding bands Ozzy gave her when they renewed their vows two years ago. She said she wished she had worn them at night. ""I always take them off and put them beside my bed and that's where they were", " right beside me on my bedside table." " Also taken were a pearl necklace and a sapphire bought as an investment for their daughters described by Sharon as ""one of the only 24-carat sapphires that is absolutely pure"". A daisy chain necklace that was a 20th anniversary present and a Franck Muller watch Sharon said was one of only 10 made were also stolen. She expressed her anger at the person who ""hasn't worked and wants to take what's yours"". ""But the thing is", " we worked for everything. I came from Brixton. Ozzy came from not a very nice part of Birmingham and everything we've got we have worked our arses off for." " ""If I choose to make an investment for my kids in whatever way I choose to make it", " that's my business and I worked for every God damn penny." " Ozzy also lamented two years in which the family has been plagued by problems", including his critical injury in a quad bike accident, his wife's colon cancer, their childrens' drug problems and now the burglary. On Sunday night, the Osbournes had been celebrating the birthday of singer Sir Elton John's partner David Furnish. Police described the intruder as well-built," about 5' 10" tall and said he was wearing a ski-mask", a light-coloured jacket and trainers. They believe he may have injured himself when he jumped from the window. There is no description of his accomplice. Police think the pair were driving a large vehicle, possibly a van, and are keen to hear from anyone who may have seen one leaving Chalfont St Peter at speed. Police appealed for public help to find the perpetrators and stolen items on 0845 8 505 505 or 0800 555 111.

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"entertainment 142.txt New York rockers top talent poll N  
ew York electro-rock group The Bravery have come top of the BBC News website's Sound of 2005 poll to find the music scene's most promising new act. The Bravery", who have been compared to The Cure and New Order, were the most heavily-tipped act in the survey of 110 impartial critics and broadcasters. Rock band Keane won Sound of 2004 while US rapper 50 Cent topped Sound of 2003. Other new artists in this year's list include London indie group Bloc Party at second and UK rapper Kano third. The Bravery played their first gig in 2003 and have since

supported bands including The Libertines, Interpol and Echo and the Bunnymen. They were the subject of a record company bidding war in 2004 and their debut single, "Unconditional," caused a huge buzz when it was released in the UK in November. Singer Sam Endicott said he felt ""great"" about coming top of the Sound of 2005 list. ""Anyone that says they don't want a zillion screaming fans is a jackass", a liar," he said. One of the experts to tip The Bravery was The Times' music critic Paul Connolly, who said they were spiky but in love with pop"". Chris Hawkins", host of BBC 6 Music's chart show," said the band had ""great guitars and a mastery of the electro-clash sound"". ""The Bravery are proof alone that New York City is still home to hot new talent", he said. Nigel Harding, head of music at London rock radio station Xfm, said every track from their live set sounded like a potential single"". Unconditional reached the summit of the station's listeners' chart within a fortnight of its first play", which Mr Harding described as ""an unheard of achievement for a debut single"". Q magazine reviews editor Ted Kessler said they were ""pretty-boy New York clothes horses"" with ""an unusually nimble ear for concise", yearning pop in the mould of Duran Duran or The Strokes"". Other pundits to take part in the survey included BBC Radio 1 DJ Trevor Nelson", NME editor Conor McNicholas, Top of the Pops presenter Fearne Cotton, Glastonbury organiser Emily Eavis and BBC Radio 2 music editor Colin Martin. Elsewhere on the top 10, second-placed rock band Bloc Party began their rise after supporting Franz Ferdinand and UK garage MC Kano, in third, is signed to The Streets' record label. US rapper The Game is hip-hop great Dr Dre's latest protege while Leeds group Kaiser Chiefs came fifth with a promise to lead a Britpop revival. In last year's survey, Keane were followed by Franz Ferdinand, Razorlight and Joss Stone in the top five - all of whom were virtually unknown outside the music industry at that point. Boy band McFly were sixth while Scissor Sisters, who had the UK's best-selling album of 2004, were seventh. In the survey, the pundits were asked for tips for three acts they thought were capable of reaching the top in their chosen genre, either in terms of sales or critical acclaim. The artists could be from any country and any musical genre, but must not have had a UK top 20 single, been a contestant on a TV talent show or already be famous for doing something else, such as a soap actor. Those tips were then counted and compiled to make the top 10.

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"entertainment 143.txt Blair buys copies of new Band Aid Prime Minister Tony Blair purchased two copies of the charity single Band Aid 20 in Edinburgh on Friday. Staff were surprised when the Prime Minister walked into HMV at 0900 GMT", accompanied by aides and local police. ""When Mr Blair came in unannounced", we were all pretty gobsmacked, said HMV manager Clive Smith. Our customer helper approached him... it was only then we realised he wanted to buy copies of the Band Aid single," rather than the latest Eminem album." Predicted chart-topper Do They Know it's Christmas? is expected to sell at least 300",000 copies by the time the new chart is announced on Sunday. However, the new version of the 1984 single is not going to be released in the US, despite being sold in many countries around the world. US record shops are stocking an import version of Do They Know It's Christmas, which is said to be selling very well in Los Angeles and New York. The original track was released in the US, and reached number 13 in the singles chart. British stars who appear on the current recording, such as Dido and Coldplay's Chris Martin, are well-known to music fans across the Atlantic, along with U2 frontman Bono. Record company Universal is responsible for the global distribution of the single, which will be available across Europe, Asia, South America and Canada. But music fans in the US are still able to access the song and download it on Band Aid 20's official websi

te. In 1985, a group of high-profile American stars known as USA For Africa came together to record their own fund-raising single, We Are The World. The song was written by Lionel Richie and Michael Jackson, with Quincy Jones as producer. It topped the US charts for three weeks and went on to win Grammy awards for best record and song. Dionne Warwick, Diana Ross and Tina Turner were among the line-up of performers. It is predicted that the Band Aid 20 song will sell 300,000 copies in the UK by the time the new chart is announced on Sunday. The record is also tipped to become this year's Christmas number one, as the original version did in 1984. Proceeds from the sales are going towards relief for the Darfur region of Sudan and to combat HIV and Aids across Africa.

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"entertainment 144.txt Eminem beats Elvis to number one R  
apper Eminem has denied Elvis his fourth number one of the year", after his song, Like Toy Soldiers, stormed to the top of the singles charts. The track claimed the top spot ahead of The King's latest re-release, Are You Lonesome Tonight. It is the fifth in a series of 18 reissues to mark the 70th anniversary of Presley's birth. Almost Here, the duet from former Westlife star Brian McFadden and Delta Goodrem, went in at number three. Like Toy Soldiers, from Eminem's Encore album, is sampled from Martika's 1980s hit Toy Soldiers. It takes a swipe at hip-hop feuds and follows the success of Just Lose It. Last week's number one, Elvis's It's Now or Never, slipped 13 places to number 14, but all five of his re-released songs are in the Top 40. One World Project Tsunami fundraiser, Grief Never Grows Old, slipped four places to number eight. Featuring Cliff Richard and Boy George, the song was written by former DJ Mike Read. In the album charts, Athlete's latest offering Tourist claimed the top spot, toppling the Chemical Brother's Push The Button Down, which fell to number six.

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"entertainment 145.txt Sir Paul rocks Super Bowl crowds S  
ir Paul McCartney wowed fans with a live mini-concert at American football's Super Bowl - and avoided any Janet Jackson-style controversies. The 62-year-old sang Hey Jude and other Beatles songs in a 12-minute set at half-time during the game in Florida. Last year", Jackson exposed a breast during a dance routine, causing outrage among millions of TV viewers and landing the CBS TV network a fine. Sir Paul, however, did nothing more racy than remove his jacket as he sang. Organisers were widely considered to be playing it safe this year by booking 62-year-old Sir Paul for his second Super Bowl show. Three years ago, he was invited to perform at the first Super Bowl after the September 11 attacks and performed his specially-written song Freedom. This time, he started off the show, at the Alltel Stadium in Jacksonville, Florida, with the Beatles numbers Drive My Car and Get Back. He then performed a mellow version of Live And Let Die, the James Bond theme he recorded with the band Wings. Finally, he closed the show with a rousing version of Hey Jude. The former Beatle resisted any temptation to refer to Janet Jackson's headline-grabbing performance last year," instead keeping banter between songs to a minimum in order to squeeze as much music as he could into his slot. The singer removed his black jacket halfway through the show - but any fans hoping for a second ""Nipple-gate"" were to be disappointed as he kept his red sweatshirt on underneath. Earlier", the Black Eyed Peas and Alicia Keys had provided the night's other high-profile entertainment by performing in a pre-game show. Black Eyed Peas singer Fergie was dressed in a tight orange top and purple hotpants, but nothing in her performance was likely to upset TV watchdogs. After the controversy last year - which saw CBS fined a record \$550,000 (£292,000) by federal regulators - Super Bowl organisers had turned to

producer Don Mischler to oversee this year's half-time show. His previous production credits included Olympic opening and closing ceremonies. The Super Bowl is watched by an audience of 144.4 million in the US, with many of the people watching said to tune in specifically to see the entertainment put on around the event. Michael Jackson, Aerosmith, Diana Ross, Gloria Estefan and Phil Collins are among the stars who have previously graced the Super Bowl stage.

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"entertainment 146.txt J-Lo and husband plan debut duet Singers Jennifer Lopez and husband Marc Anthony", a Latin pop star, are to perform a duet at this month's Grammy Awards in Los Angeles. Anthony became Lopez's third husband in June 2004. He won a Grammy in 1998 and is nominated for two more this year. The 13 February ceremony will also include a rendition of The Beatles' Across The Universe by Bono, Stevie Wonder, Norah Jones and Brian Wilson. The song will go on sale online to raise money for the tsunami aid effort. The awards show will also feature performances from U2, Green Day, Alicia Keys and Kanye West - but the Lopez and Anthony duet is likely to be one of the biggest talking points. Anthony, born in New York to a Puerto Rican family, is reported to be the biggest-selling salsa artist of all time. He is nominated this year for best Latin pop album and best salsa/merengue album. The tsunami tribute song will also feature Alicia Keys, Velvet Revolver and Tim McGraw. Fans will be able to download it for \$0.99 (£0.53) from iTunes, or purchase the video from the CBS TV network's site. Kanye West, the rapper who leads the awards with 10 nominations, will perform alongside John Legend, Mavis Staples and the Blind Boys of Alabama. There will also be a tribute to Ray Charles featuring Bonnie Raitt and Billy Preston and a celebration of southern rock with Tim McGraw, Gretchen Wilson, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Dickie Betts and Elvis Bishop. Ray Charles, who died in June 2004, has seven posthumous nominations. Alicia Keys and Usher share eight nominations each.

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"entertainment 147.txt Beastie Boys win sampling battle US rappers Beastie Boys have won their long-running battle over the use of a sample in their song Pass the Mic. The punk-rappers used three notes of music from flautist James Newton's Choir in their track from 1992. Although the group had paid a licence fee for the sample", Mr Newton said his copyright had been infringed. But the US Court of Appeal upheld its original decision that the group did not have to pay an additional fee to license the underlying composition. The Beastie Boys - Michael Diamond, Adam Horowitz, and Adam Yauch - are considered to be one of early pioneers of sampling music. Sampling, now a standard practice among musicians," involves taking a segment of one track and using it in a different song. A three-judge panel of the court held in 2003 that the band had abided by copyright protections by paying a licence fee for a sample of Mr Newton's recording. That finding upheld a lower-court dismissal of the case in favour of the Beastie Boys. ""We hold that Beastie Boys' use of a brief segment of that composition", consisting of three notes separated by a half-step over a background C note, is not sufficient to sustain a claim for infringement of Newton's copyright," Chief Judge Mary Schroeder wrote in her opinion. Mr Newton is a critically acclaimed jazz and classical flutist, composer, performer, and university professor. Mr Newton and the Beastie Boys were not available for comment.

entertainment 148.txt Pupils to get anti-piracy lessons Lessons on music piracy and copyright issues are to be taught to secondary school pupils in the UK. The lessons, aimed at 11 to 14-year-olds, will introduce them to copyright - including the issues of downloading from the internet and th

e illegal copying of CDs - and its role in protecting creativity. Music piracy, including illegally swapping music online, costs the UK music industry millions every year and has been blamed for a decline in world-wide CD sales. British Music Rights (BMR) - which was formed to represent the interests of songwriters and composers - worked with education experts to put together a learning pack. Songwriter Guy Chambers, who has worked with stars including Robbie Williams, has thrown his support behind the scheme. He said as well as educating children about music piracy, it would also protect young people planning a career in the music industry from unscrupulous"" individuals. At a debate in London to launch the scheme", Chambers said: ""I think it is important that young people receive practical and engaging learning in schools. ""These lessons will give them an insight into how the creative industries work which will help them in possible future careers." The education pack", which has already been requested by more than 1,600 secondary schools, is aimed at giving children an understanding of copyright in relation to the music industry. It will also teach children about the importance of royalties and raises awareness of different careers in the music industry, particularly in the digital age. Henri Yoxall, general manager of British Music Rights, told BBC News schools had been crying out for a resource to help them educate pupils about the issues. The scheme - which is an extension of BMR's Respect the Value of Music campaign - is also being backed by singer-songwriters Feargal Sharkey," Lucie Silvas and Grammy Award-winning composer David Arnold. Silvas said: ""I think it is so important that students gain an understanding of how the music industry works when they are at a young age. ""I wish I had been given an opportunity like this when I was at school." Emma Pike", director general of British Music Rights," said: ""We believe that copyright is an essential part of teaching music in schools. It is vital that the creatives of the future know how to turn their ideas into value. ""Copyright education has always been important... creatives are facing more challenges and more opportunities from technological change. ""Technology is allowing people to create music and distribute their music to the public in a whole host of new ways.""

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"entertainment 149.txt Spector facing more legal action M  
usic producer Phil Spector is facing legal action from the mother of the actress he has been accused of killing. Donna Clarkson", whose daughter Lana was found dead in Mr Spector's home in February 2003, is seeking unspecified damages in a civil action. The legal action accuses Mr Spector of murdering the actress at his LA home. Mr Spector is currently free on \$1m (£535,000) bail and is awaiting trial. The 64-year-old has denied the killing, saying her death was accidental. Ms Clarkson's legal action, filed in Los Angeles Superior Court, also accuses Mr Spector of negligence and battery," alleging he ""grabbed", hit," fought with and restrained"" Lana Clarkson before shooting her to death. Her lawyers said in a statement: ""The Clarkson family had hoped that there would be some resolution with regard to the criminal proceedings before moving forward with the civil action. ""However", Ms Clarkson and her family understand that the fair administration of justice takes time and in light of the numerous changes Mr Spector has made in his legal defence team over the last two years," Ms Clarkson was forced to file the action before (the statute of limitations expired) on 3 February 2005." Mr Spector", known for his work with the Beatles, has claimed that Lana Clarkson committed suicide. His lawyers, led by Bruce Cutler," have vowed to prove him innocent at trial. Mr Cutler said: ""Phil did not cause the death of this woman" , he's not criminally responsible and he's not civilly responsible either. ""But I'm not surprised they filed a suit for money", that se

ems to be de rigueur nowadays." A Los Angeles Superior Court judge is expected to set a trial date later this month for Spector", who was indicted on murder charges in September. Roderick Lindblom, one of Ms Clarkson's lawyers," said: "Our intent is to let the criminal proceedings go forward and not do anything that would interfere with the prosecution."

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"entertainment 150.txt Usher leads Billboard nominations  
R&B singer Usher is leading the race for the Billboard awards with nominations in 13 categories", including best male. Alicia Keys has 12 nominations for the awards, which will be held on 8 December at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas. Other multiple nominees include Maroon5, OutKast, Kanye West, R Kelly, Gretchen Wilson, Hoobastank and Jay-Z. Soul singer Stevie Wonder will receive Billboard's Century Award, the magazine's highest honour for creative achievement, at the ceremony. The awards will be hosted by American Idol presenter Ryan Seacrest, and will feature performances by Usher, Gwen Stefani, Nelly and Green Day. Usher and Keys will be battling it out for prizes including artist of the year, Hot 100 songwriter of the year and Billboard 200 album of the year for their respective albums Confessions and The Diary of Alicia Keys. Maroon5 and OutKast are also up for artist of the year, while OutKast's Speakerboxxx/The Love Below is a finalist for Billboard 200 album of the year, alongside Josh Groban's Closer. The awards honour the year's leading artists and songs as determined by their performance on Billboard's weekly charts.

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"entertainment 151.txt Eminem secret gig venue revealed R  
apper Eminem is to play an intimate gig in London on Saturday", following a show on the River Thames on Friday. The US star will play just two songs at a night showcasing his label Shady Records at the Islington Academy. Eminem performed on HMS Belfast on Friday, which is docked on the River Thames, where he filmed two songs for BBC One's Top of the Pops. He arrived in the UK on Friday following his appearance at the MTV Europe Music Awards in Rome. Other rap acts who may appear at the Islington gig include Stat Quo, Proof, DJ Green Lantern, Swift and Obie Trice. Eminem's latest album soared to the top of the US chart after just three days on sale in record shops. Encore is now a chart-topper on both sides of the Atlantic following its debut at number one in the UK. The fourth album from the rap star was on sale for two days before it outsold all of its rivals. The album was released early in an effort to combat both physical and online piracy. Eminem's album includes the track Mosh," which is a tirade against US President Bush and the presence of US troops in Iraq. The rapper was criticised earlier this year after a performance on BBC One's Top of the Pops in April led 12 viewers to complain he was ""lewd"" and ""offensive"". The complaints about the star grabbing his crotch were upheld by the BBC. ""The performer had been asked to tone his act down after rehearsal but ignored this request during the live broadcast", a BBC statement read. Although his gestures were part of the rap culture," they had gone beyond what is expected."

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"entertainment 152.txt Beatles suits sell for \$110",000  
Four suits worn by the Beatles on their Please Please Me album cover have sold for \$110",000 (£59,000) at a US auction. But some of Elvis Presley's earliest recordings - including takes of All Shook Up - failed to sell at the Bonhams and Butterfields two-day sale. A private collection of six tape recordings of Presley valued at between \$30,000 (£16,000) and \$50,000 (£27,000) did not meet their

reserve price. A signed Presley photograph managed to fetch \$2,115 (£1,140). Auction spokesman Erik Simon said the Presley tapes were withdrawn because ""they did not meet the minimum price set by the owners"". He said the family of sound engineer Thorne Nogar did not want to divulge the price they had set or the offers they had received. The RCA tapes date from September 1956 to September 1957. The ""pre-masters"" include a take of Jailhouse Rock", religious songs, material for his first Christmas album, and banter between Presley," members of his band and Mr Nogar. ""We've had them for a lot of years", and I think the people should enjoy them. And frankly, we could use the money," Mr Nogar's son Stephen, 57, said before the auction. Mr Nogar, who died in 1994 aged 72, always used to make two tapes of sessions as a back-up in case RCA producers wanted to make late changes to songs. He called them his 'ass-saver' tapes", his son said. The quality is said to be noticeably crisper than that of a new vinyl record. Because the family does not own the copyright to the music, the tapes could only be sold for personal enjoyment"" and cannot be copied for commercial gain. The auction made a total of \$1.1m (£600",000).

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"entertainment 153.txt OutKast win at MTV Europe Awards U  
S hip-hop duo OutKast have capped a year of award glory with three prizes at the MTV Europe Music Awards in Rome. They won best group", best video and best song for hit Hey Ya! after getting five nominations. R&B singer Usher won best male and best album for Confessions, while UK rock band Muse were named best alternative act and best British artists. OutKast will add their awards to the four they won at the US MTV Awards in August and three Grammys in February. Not only was Hey Ya! one of the biggest global hits of last year, but OutKast have been widely acclaimed as one of the most exciting and innovative acts in music. Their double CD album Speakerboxxx/The Love Below, which saw Andre 3000 and Big Boi each produce one disc," was hailed as the album of 2003 by many critics. Andre 3000 thanked fans ""for supporting OutKast throughout the years"". ""We're really appreciate it", he said. I hope you don't get tired of us," but we only do what we do." Also competing for best group had been the Beastie Boys", the Black Eyed Peas, D12 and Maroon 5. And Anastacia, Britney Spears, Maroon 5 and Ludacris had been on the shortlist for best song. OutKast did lose out in the contest for best album - which was won by Usher, another award favourite. Usher, who performed a duet with Alicia Keys, also beat off competition from Justin Timberlake, Jay-Z, Nelly and Robbie Williams to take the best male crown. He had four nominations going into the ceremony, with seven artists nominated in three categories. Eminem's group, D12, were surprise winners in the best hip-hop category, beating the Beastie Boys, Jay-Z," Kanye West and Nelly. Eminem told the crowd: ""D12 finally won an award", thank you very much." The rapper opened the show with a performance of his songs Like Toy Soldiers and Just Lose It", for which he was joined on stage by a crowd of children. The Black Eyed Peas - who had a global hit with Where is the Love? - picked up the prize for best pop act, beating Anastacia, Avril Lavigne, Robbie Williams and Britney Spears. Spears was named best female," sending a message of thanks on video saying the award ""means so much to me"". Alicia Keys", Anastacia," Avril Lavigne and Beyonce Knowles had featured alongside her in that contest. Linkin Park singer Chester Bennington described their prize for best rock band as ""quite an honour"" while Muse said their win for best alternative act was ""a real surprise for us"".

Muse were also named best UK and Ireland act", ahead of Franz Ferdinand, Natasha Bedingfield, Jamelia and The Streets. Referring to the fact that winners of 11 of the 12 main awards were from the US," Muse singer Matt Bellamy said: ""There needs to be more European bands."" The 11th annual awards were hosted by hip-ho

p artist Xzibit and watched by 6",000 people at the Tor Di Valle arena, plus millions more on TV around the world. The ceremony featured performances from the Beastie Boys, who entered the stage on bicycles and skateboards, No Doubt singer Gwen Stefani being lowered from a giant clock and Nelly doing a duet with Pharrell Williams. MTV also organised a huge open-air concert featuring Anastacia and The Cure outside the Italian capital's ancient Colosseum, with some estimates putting the attendance there at 200,000. Last year's big winner at the MTV Europe Awards, held in Edinburgh, Scotland, was Justin Timberlake, who walked away with three trophies.

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"entertainment 154.txt Oasis star fined for German brawl  
Oasis singer Liam Gallagher has been fined 50",000 euros (£35,"000) after a fight in a German hotel two years ago. Gallagher was arrested along with drummer Alan White and three other members of the band's entourage after the brawl in Munich in December 2002. The band said they were victims of an ""unprovoked attack"" in a nightclub. But police said Gallagher kicked an officer in the chest and had large amounts of alcohol and drugs - possibly cocaine - in his blood. Gallagher lost two front teeth in the fight", which led to the band abandoning their German tour. His brother and bandmate Noel was in bed at the time. ""The process has stopped by paying 50",000 euros," said Anton Winkler, spokesman for the Munich prosecutor. At the time, police said a physical altercation"" broke out among the musicians at about 0200 local time. That led to one of the group being ""jostled"" and falling onto the table of five Italian guests - causing the fight", they said. The fight continued outside," where ""one of the officers was kicked in the chest with full force by Liam Gallagher... and suffered minor injuries""", they said.

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"entertainment 155.txt Disputed Nirvana box set on sale A box set featuring 68 unreleased Nirvana tracks has gone on sale in the US", after years of legal wrangles. With the Lights Out was intended to be released in 2001, to mark the 10th anniversary of the album Nevermind. It was blocked by Courtney Love, the widow of Nirvana frontman Kurt Cobain, who did not want unreleased song You Know You're Right on the box set. The dispute between Love and surviving band members Krist Novoselic and drummer Dave Grohl was settled in 2002. Work began on the box set in 1998, but legal battles put the project on hold. The legal fight centred on a studio recording of the unreleased track You Know You're Right, regarded by fans as one of the unreleased gems of Nirvana. The set, released on Tuesday, features three CDs and a DVD of rare performance and rehearsal footage. The DVD also includes the first performance of Smells Like Teen Spirit," the track that launched Nirvana on to the international stage in 1991. ""The band wasn't always pretty", or always in tune. This is not Nirvana unplugged. It's Nirvana unedited," said Cobain biographer Charles Cross. The band's development ended tragically when songwriter Kurt Cobain committed suicide in April 1994.

entertainment 156.txt Usher leads Soul Train shortlist Ch art-topping R&B star Usher is leading the field at this year's Soul Train Awards, with five nominations. The singer, whose album Confessions has sold close to eight million copies in the US alone, is already in the running for eight Grammys. Newcomer Ciara - who recently beat Elvis Presley to the UK number one spot - has four nominations, while Alicia Keys has three. The Soul Train Awards ceremony will take place in Hollywood on 28 February. Usher has already swept the board at the American Music Awards with four titles, including two best

album awards. His Soul Train nominations include best male R&B-soul album and best male R&B-soul single for Confessions Part II. Usher's work with rappers Ludacris & Lil Jon won him nominations for best R&B-soul or rap music video and best R&B-soul or rap dance cut for the song Yeah!, while his duet with Keys, My Boo, earned the pair a nod for best R&B-soul single. Keys' album The Diary of Alicia Keys was also up for best R&B-soul album by a female. Her song If I Ain't Got You received a best single nomination in the female R&B-soul category. Newcomer Ciara's four nominations include best female R&B-soul album and best R&B-soul or rap by a new artist. Beyonce, Prince, Destiny's Child, Jill Scott and New Edition all received two nominations each. The Soul Train Music Awards, which started 18 years ago, celebrates artists in R&B, hip-hop, rap and gospel music.

entertainment 157.txt US charity anthem is re-released We Are The World, the American charity anthem inspired by the success of Band Aid, has been re-issued to raise money for Aids research and tsunami victims. More than 40 stars sang as group USA For Africa, including Lionel Richie, Diana Ross, Ray Charles, Bob Dylan, Michael Jackson and Bruce Springsteen. It topped the charts in the US and UK, raising millions of dollars for African famine relief. The re-release also marks the 20th anniversary of the original recording. It has been re-issued as part of a two-disc DVD set, which will also feature footage from the recording session of the track in January 1985. The single was originally released in the US on 7 March 1985 and sold 800,000 copies in its first week. It went on to win Grammys for song of the year and record of the year.

entertainment 158.txt Queen recruit singer for new tour The remaining members of rock band Queen are to go on tour next year with former Free and Bad Company singer Paul Rodgers taking Freddie Mercury's place. Guitarist Brian May has said he expects to be on the road with Rodgers and drummer Roger Taylor from April. May said: Suddenly the Queen Phoenix is rising again from the ashes and will take precedence over... our lives." Queen have played with many different singers since Mercury's death in 1991 but have reportedly not toured. May performed with Rodgers at a concert to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Fender Stratocaster guitar in London in September. ""We were both so amazed at the chemistry that was going on in [Free hit] All Right Now", that suddenly it seems blindingly obvious that there was 'something happening here," May wrote on his website. They teamed up again for a concert to mark their induction into the UK Music Hall of Fame", and were joined by Taylor. ""The show went so incredibly well from our point of view", and we got so many rave reactions from out there, we decided almost then and there that we would look at a tour together," May wrote. Queen went to number one in 2000 with a version of We Will Rock You sung by boy band 5ive and they have also played with Robbie Williams, Will Young and Bob Geldof. Queen bassist John Deacon has currently retired from the stage. Rodgers was singer with early 1970s rockers Free, who had a global hit with All Right Now, before forming Bad Company, a successful super group"" with members of King Crimson and Mott the Hoople. He has also been in The Firm with Led Zeppelin's Jimmy Page and The Law with The Small Faces and The Who drummer Kenny Jones.

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"entertainment 159.txt Band Aid 20 single storms to No 1  
The new version of the Band Aid song Do They Know It's Christmas? has gone straight in at number one in the UK singles chart. The charity record is also tipped to be this year's Christmas number one. It features vocals from the likes of Chris Martin", Dido, Robbie Williams and the Sugababes. The original version - which was the Christmas number one in 1984 - sold 750,000 copies in its first week and 3.5 million in total. It was released in the US, and reached number 13

in the singles chart. However, Band Aid 20 is not going to be released in the US, despite being sold in many countries around the world. US record shops are stocking an import version of Do They Know It's Christmas, which is said to be selling very well in Los Angeles and New York. British stars who appear on the current recording, such as Dido and Coldplay's Chris Martin, are well known to music fans across the Atlantic, along with U2 frontman Bono. Record company Universal is responsible for the global distribution of the single, which will be available across Europe, Asia, South America and Canada. But music fans in the US are still able to access the song and download it on Band Aid 20's official website. In 1985, a group of high-profile American stars known as USA For Africa came together to record their own fund-raising single, We Are The World. The song was written by Lionel Richie and Michael Jackson, with Quincy Jones as producer. It topped the US charts for three weeks and went on to win Grammy awards for best record and song. Dionne Warwick, Diana Ross and Tina Turner were among the line-up of performers. Proceeds from the sales of the Band Aid 20 single will go towards aid relief in Africa, in countries such as Ethiopia and Sudan. The money raised will also be used to help combat HIV and Aids across the continent. The Band Aid Trust which was set up 20 years ago, when the original single was released, handed out \$144m (£75m) to famine relief projects across Africa between January 1985 and November 2004.

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"entertainment 160.txt iTunes now selling Band Aid song I  
pod owners can now download the Band Aid single from iTunes after Apple reached agreement with the charity. Apple had been unwilling to raise the cost of the single in line with other download services", said Band Aid. But the single is now on sale for 79p - the usual cost of a song from iTunes - with Apple donating a further 70p to the charity for each song downloaded. A copy of the original 1984 song is also available for download at 79p - with all proceeds going to the charity. More than 72,000 copies of the new Band Aid single were sold on its first day of release on Monday, according to sales figures. The track has become the fastest-selling single of the year so far, shifting more copies than the rest of the top 30 combined, HMV claimed. Dido, Robbie Williams and Chris Martin are among those featured on the new version of Do They Know It's Christmas?, which is raising money to fight hunger in Africa. If the track sold 500,000 copies, more than £1m would be raised for charity. The CD is being sold for £3.99, with HMV, Virgin and Woolworths all donating their profits.

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"entertainment 161.txt Court halts Mark Morrison album Pr  
emiership footballer and record company boss Kevin Campbell has gained a court injunction stopping R&B singer Mark Morrison from releasing an album. The Everton striker signed Morrison to his fledgling 2 Wikid Records label and claims he spent thousands of pounds producing his album Innocent Man. Now he is attempting to prevent Morrison releasing the album on Monday through another label. But Morrison vowed to ignore the order", saying ""no judge is gonna stop me"". Morrison", who is now as well known for his brushes with the law than his music career, rose to fame with the 1996 single Return of the Mack. But the Leicester singer has struggled to repeat its success following two spells in jail. One was for hiring a stand-in to complete his community service for possession of a stun gun and three-months following a nightclub fracas. He signed to Mr Campbell's label a year ago and has released one single, with the label saying the album was due for release on 24 January. But Mr Campbell said he learned that Morrison planned to release the album through Jet Star," which is advertising it on

its website. Mr Campbell said: ""I'm glad we were granted the injunction but I'm completely gutted that we have had to go that far. ""Mark Morrison was given everything he asked for by 2 Wikid but it seems that he couldn't help but return to his old ways. ""I've worked hard to realise my ambition in football but had hoped that my future career would be in the music business. ""I have always dreamt of starting a record label but now Mark Morrison has spoilt that dream for me. There is no loyalty in this business - just greed." But Morrison is determined the album will be released on Monday. He said: ""The injunction is ludicrous. ""I signed a new deal with a new record company because I was not getting the support I needed from 2 Wikid. ""I was with that label for a year and in that time released just one record", which was not properly promoted. He added: ""The whole world is waiting for this album and it will come out on December 27. No injunction or judge will stop it. The Mack will return." The case is set to be heard in the High Court on 20 December.

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"entertainment 162.txt Prince crowned 'top music earner'  
Prince earned more than any other pop star in 2004", beating artists such Madonna and Elton John in US magazine Rolling Stone's annual list. The singer banked \$56.5m (£30.4m) from concerts, album and publishing sales with his Musicology tour and album. He kept Madonna in second place, as she earned \$54.9m (£29.5m) while embarking on her global Re-Invention Tour. Veterans Simon and Garfunkel were in 10th place," their comeback tour helping them earn \$24.9m (£13.4m) last year. ""Prince returned to centre stage after a decade in the commercial wilderness", the magazine reported. The singer's 2004 tour took \$90.3m (£48.5m) in ticket sales and he sold 1.9 million copies of his latest album Musicology. Although she grossed more than Prince last year, Madonna remained in second place because of the monumental"" production costs of her tour. Heavy metal band Metallica's Madly in Anger with the World tour helped push their 2004 earnings up to \$43.1m (£23.1m). They were ahead of Sir Elton John", who took fourth place and almost \$42.7m (£23m) from performances including a debut on the Las Vegas Strip. Other seasoned performers in the list included Rod Stewart, whose sold-out shows and third volume of The Great American Songbook covers album helped net him £35m (£19m). The highest-ranking rap act in the list was 50 Cent, who at number 19 took \$24m (£13m) to the bank.

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"entertainment 163.txt Early Elvis recordings go on sale  
Some of Elvis Presley's earliest recordings - including takes of All Shook Up - are going under the hammer on Sunday at a Los Angeles auction. The six unedited reel-to-reel tapes - which were owned by the engineer who recorded them - are valued at up to \$50",000 (£29,"000). Highlights of the two hour-long collection will get their public debut at Bonhams auction house on Saturday. The RCA tapes date from September 1956 to September 1957. The ""pre-masters"" include a take of Jailhouse Rock", religious songs, material for his first Christmas album, and banter between Presley," members of his band and engineer Thorne Nogar. ""We've had them for a lot of years", and I think the people should enjoy them," Nogar's son Stephen, 57, said. And frankly", "we could use the money." Nogar", who died in 1994 aged 72," always used to make two tapes of sessions as a back-up in case RCA producers wanted to make late changes to songs. ""He called them his ass-saver tapes", his son said. The quality is said to be noticeably crispier than that of a new vinyl record. Because the family does not own the copyright to the music, the tapes can only be sold for personal enjoyment"" and they cannot be copied for commercial gain.

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"entertainment 164.txt Parker's saxophone heads auction A  
saxophone belonging to legendary jazz musician Charlie Parker is expected to fetch up to \$1m (£535",000) at an auction of jazz memorabilia next month. The sale, at Guernsey's Auction House in New York, will feature instruments from other musicians including John Coltrane and Benny Goodman. Other items will include an evening gown belonging to Ella Fitzgerald. Organisers said the auction was the first in the US to be devoted to items belonging to jazz musicians. Other items that will be auctioned include unreleased tape recordings of music by Parker as well as handwritten sheet music by jazz composers John Coltrane and Thelonious Monk. Among the instruments in the sale will be a trumpet which belonged to Dizzy Gillespie, which is expected to fetch around \$500,000 (£267,000), as well as JJ Johnson's trombone and a vibraphone which belonged to Lionel Hampton. Works of art by musicians including Miles Davis and Bruni Sablan will also be featured. The proceeds from the auction, which will take place on 20 February, will go towards several organisations including the John Coltrane Foundation, a foundation set up in memory of Benny Goodman, and the Red Cross.  
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"entertainment 165.txt Comic Morris returns with sitcom C  
omedian Chris Morris", who created controversial TV show Brass Eye," is to return to screens with a new sitcom about a spoof London media worker. Morris will direct and co-write Nathan Barley - a character from cult website TV Go Home - for Channel 4. It is a send-up of the stereotypical ""cool"" metropolitan media scene", with Nicholas Burns in the title role. A Brass Eye satire of the media handling of paedophilia sparked 2,"500 complaints in 2001. Nathan Barley will be ""a character-driven comedy""", according to Charlie Brooker," who created TV Go Home in 1999 and has co-written the series. Barley is described as a ""web master", guerrilla film-maker, screenwriter, DJ and in his own words," a 'self-facilitating media node"". The story will also feature Dan Ashcroft", a style magazine columnist, and his sister Claire," a film-maker who hates the ""cool"" scene. As well as Brass Eye", Morris was behind another news show satire, The Day Today, and dark sketch comedy Jam. The new show is expected to begin in February.  
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"entertainment 166.txt TV station refuses adoption show A  
TV station in the US has refused to show a controversial new series where adopted children try and pick their birth father - and win a cash prize. The WRAZ-TV Fox affiliate in North Carolina was the only one of 182 stations to refuse Monday's show. Who's Your Daddy promises \$100",000 (£52,000) to the contestant if she correctly identifies her father. It was met with protests by the National Council for Adoption," which said it ""exploits"" sensitive emotions. ""It exploits the sensitive emotions of adoption""", said Thomas Atwood, president of the National Council for Adoption. It trivialises them. Adoption is a very personal," meaningful experience and it should not be commercialised like this." On the pre-taped programme", the contestant is presented with eight men who may or may not be her natural father. If she picks the correct man from the line-up, the contestant wins the jackpot prize of US\$100,000 (£52,590). However, if she picks the wrong man, then the impostor takes the money. Fox producers defended the show," saying it was a ""positive experience""". They have made six specials"," though only one episode has so far been broadcast. ""The special was thoroughly vetted by our standards and practices department to ensure that it was a  
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ppropriate for broadcast", said a Fox spokesman. However," any network affiliate that feels the programming may be inappropriate for their individual market has the right to pre-empt the schedule." " WRAZ-TV instead chose to air an independently-produced film", I Have Roots and Branches... Personal Reflections on Adoption," a documentary about families with adopted children. " "We just don't think adoption is a game show", " said Tommy Schenck, WRAZ-TV's general manager, though he said his decision had not been influenced by public protests.

entertainment 167.txt A-listers flock to Gervais sitcom H  
ollywood actors Samuel L Jackson and Ben Stiller have signed up for Ricky Gervais' new sitcom, the comedian has told BBC News. He said they had both seen the scripts and had agreed to appear in an episode each of the sitcom Extras. They join British stars Jude Law and Kate Winslet who have been booked for guest roles. The comic and actor said he had drawn up an A-list of stars he wanted and all had agreed to be in it. We wanted actors who had iconic status but that we could also deconstruct", Gervais told BBC News. It's not about the zeitgeist. We wanted people who would still be around in 20 years," not just the winner of Big Brother to take part." " Gervais admitted he was cautious about revealing who would be taking part until they had all signed on the dotted line. But he has met with Stiller and Jackson and they enjoyed the scripts enough to commit to it. " "I didn't want to start revealing names until it was all sorted because people just mention people who haven't even been asked. " "I have been linked with ridiculous stories recently such as I'm going to be in a remake of 10 taking Dudley Moore's part. I haven't been approached and I wouldn't take it anyway." " He said Stiller and Jackson would be playing " "twisted" " versions of themselves in Extras and that the jokes about them " "would sail pretty close to the bone" ". Gervais and his writing partner Stephen Merchant are currently refining the scripts for the six-part series", in which Gervais plays a struggling actor who bitches about the stars. Meanwhile, Gervais is gearing up to promote his cartoon book Flanimals which is released in the US in March," around the same time as NBC begin showing the US version of The Office. The film rights to Flanimals have already been snapped up but Gervais is keen for the project to be taken slowly. " "A film will happen over the next three years but I don't want it to be a \$50m movie straight away because it is not well enough known and it wouldn't be another Spider-Man or Batman. I would like to do something small on TV with it first." "

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"entertainment 168.txt Campaigners attack MTV 'sleaze' MT  
V has been criticised for " "incessant sleaze" " by television indecency campaigners in the US. The Parents Television Council (PTC)", which monitors violence and sex on TV," said the cable music channel offered the " "cheapest form" " of programming. The group is at the forefront of a vociferous campaign to clean up American television. But a spokeswoman for MTV said it was " "unfair and inaccurate" " to single out MTV for criticism. The PTC monitored MTV's output for 171 hours from 20 March to 27 March 2004", during the channel's Spring Break coverage. In its report - MTV Smut Peddlers: Targeting Kids with Sex, Drugs and Alcohol - the PTC said it witnessed 3,056 flashes of nudity or sexual situations and 2,881 verbal references to sex. Brent Bozell," PTC president and conservative activist said: " "MTV is blatantly selling raunchy sex to kids. " "Compared to broadcast television programmes aimed at adults", MTV's programming contains substantially more sex," foul language and violence - and MTV's shows are aimed at children as young as 12. " "There's no question that TV influences the attitudes and perceptions of young viewers", " and MTV is deliberately marketing its raunch to millions of innocent children." " The watchdog decided to look at MTV's pr

ogrammes after Janet Jackson's infamous ""wardrobe malfunction"" at last year's Super Bowl. The breast-baring incident generated 500", "000 complaints and CBS - which is owned by the same parent company as MTV - was quick to apologise. MTV spokeswoman Jeannie Kedas said the network follows the same standards as broadcasters and reflects the culture and what its viewers are interested in. ""It's unfair and inaccurate to paint MTV with that brush of irresponsibility", " she said. We think it's underestimating young people's intellect and level of sophistication." Ms Kedas also highlighted the fact MTV won an award in 2004 for the Fight for Your Rights series that focused on issues such as sexual health and tolerance.

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"entertainment 169.txt US actor 'found with gun residue'  
Actor Robert Blake had gunshot residue on his hands and clothes the night his wife was shot dead", a court has heard. But it may not have come from the shot that killed Bonny Lee Bakley in 2001, Mr Blake's murder trial was told by criminalist Steven Dowell. Mr Dowell told a Los Angeles court the residue may have come from Mr Blake's revolver, his gun collection, his presence at the crime scene or police. The 71-year-old former star of US TV drama Baretta has denied murder. Mr Blake said he found Ms Bakley, 44, dead in a car after they left a restaurant. He said he briefly returned to the restaurant to collect a gun he had left behind and discovered her body when he returned. The gun he collected was not the murder weapon. It could also have been picked up if he touched or leant on the car when he found the body," or from a police box in which his clothes were later stored. The box had come from an area where officers went after being on the firing range. But Mr Dowell also said the residue would have been present if Mr Blake fired a gun that night. Witnesses have already told the trial Mr Blake ""stood out as being quite nervous and agitated"" at the restaurant before the murder. The actor", who won an Emmy for playing a maverick detective in the 1970s TV cop drama Baretta, could face life in prison if convicted.

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"entertainment 170.txt EastEnders 'is set for US remake'  
Plans to create a US soap based on the BBC's EastEnders have reportedly been drawn up by the Fox TV network. EastEnders' head writer Tony Jordan and music mogul Simon Fuller are involved in the project", according to reports in the Hollywood Reporter trade newspaper. It said scripts have been commissioned for a series about a community of working class people in of Chicago. The original East Enders was pulled from BBC America last year after it proved a failure in the ratings. US versions of other British hits have proved less successful across the Atlantic. BBC comedy Coupling was remade with a US cast, but lost its primetime slot on the NBC network due to disappointing ratings. At home, EastEnders has been facing its own ratings battle, recently losing out to rival ITV soap Emmerdale. Primetime soaps on US television have made a recent comeback," following the success of ABC serial Desperate Housewives. The series takes a ""darkly comedic"" look at the goings-on of a group of characters living in the suburbs.

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"entertainment 171.txt US 'to raise TV indecency fines' U  
S politicians are proposing a tough new law aimed at cracking down on indecency and bad language on US TV. Fines of up to \$500", 000 (£266,582) could be imposed each time broadcasters transmit nudity or profanities. The proposal, unveiled in the House of Representatives, also seeks to revoke a broadcaster's licence a

fter three violations have been committed. The exposure of Janet Jackson's brea st at last year's Superbowl landed CBS with a \$550,000 (£293,264) fine. Enterta iners could also be liable for fines under the proposed legislation from both US politicians and officials from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). A Re publican senator from Kansas, Sam Brownbeck, is set to call for a maximum \$3 mi llion (£1.6 million) fine for repeated violations. The current maximum fine st ands at \$32,500 (£17,320) - 20 of the stations in the CBS network were each pen alised these lesser amounts for the Jackson incident. Republican politician Fred Upton, who chairs the committee responsible for broadcasting," said current f ines are ""more of a cost of doing business rather than a deterrent"". Last year's Janet Jackson 'wardrobe malfunction' encouraged the FCC to impose tougher r ules", but the US Congress adjourned last year without agreeing on a new level of fines. New figures have to be decided before new legislation can be put befo re President Bush. Certain broadcasters, like Fox, claim the material they carr y does not violate indecency laws and is protected under the right to free spee ch.

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"entertainment 172.txt Eurovision 'greats' to do battle S tars of the Eurovision Song Contest from the show's 50-year history are to comp ete against each other to celebrate the contest's anniversary. Viewers will ch oose 14 past songs to be performed by the original artists or others in the spi rit of the originals. Past Eurovision performers include Abba", Celine Dion, Bucks Fizz, Nana Mouskouri, Lulu and Julio Iglesias. Fans will then vote as usual to pick the all-time best Eurovision song during the show in Denmark in Octobe r. The first contest was organised by the European Broadcasting Union, or EBU, in 1956, and has become an annual event pitting pop giants against musical minnows - with often surprising results. While some regard it as an essential cele bration of continental talent, others see it as an equally unmissable parade of the reasons some countries do not normally produce international stars. The 50t h annual contest will be held in Kiev, Ukraine, in May, after Ukrainian singer Ruslana won last year. The 50th anniversary special will be held in Denmark lat er this year because the Danish Broadcasting Corporation came up with the idea for the all-time contest. A plan to hold it in London was scrapped because of p roblems finding a suitable venue. Ireland has been the most successful country in the show's history with seven victories, followed by the UK, France and Luxembourg with five each.

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"entertainment 173.txt UK TV channel rapped for CSI ad TV channel Five has been criticised for sending ""offensive"" and ""threatening"" advertising material to viewers for a new show about murder scene scientists. Five mailed thousands of fake dossiers including photos of murder victims and a n e-mail suggesting the recipient was being stalked by a serial killer. Followi ng complaints", the Advertising Standards Authority contacted Five to cease pro motion of crime show CSI:NY. Five admitted it had sent out 55,000 promotion pac ks but had now stopped. The promotion material was sent in brown envelope of th e type used by investigators in the series, a spin-off from the highly successf ul CSI: Crime Scene Investigation series, which also runs on Five. The pack als o features pictures of forensic evidence from a crime scene and a wanted poste r," which did have a CSI:NY logo printed in large at the bottom. Five said it had received 100 complaints but that it had been surprised at the reaction beca use it was ""obvious this material is promoting a drama"". A Five spokesman sai d: ""In light of the efforts we have made to make the nature of the contents so

transparent we are surprised a very small minority of recipients have mistaken it as anything else. ""Everyone who was sent this promotion has expressed an interest in receiving details about this particular genre of programming on various websites. ""We have also received emails and calls from recipients praising the originality and imagination of the campaign."

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, "entertainment 174.txt X Factor show gets second series T  
V talent show The X Factor is to return for a second series after being recommissioned by ITV. Judges Simon Cowell", " Louis Walsh and Sharon Osbourne are in discussions to sign up for the new series. The final of the first series will take place on 11 December. Last Saturday's show was beaten in the ratings by the BBC's Strictly Come Dancing. ""Working on the X Factor has been a blast... I predict series two will be even better", said Cowell. I think the production team have done an amazing job," he added. The Pop Idol-style show votes off a group or contestant every week - the two that receive the lowest public vote have to perform a second time before the judges make a final decision. Rowetta Satchell, Steve Brookstein, Tabby Callaghan and group G4 are the remaining finalists. ITV's controller of entertainment, Claudia Rosencrantz, said she had no hesitation in recommissioning the show. There's much more to come this series as we build towards the final next month and it's great to have secured this terrific format for our viewers for another series", " she said.

entertainment 175.txt Alicia Keys to open US Super Bowl  
R&B star Alicia Keys is to open February's Super Bowl singing a song only previously performed there by Ray Charles and Vicki Carr. Keys, who will sing America the Beautiful, will be accompanied by 150 students from the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind. Charles, who died last year, attended the school as a child in 1937. Keys said she was very excited"" , " describing Charles as ""an artist I admire", " miss and respect". ""I know that this is going to be a very touching and memorable moment", " she said. It will be her first performance at the Super Bowl, which will be watched by millions in the US on 6 February. Sir Paul McCartney will provide the half-time entertainment in the slot filled by Janet Jackson last year. Organisers have promised there will be no repeat of her nipple-baring incident that sparked thousands of complaints on US TV's most-watched broadcast. A National Football League spokesman said they were comfortable"" this show would be acceptable to a mass audience. The game and show were watched by 144 million people in the US in 2003. Twenty CBS-owned TV stations were fined \$550", 000 (£300,000) by the country's TV regulatory agency after more than 542,"000 complaints were made about Janet Jackson's ""wardrobe malfunction"". Sir Paul said: ""There's nothing bigger than being asked to perform at the Super Bowl. ""We're looking forward to rocking the millions at home and in the stadium." "

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,"entertainment 176.txt 'Comeback' show for Friends star F  
riends actress Lisa Kudrow is to play the lead role in a new series about a one-time sitcom star", according to the Hollywood reporter. Thirteen episodes of Comeback have been commissioned by cable channel HBO, home of hits such as Sex And The City. Kudrow, who played Phoebe in Friends, co-wrote the pilot episode and will also act as executive producer. HBO has been looking for its next big comedy hit since Sex And The City drew to a close in the US in February. Comeback is the first 30-minute comedy series that the channel has picked up since the Sex And The City drew to the end of its six-year-run. Friends ended its 10-ye

ar run on the NBC network in May, and attentions have turned to which projects its six individual stars would pursue. Matt LeBlanc is starring in a Friends spin-off sitcom, charting Joey's fortunes in Los Angeles as he pursues his acting career. Jennifer Aniston, who was Rachel in the long-running show, has enjoyed a series of successful film appearances, with further projects in the pipeline. Courteney Cox Arquette (Monica) has been working on a drama project along with husband David Arquette for HBO, called The Rise And Fall Of Taylor Kennedy. Matthew Perry, who played Chandler, has appeared on the West End stage, and has a film, The Beginning Of Wisdom, currently in production. And David Schwimmer (Ross) directed during his time on Friends, and has also worked on Joey.

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"entertainment 177.txt Hillbillies singer Scoggins dies C  
ountry and Western musician Jerry Scoggins has died in Los Angeles at the age of 93", his family has said. Scoggins was best remembered for singing the theme tune to popular US TV show The Beverly Hillbillies. The Texan-born singer approached the producers of the programme with theme tune The Ballad of Jed Clampett for the pilot which was screened in 1962. The show, which told the story of a poor man striking oil and moving to Beverly Hills," ran until 1971. Scoggins' daughter Jane Kelly Misel said that her father never tired of the song and would sing it at least once a day. ""He'd sing it at birthdays and anniversaries and variety shows. He never stopped performing it"," she said. When a film version of The Beverly Hillbillies was made in 1993, Scoggins came out of retirement to perform the theme tune. Scoggins sang the lyrics while bluegrass stars Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs played guitar and banjo.

entertainment 178.txt Branson show flops on US screens En  
trepreneur Sir Richard Branson's US TV show, The Rebel Billionaire, is proving a flop in the ratings. The programme suffered poor viewing figures on its debut on the Fox network three weeks ago, and has lost one in five of its viewers since then. The show is seen as Fox's answer to The Apprentice featuring tycoon Donald Trump, a ratings hit for rivals NBC. Sir Richard's show sees a group of young entrepreneurs compete to become the president of his business empire. The Rebel Billionaire has averaged five million viewers and is 91st in the rankings of all prime-time shows. The Apprentice, which has already completed its first season, is still managing to pull in 16 million viewers, while its prime-time ranking is number four. But Fox has said it plans to stick with Branson's show throughout its 12-episode run. It's going to remain on the air", said the network's spokesman Scott Grogin. Creatively we're extremely pleased with the show and hope the audience will find it," he added. Contestants on Sir Richard's show are confronted with business tasks to solve, similar to The Apprentice. They are also subjected to stunts like walking a plank suspended in mid-air. The Rebel Billionaire has marketed itself as a less materialistic version of The Apprentice, with Sir Richard shown jumping out of a taxi, while Trump is seen in a limousine.

entertainment 179.txt Housewives lift Channel 4 ratings T  
he debut of US television hit Desperate Housewives has helped lift Channel 4's January audience share by 12% compared to last year. Other successes such as Celebrity Big Brother and The Simpsons have enabled the broadcaster to surpass BBC Two for the first month since last July. BBC Two's share of the audience fell from 11.2% to 9.6% last month in comparison with January 2004. Celebrity Big Brother attracted fewer viewers than its 2002 series. Comedy drama Desperate Housewives managed to pull in five million viewers at one point during its run to date, attracting a quarter of the television audience. The two main television channels, BBC1 and ITV1, have both seen their monthly audience share decline

in a year on year comparison for January, while Five's proportion remained the same at a slender 6.3%. Digital multi-channel TV is continuing to be the strongest area of growth, with the BBC reporting Freeview box ownership of five million, including one million sales in the last portion of 2004. Its share of the audience soared by 20% in January 2005 compared with last year, and currently stands at an average of 28.6%.

entertainment 180.txt McCririck out of Big Brother show R  
acing pundit John McCririck has become the latest contestant to be evicted from Celebrity Big Brother. He was nominated to leave the Channel 4 show by fellow housemates, alongside Happy Mondays dancer Bez. At one time Bez was among the most popular contestants but he has since become withdrawn and argumentative. McCririck was ordered to leave the house on Monday, following Jackie Stallone, the actor Sylvester's mother, who was first to be evicted. Bez reacted badly to the news that he had been nominated by five of his fellow housemates, whilst John received four votes against him. Sylvester Stallone's ex-wife Brigitte Nielsen nominated both John and Bez. She said: Bez is a difficult human being. There's something wrong with him. Even though he's making an effort," he's not very happy in here. "" Former Holby City actor Jeremy Edwards said he had nominated Bez after he became agitated on Friday night and talked about escaping over the wall to go clubbing. He said Bez was being ""loopy"" and ""stressed"". According to bookmaker Ladbrokes", John McCririck was 1/3 favourite to be evicted on Monday while Bez was at 9/4 . McCririck faced the public vote on Friday and received 67% of the vote to keep him in the house, whilst Jackie Stallone was evicted.

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"entertainment 181.txt Chris Evans back on the market Bro  
adcaster Chris Evans has begun selling thousands of his possessions from a stall in Camden Market", London. Evans perched on a stool as shoppers wandered around the open-fronted shop packed with his furniture. Among the items from his homes in Los Angeles and London were countless sofas, chairs, pictures, beds and memorabilia from his past TV shows. Asked the reason for the sale," Evans said: ""I just want to get rid of it all"," it's just a headache." " He added: ""It feels good to be selling this stuff", " it's a weight off my mind. ""Look at it all"," there's so much clutter. I've enjoyed every bit of furniture and every poster but it's not important anymore." " The normally gregarious Evans cut a peculiarly unshowbusiness-like figure as he sipped coffee and smoked cigarettes", wrapped in a big coat and scarf in front of his Aladdin's cave. However, the ostentation of some of the items on sale painted a picture of the eccentricity that endeared him to the British public in shows such as Channel 4's gameshow Don't Forget Your Toothbrush. The most striking thing about many of the pieces was their sheer size. Sofas looked like they could seat a small party and a bed seemed big enough for four. The elaborate nature of the pieces, many custom-made, had to be admired," particularly a huge red and gold upholstered ""throne"" and a stripy deckchair from the Queen Mary liner. To help people in their browsing", Evans had given the pieces labels with not only the price but a helpful, often comic," aside. ""Isn't it great"" was the comment on the £1", "950 throne and ""Bob Dylan's old sofa - honest"" was written on a dark wood couch priced £4", "250. The prices were steep by a lot of people's standards but Evans said it was not deterring shoppers. ""I've sold quite a lot already. Everything here is on sale for less than I bought it for but it's not really about the money. It's about getting rid of it all. We've all been bartering", " that's what it's all about." " He added that he was not going to reveal what he was going to do with the money he was making. Vintage TV and film posters also lined the walls",

including a rare portrait of Raquel Welch and an original advertising print from the Benny Hill Show. And, almost hidden at the back of the lock-up, were the two giant toothbrushes from his former Channel 4 show, although these were not for sale. Despite the sheer curiosity value of the sale, there was a healthy trickle of interest from the public rather than the perhaps expected crowds. Some wandered in just to browse, as they would any of the other stalls," not knowing that it belonged to Evans. Paul Burgess said: ""I didn't realise. I thought it was just a load of junk. I should go back and have a better look."" But local resident Francesca Detakats came specially to the stall and left happy with her purchase of an original 1960s photograph of The Who by David Wedgburg. Ms Detakats said she was a collector and did not mind paying £350 for the print. ""If you like something", you don't really count it like that," she said. Martin Hellewell, who had also made a point of visiting Evans' shop, said he thought it was a great idea. Why not", if you've got stuff to get rid of it's a good place to do it," said Mr Hellewell. Evans has taken out the stall with business partner Pete Winterbottom. They plan to open every day if possible, although Evans did not know how often he would be there. We'll stay definitely until Christmas and then maybe a week after that", said Evans.

entertainment 182.txt Top stars join US tsunami TV show B  
Brad Pitt, Robert De Niro and Hugh Grant have been added to the line-up for a two-hour US TV special to raise money for victims of the Asian tsunami. Andy Garcia, Lucy Liu, Natalie Portman and Jay Leno are also among the new names for Saturday's Tsunami Aid. They will join A-list singers Madonna, Sir Elton John, Nelly and Usher plus actors Kevin Spacey, Halle Berry and George Clooney on the NBC broadcast. Viewers will be urged to phone in to make donations throughout the night. Norah Jones, Diana Ross, Stevie Wonder, Maroon 5, Mary J Blige and Eric Clapton will give musical performances on the show described as A Concert of Hope"". Catherine Zeta Jones", Michael Douglas, Bruce Willis, Uma Thurman, Matt Damon," Drew Barrymore and Tim Robbins are among the other movie superstars due to put in an appearance. George Clooney recently reacted angrily to a TV host's suggestion that not all funds raised would go towards tsunami relief. Fox TV's Bill O'Reilly said he would be ""watching to see if the money gets to the tsunami victims"" and warned the celebrities taking part ""had better be involved all the way down the line"". But Clooney accused O'Reilly of creating a fuss for his own personal gain", saying viewers may now be ""afraid that their money will do no good"". He urged O'Reilly to co-present the TV special", adding in a letter: ""We're not playing games here", we're trying to save lives. It's as simple as this - you're either with this joint effort or against it."" Organisers say all funds will go to the American Red Cross. The commercial-free benefit show will also be aired by a string of cable broadcasters and Clear Channel's radio stations across the US. In addition", performances will be available to buy on the internet as downloads from Sony's Connect music store. A similar TV benefit carried by all four primary US TV networks after the 11 September terror attacks raised more than \$150m (£80m). - The Bangkok International Film Festival got under way on Thursday in the Thai capital in the shadow of the country's 5,300 deaths from the tsunami. The red carpet gala opening night was ditched in favour of a more subdued first night. Six different films were shown at six cinemas, with all money from ticket sales going to charity.

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"entertainment 183.txt Star Trek fans fight to save show  
Star Trek fans have taken out a full-page ad in the Los Angeles Times in an attempt to persuade TV executives not to scrap Star Trek: Enterprise. Made by the UPN TV network", the latest spin-off from the hit sci-fi show is due to end in

May after four series. But fans around the world have pitched in to pay for the advert," which had the headline ""Save Star Trek"". They are also asking the Sci-Fi Channel to pick it up from UPN and will stage a rally in Los Angeles on 25 February. The advert described the Star Trek franchise as a ""cultural icon"". Enterprise stars former Quantum Leap actor Scott Bakula as Captain Archer and is set before the original 1960s Star Trek series. ""Captain Archer and the crew of the NX-01 need your help to continue their journeys!"" the advert said. It also included a cut-out coupon for fans to send to UPN's parent companies Paramount and Viacom plus the Sci-Fi Channel. It also urged supporters to join the rally outside the Paramount studios. Fan website Trek United is hoping to raise \$32m (£17m) from donations by the end of March to pay for a fifth series. More than \$23",000 (£12,000) has been pledged so far, according to the site. The 98th and final episode of Star Trek: Enterprise will air in the US on 13 May. The fourth series has averaged 2.9 million viewers per episode - half the amount it got in its first series. Star Trek: Enterprise began in 2001 following other Star Trek spin-off series The Next Generation, Deep Space Nine and Voyager.

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"entertainment 184.txt Top of the Pops leaves BBC One The BBC's flagship pop music programme Top of the Pops is to move from BBC One on Fridays to Sundays on BBC Two. The new programme will combine with archive show TOTP2"," mixing new music with footage of classic bands. The corporation said the new show ""aims to appeal to a diverse audience of music lovers"". The move is the biggest shake-up in the history of the show", which was first broadcast in 1964 and has always been on BBC One. Top of the Pops was relaunched in a blaze of publicity in December last year in an attempt to reverse a long-term decline in audience figures. The All New Top of the Pops was fronted by newcomer Tim Kash and was put together by producer Andi Peters," who was brought back to the BBC from Channel 4 to revitalise the series. About three million people a week were watching the show on Fridays - less than half the total it was attracting in the mid-1990s - as the programme went up against popular ITV soap Coronation Street. But despite the relaunch audience figures failed to rise and still remain around the three million mark. Tim Kash has since been replaced as host by Fearne Cotton. The new show will launch in Spring next year in an extended format. BBC Two controller Roly Keating: ""It's an exciting new era for Top of the Pops. We want to make it bigger and better so that it becomes the ultimate pop music show for music lovers of every generation."" Mr Keating described BBC Two as the ""natural home"" of Top of the Pops. He added: ""The addition of Top of the Pops will also extend BBC Two's offering to younger audiences.""" A BBC spokeswoman said Andi Peters would continue as executive producer on the show. She said that issues over the exact format of the programme and a time slot were still to be decided. The programme will have a close relationship with the BBC Radio 1 chart show", which suggests the relaunched show may be transmitted at about 1900 on Sundays. ""Hopefully the audience for Top of the Pops will find it on BBC Two. ""We think that the new slot will create a buzz around the programme as for the first time viewers will discover the news of who is number one as it happens."""

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"entertainment 185.txt Oscar host Rock to keep it clean 0 scar host Chris Rock said he will steer clear of bad language when he fronts the awards on 27 February. The comedian", who recently got into trouble for poking fun at the ceremony," is renowned for his heavy use of expletives during his

stand-up routine. The live ceremony will be broadcast with a transmission delay on US network ABC to ensure swear words are removed. ""I've been on TV and been funny not cursing", he said during an interview for CBS network's 60 Minutes show. As far as content is concerned, I will talk about the movies. I'm not really worried about it. I'm sure ABC might be more worried about it than me," he added. The 40-year-old comedian caused a furore when he said in an interview with US magazine Entertainment Weekly recently that he hardly ever watched the Oscars and labelled awards ceremonies idiotic"". The show's producers defended Rock and confirmed that he would still be presenting the Oscar ceremony", saying his comments were ""humorous digs"". Meanwhile", the Academy has announced that Oscar-nominated actress Natalie Portman will present an award at the ceremony. Portman, who has been nominated for a best supporting actress gong for her role in Mike Nichols' Closer, joins a growing list of stars set to bestow an award at the ceremony including Dustin Hoffman, Drew Barrymore, Renee Zellweger and British-born actress Kate Winslet.

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"entertainment 186.txt Johnny and Denise lose Passport Jo  
hnny Vaughan and Denise Van Outen's Saturday night entertainment show Passport to Paradise will not return to screens", the BBC has said. The ex-Big Breakfast presenters were recruited to host the BBC One family variety show last July. ""There are currently no plans for another series", a spokeswoman said. She added the pair brought a real warmth to Saturday night," but in the end we felt we had done enough with the format of the show"". Passport to Paradise involved a combination of games and outside broadcasts with a high level of audience participation. The first instalment attracted more than 4.1 million viewers - but that had dropped to fewer than 2.7 million by the time it ended. The BBC spokeswoman said Graham Norton's Strictly Dance Fever would be a priority for 2005. ""That's very much on the cards for next year", and we're concentrating at the moment on Strictly Come Dancing, which is doing phenomenally well," she said.

entertainment 187.txt Double eviction from Big Brother Mo  
del Caprice and Holby City actor Jeremy Edwards have both left the Celebrity Big Brother house in a surprise double eviction on Friday. Caprice, who left in the scheduled fourth eviction having gained just 5% of the public vote, afterwards said: I am so happy", "I am so glad I'm out." Edwards then left in a surprise eviction", with 12% of the vote. Nineteen-year-old Blazin' Squad singer Kenzie is currently favourite to win the £50,000 charity prize. Caprice had been the pre-show favourite to be voted out of the house," with bookmakers Ladbrokes offering odds of 1/5 on her departure. Ladbrokes spokesman Warren Lush had said she was ""the hottest eviction favourite so far this series"". Odds on Kenzie's victory have been slashed from 4/6 to 1/2", although bookmakers have said they are not ruling out a late rally from former Happy Mondays star Bez. The other remaining housemate is actress Brigitte Nielsen. DJ Lisa I'Anson became the third housemate to be voted out on Wednesday when she became the victim of a surprise eviction during a game of hide-and-seek on the Channel 4 show. I'Anson said she was ""glad to be out"" and predicted that Kenzie would emerge as the winner. The winner is due to be announced on Sunday night.

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"entertainment 188.txt Celebrities get their skates on Fo  
rmer England footballer Paul Gascoigne will join EastEnders' actress Scarlett Johnson on BBC One's Strictly Ice Dancing. The one-off Christmas special will also star television presenter Carol Smillie and Jessica Taylor from Liberty-X. Each celebrity will be paired with a professional skater to impress a panel of

judges and win the audience vote. The BBC is yet to confirm the final two stars who will battle it out to become Ice King or Queen. Veteran presenter Bruce Forsyth and Tess Daly will host the programme", which follows hot on the heels of the current Saturday night series Strictly Come Dancing. The celebrities will have to practise a stipulated ice dance and perform it at an ice rink with their partner. The judges will have 50% of the vote to decide who wins the contest, with the ice rink audience making up the rest of the vote. The show forms part of the BBC's festive schedule. Ice skating duo Jayne Torvill and Christopher Dean are to front a similar celebrity ice dance show for ITV, titled Stars on Thin Ice. The contestants on Stars on Thin Ice will each be paired up with a professional skater and will learn a new routine every week. At the end of the series, one celebrity will be crowned the winner.

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' entertainment 189.txt Holmes wins '2004 top TV moment' S  
printer Kelly Holmes' Olympic victory has been named the top television moment of 2004 in a BBC poll. Holmes' 800m gold medal victory beat favourite moments from drama", comedy and factual programmes, as voted by television viewers. Natasha Kaplinsky's Strictly Come Dancing win was top entertainment moment and a Little Britain breast feeding sketch won the comedy prize. The 2004 TV Moments will be shown on BBC One at 2000 GMT on Wednesday. Double gold medal winner Holmes topped the best sports moment category, beating Maria Sharapova's Wimbledon triumph and Matthew Pinsent's rowing victory at the Olympics. She then went on to take the overall prize of Golden TV Moment. The sight of former royal correspondent Jennie Bond with dozens of rats crawling over her in ITV's I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here was named best factual entertainment moment. Michael Buerk's return to Ethiopia, 20 years after originally reporting its famine, topped the factual category for BBC programme This World. Long-running soap EastEnders won the best popular drama moment title when character Dot confided in Den Watts that she was unwell.

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' entertainment 190.txt Veteran comic Cyril Fletcher dies  
Veteran comedian and broadcaster Cyril Fletcher has died aged 91 at his home in Guernsey. Fletcher will be remembered for his ""odd odes"" and amusing misprints on TV show That's Life in the 1970s and 80s", as well as a long variety career. He was also a regular on Does the Team Think?," a comic version of radio information show The Brains Trust. That's Life host Esther Rantzen said he was ""so lovely"" and a ""delight"" to work with. ""The thing about Cyril was that he was", to use a slightly old-fashioned phrase, an English gentleman, she said. He was courteous, and understated, and he adored gardens," particularly creating them for his beautiful wife. ""He was funny and witty to work with. He was a real friend and I shall miss him."" One of the last comedians of old-time variety era", Fletcher made his first TV appearance in 1937. A year after BBC Television began, he was seen reciting humorous poems, appearing in a revue, Tel e-Ho, and playing the Emperor of Morocco in the first televised pantomime, Dick Whittington. He went on to become a regular voice on radio, have a string of TV shows in the 1950s and appear in several films, including 1947's Nicholas Nickleby. He married actress Betty Astell in 1941 and in the 1950s and 60s, they produced pantos and summer shows, discovering new stars including Harry Secombe. In the mid-1990s," Fletcher said he had made a ""fabulous living"" since the age of 22 and had never had a day out of work. He was most recently seen presenting a gardening programme for Channel TV. Fletcher was described as a ""consummate

e professional"" by his friend and fellow broadcaster Michael Pointon. ""It really was a pleasure to work with him - he had met everyone and done everything", Mr Pointon said. He was a whimsical, droll fellow, but also a very artistic man. As a friend, he was very kind," and generous." Fletcher's daughter Jill said her father would be sorely missed. ""He was greatly loved by the public", she said.

entertainment 191.txt Little Britain vies for TV trophy B  
BC hits Little Britain and Strictly Come Dancing are among numerous British shows nominated for the prestigious Golden Rose television awards. Homegrown reality programmes dominated that category, including Channel 4's Supernanny and ITV1's Hell's Kitchen. EastEnders and Coronation Street were overlooked in the soap category, but Doctors and Family Affairs gained nods. The festival, which honours the best TV from around the globe, will take place in Lucerne, Switzerland from 3-8 May. Little Britain, which is now in its second series, faces competition from BBC Two's The Catherine Tate Show and Sacha Baron Cohen's creations Borat and Bruno. In the separate sitcom category, dark comedy Nighty Night - which began life on BBC Three - will do battle with mainstream BBC One show My Family. BBC One's Strictly Come Dancing, which saw celebrities compete against each other to become champions of the dancefloor, is among five British nominations in the variety category. Lenny Henry, who won a Golden Rose for his In Pictures series in 2001, picks up another nomination for his recent BBC show. British television music shows have picked up six nominations, with BBC Three's Flashmob - The Opera up against the UK Music Hall of Fame series, which was screened on Channel 4. British television has performed very well in the arts and specials category, gaining a total of 11 nominations. The BBC leads the way with its programmes on The Sound of Music, Agatha Christie and Rolf On Art - The Big Event - which saw Harris lead an effort to produce a life-size painting in London's Trafalgar Square. British shows - which picked up a total of 48 nominations - will have to overcome competition from a host of other countries, including the US, Canada, Japan and across Europe. UK nominee TV Diaries, which is shown around the world, is owned by a British company but has yet to be screened in this country. Previous UK winners have included Ant & Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway, Pop Idol, Channel 4 show Faking It and comedy duo French and Saunders, who became the first winners to receive an honorary Golden Rose. Individual performers will also be rewarded, with prizes for best comics, best sitcom actor and actress and best gameshow host. Last year actor Shane Richie won an award for his portrayal of Alfie Moon in EastEnders.

entertainment 192.txt Springer criticises Opera musical T  
alk show host Jerry Springer, whose programme inspired the controversial opera shown by the BBC, has said he would not have written it himself. The BBC received 47,000 complaints before the musical was broadcast, and protesters demonstrated outside BBC buildings across the UK. Springer helped launch the West End show and attended the opening night. I wouldn't have written it. I don't believe in making fun of other religions", he said. The TV host said he understood how people could have thought the musical had gone too far. You know, on our TV show if people use inappropriate language we bleep it out, if there's nudity we cover it up, so that viewers at home don't get to see any of this, he said. Asked whether he thought the BBC should have screened the controversial musical he said: I don't know if they should have had it on television but, good Lord, if you don't like what's on television," that's why God gave us remote controls. ""My show is about dysfunctional people and I defy anyone to watch the show and suggest to me the people on it aren't to some degree dysfunctional." "If I did a show about the war in Iraq", it wouldn't make me a warmonger," I would just be doing my job to report on the war. ""In the case of my show", it's my job

to report on the dysfunctions that take place in society." " The British-born presenter is in London to speak at a fundraising dinner for the United Jewish Israel Appeal. The dinner", on Tuesday, is expected to be attended by more than 800 guests.

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"entertainment 193.txt CSI shows give 'unrealistic view' People have unrealistic expectations of forensic science thanks to the success of the CSI TV shows", real experts say. Evidence submitted to forensic labs has shot up as a result of the programmes, at a time when many have large backlog s, science investigators claim. Lawyers also fear the effect because jurors have a distorted view of how forensic evidence is used. The issue was discussed at a major science conference in Washington DC. Crime Scene Investigation (CSI) and its spin-offs, CSI: Miami and CSI: New York, have proven exceptionally popular with audiences on both sides of the Atlantic. Each episode," a team of forensic investigators goes about solving a crime through the ingenious appliance of science - and the extensive resources at their disposal. " "The CSI effect is basically the perception of the near-infallibility of forensic science in response to the TV show", " said Max Houck, who runs a forensic science graduate course at West Virginia University, US. This TV show comes on and everyone starts watching it - including the cops and prosecutors - and submissions to forensic laboratories go through the roof", " he told the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). The American forensics expert said there were roughly 200,000-300,000 backlogged DNA samples in US labs. Yet these constituted just 10% of the total test backlog, said Dr Houck. Forensic pathologist Dr Patricia McFeeley said she had started to see the show's influence in dealing with the families of victims. What I find is that families now are more dissatisfied with the investigation than was previously the case", she explained. For example, on television, the toxicology results are available almost instantaneously. But when people find out that it can take several months," they can find that very difficult." " Dr McFeeley added that the accuracy with which forensic investigators can determine time of death was far lower than most people's perceptions. The show's influence can follow forensic investigators all the way into the courtroom", " making lawyers jittery. " "Prosecutors fear the CSI effect with juries because", for example, they wonder: 'why wasn't everything tested?' Well, in fact, not everything needs to be tested," Dr Houck explained. Defence attorneys also worry about the CSI effect because they think that jurors come in and have this view of science as a juggernaut; this objective method that's always accurate." " However", " he admitted the show had had positive as well as negative effects on the field. " "My university course started with four graduates in 1999; we're now the largest major on campus - with 400 students", " he said. Dr Houck added that there was an urgent need for better funding of forensic science at the university level: There's more money spent in this country on holistic medicine than there is on forensic science research." "

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"entertainment 194.txt Ethnic producers 'face barriers' M inority ethnic led (Mel) production companies face barriers in succeeding in the film and television industries", research has suggested. The study, commissioned by Pact and the UK Film Council, included interviews with industry experts and individuals. They indicated that career progression and a lack of role models are among the main problems within such companies. The research indicated that about 10% of independent production companies in the UK are minority ethnic led. A minority ethnic led company is defined as one in which the majority of

decision-making power rests with an individual or individuals from a minority ethnic group. The report also explored the problems faced by such companies when attempting to compete within the film and TV industries. It said they are often smaller than other companies and lack the resources, so are often squeezed out of the market by bigger firms. The research recommended that minority ethnic led companies could benefit from such positive actions as career training and business advice," plus improved communication within the film and TV sectors. "The UK has a rich and diverse culture and it is essential that it is reflected on film and television", said Arts minister Estelle Morris of the findings. I welcome this report which I hope will lead to more doors being opened and all businesses in our film and television industries being given the same opportunities."

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"entertainment 195.txt US TV special for tsunami relief A  
US television network will screen a celebrity TV special to benefit the tsunami relief effort in South Asia. NBC will encourage viewer donations during an hour-long show featuring musical performances on 15 January. Actress Sandra Bullock has donated \$1m (£525,000) to The American Red Cross and actor Leonardo DiCaprio pledged a "sizable" aid contribution to Unicef. Meanwhile 70 Hong Kong music and movie stars re-recorded We Are the World in Mandarin and Cantonese to raise funds. The song will not be released as a single", but will be played regularly during a Chinese telethon on Friday in aid of victims of the Boxing Day disaster. Around 140,000 people were killed and five million left homeless or without food and water after an earthquake below the Indian Ocean sent waves crashing into coastal communities in 11 countries. The United Nations warned that the number killed in the disaster could rise sharply, with aid yet to reach some remote areas. Performers have yet to be confirmed for NBC's aid relief benefit later this month. It follows a two-hour telethon carried by all four major US television networks 10 days after the 11 September terror attacks in 2001. America: A Tribute to Heroes raised more than \$150m (£79m) to help victims of the suicide attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon.

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"entertainment 196.txt Gervais writing Simpsons episode T  
he Office's Ricky Gervais is writing an episode of hit US cartoon The Simpsons", following an invitation from its creator Matt Groening. Gervais has already begun writing the script but is keeping its subject matter a closely guarded secret. He will also write a part for himself in the episode. ""I've got the rough idea but this is the most intimidating project of my career. The Simpsons is the greatest TV show of all time", he said. Groening recently heaped praise on The Office, saying: Everybody on The Simpsons is a fan of The Office - it's one of the best shows on TV in the last decade." Gervais has already said he would not guest star in the show as his Office character David", having left him behind for good in the Christmas specials. The Office became a surprise US success when it was screened on cable channel BBC America. The first series won two Golden Globes in 2004 for best comedy and best TV actor for Gervais. In winning it beat the likes of Sex and the City and Will and Grace. An American version was produced, but so far only a pilot has been broadcast - to much criticism that it failed to live up to the original. At the British Comedy Awards on Wednesday, Gervais was handed a special achievement award for writing. But The Office missed out in the best comedy show category to Little Britain. Matt Groening was also at the awards to collect the award for best international comedy for The

Simpsons.

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"entertainment 197.txt John Peel replacement show begins  
The permanent replacement for late DJ John Peel's BBC Radio 1 show goes on air on Tuesday", with three hosts chosen to fill the legendary presenter's slot. Rock DJ Huw Stephens will go on air in the 2300 slot every Tuesday," with black music champion Ras Kwame on Wednesdays and dance DJ Rob Da Bank on Thursdays. Rob Da Bank filled in after Peel had a heart attack aged 65 in October. All three will play ""diverse"," unpredictable and non-commercial"" songs under the banner of the OneMusic show. Radio 1 said the station was not trying to replace Peel"," but would rise to the ""challenge"" of ""keeping his legacy alive"" with unpredictable music. The three DJs were chosen for their ""in-depth musical knowledge across a variety of musical genres""", the station said. Rob Da Bank is one of the hosts of The Blue Room, an early morning weekend show which plays electronic and dance music. Huw Stephens has been one half of the Thursday night show Bethan and Huw in Wales, which explores new music, especially up-and-coming acts in Wales. And Ras Kwame is host of 100% Homegrown on Radio 1's digital station 1Xtra, dedicated to showcasing the best hip-hop and garage. Another change to the station line-up will see Sara Cox return after maternity leave. She will host the lunchtime show on Saturdays from this week. Good luck to all three of them, not one DJ could fill Peels boots so it's probably a good idea to get them all contributing. This time next year I hope we are saying how well these DJs have done, but I fear this time next year we will really realise how much John Peel will be forever missed. Very good idea to continue the legacy without attempting to replace John Peel. Also, there will surely be a wider spectrum for international music as three top radio DJs unite under the One World name. Congratulations! The whole glory of John Peel was the fact he was not committed to one genre. He played what he liked across the range of music.... this is not going to be the same, and all they seem to be doing is what they already have. Bring back Steve Lamacq. The obvious heir to John Peel is the marvellous, wonderful and talented Claire Kember from totallyradio.com. This lady is young and fresh and is one of the most knowledgeable and likeable people in British broadcasting today. Everyone who listens to her show understands and compares her to the legendary John Peel. BBC Radio should seek out the real talent from internet radio stations, people who are making a real impact on the world of music and the world in general.

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"entertainment 198.txt Brookside actress Keaveney dies Ac  
tress Anna Keaveney", who appeared in Brookside, My Family and A Touch of Frost, has died of lung cancer aged 55. Keaveney, who played Brookside's Marie Jackson when the Channel 4 soap began in 1982, died on Saturday. Born in Runcorn, Cheshire, she also starred in numerous films including 1989's Shirley Valentine. She played Nellie in Mike Leigh's latest film Vera Drake, which won the Golden Lion prize for best film at this year's Venice Film Festival. And most recently she appeared alongside Richard Wilson in ITV's King of Frides and with Martin Clunes in Doc Martin. Other TV appearances included the part of Matron in ITV drama Footballers' Wives and a cameo role as Tom Farrell's mother Sheila in BBC comedy Gimme Gimme Gimme. Keaveney's career also included stage performances in Neaptide for the National Theatre," Private Lives and The Rise and Fall of Little Voice. The actress died in hospital. Her agent Barry Brown said: ""Anna was due to have had another operation on Friday but unfortunately she was too weak.""

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"entertainment 199.txt 1.8m indecency fine for Viacom  
Media giant Viacom has paid out \$3.5m (£1.8m) to end investigations into indecency in its US radio and TV shows. The settlement to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) ends a long-running saga dating back to 2001. The FCC was looking into 50 shows", including those by "shock jock" Howard Stern and two New York DJs. Stern recently announced he was leaving Viacom while the two DJs were sacked after their show featured a couple purporting to have sex in a church. After the church incident two years ago Viacom agreed to install audio delay equipment at its radio stations that broadcast live programming. It also agreed to train its broadcasters and employees about indecency laws. The agreement cancels investigations into about 50 radio and television shows", said Richard Diamond, FCC deputy secretary of communications. The shows were broadcast by Viacom-owned stations across the United States. Viacom has five days to pay the \$3.5m fine, according to the agreement. The payment is not related to the FCC's \$550,000 (£293,000) fine levied against Viacom after the exposure of singer Janet Jackson's breast during the CBS Super Bowl halftime show in January. Viacom is contesting that fine. It is not the first time that Viacom has paid out over indecency charges. Infinity Broadcasting, which is owned by Viacom, paid cumulative fines totalling \$1.7m (£907,000) in 1995 to settle FCC violations by Stern.  
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"entertainment 200.txt Celebrities get to stay in jungle  
All four contestants still remain in I'm A Celebrity ... Get Me Out Of Here as no evictions were made on the television show on Saturday. Contestants Paul Burrell", Joe Pasquale, Janet Street-Porter and Fran Cosgrave were told by hosts Ant and Dec. Natalie Appleton's decision to quit the show last Monday had given them all a stay of execution, the group were told. Model Sophie Anderton was the last person to be voted off the ITV1 show, set in the Australian jungle. The four remaining stars will do a joint Bushtucker Trial on Sunday. Former All Saints singer Natalie Appleton, 31, walked out of the show after learning she would face a fifth so-called Bushtucker Trial. The celebrities are chosen by the viewers to pass trials in order to win food for the rest of the camp. Appleton had endured a torrid time during the programme, including a well-publicised row with Sophie Anderton. And on 26 November singer Brian Harvey quit as a contestant after he had a blazing row with Janet Street-Porter.  
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"entertainment 201.txt Triple triumph for Little Britain  
Top TV cult hit Little Britain has triumphed over The Office at the 15th annual British Comedy Awards. The BBC show beat The Office Christmas Special in the best TV comedy category and took the people's choice award. Matt Lucas and David Walliams also jointly won best TV comedy actor over The Office creator Ricky Gervais", who won a special award for writing. It was also a good night for Ant and Dec who clinched two awards, including best comedy entertainment personality. The Geordie duo also secured best comedy entertainment programme for Saturday Night Takeaway, beating I'm A Celebrity... Get Me Out Of Here!, which they also host, and the BBC's Have I Got News For You. The ceremony was presented by Jonathan Ross from ITV's London Studios headquarters on the capital's South Bank. Little Britain began life as a radio series on Radio 4, with Walliams and Lucas playing a range of misfit characters from an alternative Britain. It was later commissioned for BBC Three, where it proved a huge success, with the second series also shown on BBC One. After receiving his award for best TV comedy acto

r with Walliams," Lucas said: ""It's a great honour to be nominated alongside Ricky Gervais and Martin Clunes."" The show also won the people's choice award", which is the only gong on the night voted for by viewers. Speaking after receiving the award for best comedy," Walliams said: ""It was a real shock but I don't think we deserved to beat The Office which is a great show and more than just a comedy. It's a beautiful piece of work."" Gervais and The Office co-writer Stephen Merchant received a special award for writing", presented by Noel Gallagher and Tom Stoppard. Gervais said: ""The show has won an awful lot of awards in the last couple of years", too much. It's got embarrassing to be honest." Other winners at the awards included Caroline Quentin", who took home best TV comedy actress for Life Begins and Von Trapped. Catherine Tate, from The Catherine Tate Show, was also nominated for the same award, but she did walk away with best comedy newcomer, over James McAvoy from Shameless (Channel 4) and Julian Barratt and Noel Fielding from The Mighty Boosh (BBC Three). Nighty Night was named Britain's best new TV comedy over ITV1 shows Doc Martin and Life Begins. But Doc Martin won best TV comedy drama, over Jonathan Creek (BBC One) and Shameless. Winner in the best international comedy category was The Simpsons, beating Sex and the City and Curb Your Enthusiasm. The prize was accepted by Matt Groening, creator of The Simpsons, who also received an outstanding contribution award from scientist Stephen Hawking, who has been featured in the series. School of Rock was voted best comedy film beating Shaun of the Dead and Shrek 2. Matt Lucas & David Walliams (Little Britain, BBC Three) Caroline Quentin (Life Begins/ Von Trapped, ITV1) Ant & Dec (Ant & Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway/ I'm A Celebrity, Get Me Out Of Here!, ITV1) Catherine Tate (The Catherine Tate Show, BBC Two) Nighty Night (Baby Cow Productions, BBC Three) Little Britain (BBC Three) Doc Martin (Buffalo Productions, ITV1) Ant & Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway (Granada, ITV1) The Simpsons (Twentieth Century Fox, BBC Two/Sky One/Channel 4) School Of Rock

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"entertainment 202.txt BBC 'should allow more scrutiny' M  
Ps have urged the BBC to give watchdogs more freedom to scrutinise how £2bn in licence fee money is spent. The Public Accounts Committee called for the National Audit Office to be given a ""free hand"" to investigate how the BBC offers value for money. Although six areas are to be opened up to scrutiny the audit office should have more power to choose what it investigated", the MPs said. The call was made in a report into the BBC's Freeview digital service. ""Our aim is not to rewrite the storyline of EastEnders but simply to ensure that the BBC is as accountable to parliament as any other organisation spending public money", said the committee chairman, MP Edward Leigh. The BBC's spending is not subject to the full independent scrutiny", and accountability to parliament. ""Parliament requires television owners to pay a licence fee and expects the comptroller and auditor general", on behalf of parliament, to be able to scrutinise how that money, over £2 billion a year," is used." A BBC spokeswoman said: ""We share the committee's interest in ensuring the public money we receive is spent well. Though in its infancy", we think the arrangements with the NAO are working well and should be given time to mature." The report said the Freeview digital service has had an ""impressive"" take up since its launch but the BBC must still dispel confusion about the service. The committee found the BBC had succeeded in ensuring subscription-free access to digital channels following the collapse of ITV Digital in 2002. But the fact that one in four homes could not access Freeview remained a problem. The report said that while gaps in the coverage were largely due to landscape issues", there was need for detailed explanations on the Freeview website and on promotional literature as to why it was

not available in specific areas. The government has proposed switch off of the analogue television signal, with 2012 the most recently proposed date. The BBC launched Freeview in 2002 as an alternative to satellite subscription services such as Sky, to allow its digital channels such as BBC Three and News 24 to be seen. There have been an estimated five million Freeview set-top boxes sold since the launch and prices have fallen considerably. The corporation plans to spend up to £138m on Freeview before 2014 to ensure people can receive the service throughout the UK, and are aware of it.

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"entertainment 203.txt Greer attacks 'bully' Big Brother  
Germaine Greer has criticised Celebrity Big Brother's ""bullying"" of housemates after quitting the reality TV show. She said ""superior"" bullying tactics", like making housemates cold and hungry," could encourage playground bullying. She also condemned the ""complete irresponsibility"" of adding Brigitte Nielsen's former mother-in-law Jackie Stallone to the house on Monday. Nielsen had panicked that if she reacted badly it could harm her access to her children", Greer said. The feminist writer and broadcaster said Big Brother had behaved ""like a child rather than a parent"" by taunting contestant John McCririck after denying him a cola drink. ""I thought it was actually demonstrating the role of taunting in the playground and there are so many children whose lives have actually been destroyed by taunting in the playground", Greer said. She also said that her fellow housemates had publicity-seeking agendas"". ""I had no idea who would be in here and it's wrong for me to present myself in the same context as they are." Media observers had been surprised by Greer's initial decision to join the third celebrity version of the Channel 4 reality TV show", given that she has written critical articles about the format in the past. As she packed her suitcase to leave the house she told fellow housemates: ""I'm leaving over specific issues", but best for everyone if I don't discuss them. ""I have a problem with decisions", I make them fast and when I make them," I stick to them." Greer had earlier failed to persuade other contestants to stage a naked protest against Big Brother. Other celebrities to walk out of a reality show TV include Sex Pistol John Lydon", former EastEnders actress Danniella Westbrook and ex-E17 singer Brian Harvey who all left I'm A Celebrity... Get Me Out Of Here. Previous Big Brother housemates to leave before their time were Sunita Sharma and Sandy Cumming from the third series of the non-celebrity version of the show. VOTE Was Germaine Greer right to leave Celebrity Big Brother? Yes No Results are indicative and may not reflect public opinion Happy Mondays dancer Bez is now 2-1 favourite to win the show," followed by Blazin' Squad singer Kenzie at 5-2 and actor Jeremy Edwards at 4-1. Ladbrokes spokesman Warren Lush said that the series was still ""wide open""", adding that the last 24 hours had also seen a rush of bets on McCririck slashing his odds to 8-1. DJ Lisa I'Anson is the outsider with odds of 40-1, while Jackie Stallone, who joined the house on Monday, is also one of the less popular housemates at 20-1. The first eviction of the series has now been postponed after Greer's exit unexpectedly reduced the number of competitors. The eight remaining contestants are competing for a £50,000 prize, to be donated to the charity of their choice, if they survive a series of public votes. For every 50p vote cast by viewers by telephone or text during the programme's run, 9p will go to a tsunami charity appeal.

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"entertainment 204.txt No charges against TV's Cosby US comedian Bill Cosby will not face charges stemming from an allegation of sexual misconduct. Authorities in Philadelphia said they found insufficient evidence

to support the woman's allegations regarding an alleged incident in January 2004. The woman reported the allegations to Canadian authorities last month. Cosby's lawyer", Walter M Phillips Jr," said the comedian was pleased with the decision. ""He looks forward to moving on with his life", he said. District Attorney Bruce L Castor Jr, who was in charge of the case, said that detectives could find no instance where anyone complained to law enforcement of conduct which would constitute a criminal offence. He also said that the fact the woman waited a year before coming forward", and she had had further contact with Cosby during that time, were also factors in his decision. The unidentified woman's lawyer, Dolores M Troiani," said her client was likely to sue the comedian. ""I think that's the only avenue open to her. She felt", as we did," that it's a very strong case and she was telling the truth."" She also said that the woman supplied further evidence to prosecutors that she believed strengthened her allegations. Cosby emerged as one of the first black comics to have mainstream success in the US. He was a successful stand-up before hosting the children's show Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids", and starring in The Cosby Show, one of the biggest sitcoms of the 1980s.

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"entertainment 205.txt Wife Swap makers sue US 'copycat'  
The British producers of US Wife Swap are taking legal action against a show they claim is ""a blatant and wholesale copycat"" of their programme. RDF Media", which makes the show for US network ABC, has filed a damages claim for \$18 million (£9.25 million) against Fox's Trading Spouses. ABC bought the rights to the British show, which was first aired in 2003 and became a hit on Channel 4. The US network is not part of the claim," but has supported RDF's action. ""We respect our producing partners' right to protect their intellectual property in whatever manner they deem most appropriate", said ABC in a statement. A spokesman for Fox said it had not seen the details of the legal action and could not comment. Their show was first screened in June, and was criticised in the press for its similarities to Wife Swap. ABC originally planned to call their programme Trading Moms, but changed it to avoid confusion with the Fox version. Earlier this year, the NBC network claimed that Fox's boxing show The Next Great Champ had been hurriedly produced to ensure its programme was the first to be screened. NBC alleged that boxing regulations had been violated, but failed in their attempt to have the show pulled. The Fox show proved a ratings flop, while NBC's The Contender is due to begin in February.

"entertainment 206.txt Show over for MTV's The Osbournes R  
ock star Ozzy Osbourne has said his family will not make any more episodes of reality TV show The Osbournes. At the end of it I didn't like having cameras around the house all the time", the Black Sabbath singer told reporters at the MTV Europe Awards in Rome. His wife Sharon, who also appears in the popular MTV show based on the Osbournes' family life, agreed. Now everybody's doing reality shows. He's done it", he's been there, he's got to do something else, she said. Ozzy Osbourne said he had had enough of the work involved in making the series. When you watch a 25-minute episode, I've been filming all day," he said. Sharon Osbourne is currently appearing as a judge and mentor in ITV1 talent show The X-Factor alongside Simon Cowell and Louis Walsh. Earlier this year she topped a poll of the most important people in rock, for her part in guiding the career of husband Ozzy and her family. She was the driving force behind The Osbournes, which ran for three series, earning the family a reported \$85m (£46m). The renewed popularity for Ozzy has seen sales of his merchandise hit the \$50m (£27.2m) mark, a record for a heavy metal artist. Sales of T-shirts, accessories and action figures have rocketed since The Osbournes hit screens. At its peak, The Osb

ourne's had a regular audience of eight million, with America's TV Guide magazine describing the series as a cross between The Simpsons and This Is Spinal Tap". Osbourne himself was at a loss to explain its popularity: ""I suppose Americans get a kick out of watching a crazy Brit family like us make complete fools of ourselves every week.""

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"entertainment 207.txt Jungle TV show ratings drop by 4m  
The finale of ITV1's I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here drew an average of 10.9m viewers - about four million fewer than the previous series. The fourth series of the show peaked on Monday at 11.9m and 49.2% of the audience", just before Joe Pasquale won. This compared with a peak of 15.3m at and a record 62.2% of the TV audience when Kerry McFadden won in February. Comic Pasquale beat former Royal butler Paul Burrell who came second, nightclub owner Fran Cosgrave, who was third. Pasquale follows Kerry McFadden, Phil Tufnell and Tony Blackburn as winners of the show. Singer and TV presenter McFadden was the show's first female winner. When cricketer Phil Tufnell won in May 2003, 12.3 million people - 50% of the viewing public - tuned in to watch. And when Tony Blackburn won the first show in 2002, 10.9 million people saw the show. Pasquale had been the show's hottest ever favourite to win, and its hosts Anthony McPartlin and Declan Donnelly, known as Ant and Dec, said Monday's deciding vote was the closest in the programme's history. Pasquale has been flooded with offers of TV work, according to his management company, but one of his first jobs on his return is pantomime. Before joining I'm a Celebrity, he had signed up to play Jack in Jack and the Beanstalk in Birmingham," and tickets for the show have become increasingly popular since he joined the TV show. His manager Robert Voice said: ""We've had interest from different TV producers. Some are for comedy shows", some are new-type projects. ""There are a number of things Joe wants to do. He is very ambitious. ""He wants to play the West End and do different things other than straightforward comedy. We are talking to a couple of West End producers about a musical.""

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"entertainment 208.txt Duran Duran show set for US TV Char  
rt stars Duran Duran are to appear in a VH1 special in the US including interviews and concert footage. The show airs on Tuesday and will feature a studio performance", behind the scenes footage and fan interviews. ""They seemed like a perfect fit with our audience", said Rick Krim, VH1's vice president of music and talent. The band recently released a new album, Astronaut, the first from the original line-up since 1983. They will also tour Japan and the US next year. When we started playing together", we didn't try and make a really sort of mature album. We just really wanted to make a great Duran Duran album," said keyboard player Nick Rhodes. It's pretty much in line with a lot of stuff out there. ""Duran Duran are currently promoting the album's second single", What Happens Tomorrow. Simon Le Bon said earlier this year that the group were not trying to update their sound too much. ""We wouldn't want to lose them [older fans] by trying too hard by trying to connect with a new audience", the singer said. Le Bon also said the five members were getting on very well. We're like any people who get very close. Sometimes you argue with each other. But the fact is we inspire each other musically. ""Nobody else does it for me", he said. It's just very special.""

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"entertainment 209.txt US show sued for rat-eating stunt

A US TV network is being sued for \$2.5m (£1.3m) by a viewer who says he was disgusted by watching contestants eat dead rats in a stunt show. Austin Aitken is taking action against NBC over its programme Fear Factor. He said watching the show caused his blood pressure to rise so high that he became dizzy and light-headed. The legal assistant said NBC was ""sending the wrong message to viewers that cash can make or have people do just about anything beyond reasoning"". The hand-written, four-page lawsuit said: ""To have the individuals on the show eat and drink dead rats was crazy and from a viewer's point of view made me throw-up as well as another in the house at the same time."" Mr Aitken", who lives in Cleveland, said that after becoming light-headed, he ran towards the bedroom and knocked his head in a doorway. A spokesman for NBC said it had no comment on the lawsuit, but confirmed the stunt show did feature a rat-eating scene in New York's Times Square on 8 November. Past shows have featured viewers eating spiders and live worms. The programme has been screened in the UK on Sky One.

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"entertainment 210.txt Muslim group attacks TV drama 24 A British Muslim group has criticised the new series of US drama 24", which is about to be aired on Sky One, claiming it portrays Islam unfairly. The Muslim Council of Britain has complained to broadcasting watchdog Ofcom. It says the programme breaches editorial guidelines. The group's members met with Sky executives on Tuesday after viewing previews of the first five episodes. The drama, now in its fourth series," begins on Sunday evening. The new series portrays a Muslim family as a sleeper terrorist cell. The Muslim Council of Britain said in a statement: ""We are greatly concerned by the unremittingly hostile and unbalanced portrayal of Muslims in this series of 24 based upon a preview of the first five episodes that we have seen." "There is not a single positive Muslim character in the storyline to date. At a time when negative stereotypes of Muslims are on the increase we feel that Sky - as a major UK broadcaster - has a responsibility to challenge these insidious views," not help to reinforce them." But Sky denied the programme breached broadcasting guidelines. A spokesperson said: ""During a useful meeting yesterday," Sky listened to the concerns raised by representatives of the council. Sky does not believe that the episodes that it has reviewed to date breach Ofcom's programme code." Fox TV", which shows the series in the US, is broadcasting public service announcements showing Muslims in a positive light after complaints about the series.

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"entertainment 211.txt Brookside creator's Channel 4 bid The creator of defunct TV soap Brookside has written to the culture minister to offer to buy Channel 4. Phil Redmond", now chairman of Mersey TV, told Tessa Jowell he would run it with its current remit intact for the next 10 years. But media watchdog Ofcom has said the the commercially funded public service broadcaster will not be privatised. A spokesman for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport said there were no plans to sell the channel. He added that primary legislation would be required for the station to be sold off, which the government was not intending to introduce. Brookside was axed in 2003 after its ratings slumped from a peak of seven million to just 1.5 million. Redmond also brought teen soap Hollyoaks to Channel 4 and created Grange Hill, the school-based drama serial which was first broadcast on BBC One in 1978. He was awarded the CBE for services to drama earlier this year.

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"entertainment 212.txt Little Britain two top comic list

Little Britain stars Matt Lucas and David Walliams have been named the most powerful people in TV comedy", in a poll by listings magazine Radio Times. The duo kept Phoenix Nights creator Peter Kay at number two and The Office star Ricky Gervais in third place. A Radio Times panel compiled the list, taking the comedians' critical acclaim and financial success into account. Newcomers to the annual list included Nighty Night star Julia Davis at seven and Black Books' Tamsin Greig at 19. Lucas and Walliams won numerous awards for Little Britain in 2004, including National Television, Royal Television Society and British Comedy awards. More than 1.8 million people watched the first episode of the latest series of Little Britain on BBC Three in October, giving the digital channel its highest rating ever. They topped the Radio Times list after rising from 10th position last year. Other big risers over the past year included presenting duo Ant and Dec at five, up from 13 in 2004, Stephen Fry rising nine places to 15 and BBC Three controller Stuart Murphy, who moves to number 18 from 32 last year. Last year's winner, chat show host Graham Norton, fell to number 16 following relatively few television appearances in 2004. Production companies also featured in the top 50, including Steve Coogan's Baby Cow, which created Nighty Night among others, Hat Trick - behind The Kumars at Number 42 - and The Vicar of Dibley production company Tiger Aspect.

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"entertainment 213.txt TV show unites Angolan families An golan families who are attempting to track each other down", after being separated by nearly 30 years of war, are succeeding thanks to a hugely popular TV show. Meeting Point has become one of TV Angola's most watched programmes, and has reunited hundreds of families. It runs daily, not only on the television but also on the radio. Every Friday, hundreds of people gather in Luanda's Independence Square to record a message in front of the TV cameras," in the hope that a lost relative will see it. Many relatives have been reunited on air. ""At the beginning there was an absolute explosion - huge", huge crowds," Sergio Gera, the programme's chief co-ordinator, told BBC World Service's Assignment programme. Now things are a little calmer", there are slightly less people - but, after two and a half years of broadcasting," there are still a lot of people going." The media in the southern African country", twice the size of France, has been gripped by the quest of so many people to find their relatives. Hundreds of thousands of people died in Angola's 30-year civil war, which finally ended in 2002, and tens of thousands of people are still missing. Many have not heard anything for 10 or more years - in all, 90% of Angolan families have lost someone. The idea of recording in Independence Square was modelled on a square in the Argentine capital Buenos Aires, where mothers go to talk about the dead and the missing, and to exchange news. One woman, Victoria Lapete," found her sister - the only remaining member of her family - in Independence Square live on Meeting Point. She had not seen her sibling for 28 years. ""When we saw each other", we threw ourselves into each other's arms, she told Assignment. We started to cry. I felt very, very happy," because I'd spent so long without any family. Suddenly I had a sister again." However", Angola is one of the poorest countries in Africa, and the number of people with access to either a television or radio is comparatively few. This means that elsewhere in the country, the task of reuniting families lies primarily with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). In the city of Wambo, the ICRC runs the Gazette - a 200-page, tabloid-size book which contains 13,000 names of missing or displaced. Their task is made much harder by the huge number of landmines dotted around the country. ""It's very difficult - there are many displaced"," stated Joaquim Sahundi, head of tracing in Wambo. As they try to go back [home]", others are trying to reloc

ate their relatives. Many people are getting injured because of that - in the villages, in the bush," there has been no clearance of mines. ""When people are crossing these areas," they step on mines." The ICRC also uses the media where it can", running four daily broadcasts of their lists of the missing on Radio Angola. Meanwhile," there remain massive challenges to Angolan families even once they are reunited. ""The programme of family reunification is extremely important", but for these families to remain reunified, there has to be social integration, job access, education, healthcare," said Rafael Marques of the pro-democracy George Soros Foundation for Southern Africa. Essentially the government is waiting for the international community to pay for the reconstruction - that's why it has been persistently calling for a donor's conference. That is just a way of detaching itself from its political responsibilities.""

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"entertainment 214.txt Volcano drama erupts on BBC One Supervolcano", a docu-drama about a volcanic eruption in Yellowstone National Park in the US, is among the highlights on the BBC One this winter. The £178m winter schedule also includes the return of Doctor Who and a drama about Angela Cannings, who was wrongly convicted of killing two of her babies. Sarah Lancashire and Timothy Spall will star in the real-life drama, Cherished. ITV also unveiled their festive season on Tuesday, which includes Stephen Fry in a remake of Tom Brown's Schooldays. Supervolcano, follows in the footsteps of last year's Pompeii, which drew 10 million viewers to BBC One in October 2003. The programme merges science, drama and computer imagery to reveal what could happen if Yellowstone - home to the only currently active supervolcano in the world - were to erupt again. BBC Two will run a two-part documentary, The Science Behind Supervolcano, in conjunction with the transmission. Other educational highlights include a documentary about infamous Mongolian warrior Genghis Khan and Grandchild of The Holocaust. Grandchild of The Holocaust, part of the BBC commitment to Holocaust Memorial Day, follows Adrian, 13, on a journey to uncover the truth about what happened to his grandmother in Auschwitz and Belsen. New drama includes Archangel, an adaptation of the Robert Harris best-seller, which stars Daniel Craig on the trail of Stalin's diaries in Communist Russia. And Sarah Waters' gets her second adaptation on BBC One with Imelda Staunton and Charles Dance lined up to star in Fingersmith. The adaptation, about a conman in Victorian England, will make an interesting contrast to Julie Burchill's Sugar Rush - a lesbian teenage drama part of Channel Four's winter season. On a lighter note, Jessica Stevenson will star in new BBC One sitcom, The World According to Bex, penned by My Family creator Fred Barron and the Two Ronnies return for a celebration of their classic comedy series. Fry's portrayal of headmaster Dr Arnold dominates a muted Christmas schedule on ITV1, which sees the channel retreat from broadcasting blockbuster movies in favour of extended soap episodes and popular quiz shows. Sir Paul McCartney, wife Heather Mills and Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson will join a celebrity edition of Who Wants to be a Millionaire? on Christmas Day. Also on Christmas Day, John Nettles will return in a one-off edition of Midsomer Murders, while two episodes of the new Miss Marple drama will air over the festive period. Films on ITV1 include Gus Van Sant's Finding Forrester, starring Sean Connery, and classics such as Mary Poppins, Star Wars and The Good, the Bad and the Ugly. In contrast, BBC's Christmas season includes terrestrial debuts of the first Harry Potter film, Shrek and Steven Spielberg's AI, as well as new episodes of the Vicar of Dibley and the final Auf Wiedersehen, Pet.

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"entertainment 215.txt South Bank Awards honour hit soap Coronation Street has become the first soap to triumph at the South Bank Show Awards", which traditionally reward highbrow and groundbreaking culture. The soap beat fellow ITV1 show Filthy Love and Channel 4's Shameless to win the best TV drama prize on Thursday. Little Britain was named best comedy while Franz Ferdinand beat Morrissey and The Libertines to the music award. Shane Meadows' Dead Man's Shoes picked up the best film award, beating Shaun of the Dead and My Summer of Love. The two award ceremonies reflect the achievements the industry believes have been made in the last year. In 2004, Coronation Street pulled away from its BBC One rival EastEnders in the ratings and dominated other TV awards. Last year, the South Bank Award for best TV drama went to Steven Poliakoff's period piece The Lost Prince, while Bloody Sunday, about the 1972 killings in Northern Ireland, won in 2003. In other South Bank categories, Little Britain's second series beat Nighty Night and The Green Wing to the comedy trophy while Alan Bennett's The History Boys won in the theatre category. Author David Mitchell made up for losing out in the Booker Prize to Alan Hollinghurst by beating him to the literary award with his book Cloud Atlas. Shameless, State Of Play and Clocking Off creator Paul Abbott got a lifetime achievement award while former Grange Hill actress Amma Asante won the breakthrough award for writing and directing her first film, A Way Of Life.

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"entertainment 216.txt Housewives lift Channel 4 ratings The debut of US television hit Desperate Housewives has helped lift Channel 4's January audience share by 12% compared to last year. Other successes such as Celebrity Big Brother and The Simpsons have enabled the broadcaster to surpass BBC2 for the first month since last July. However the channel's share of the audience fell from 11.2% to 9.6% last month in comparison with January 2004. Celebrity Big Brother attracted less viewers than its 2002 series. Comedy drama Desperate Housewives managed to pull in five million viewers at one point during its run to date", attracting a quarter of the television audience. The two main television channels, BBC1 and ITV1, have both seen their monthly audience share decline in a year on year comparison for January, while Five's proportion remained the same at a slender 6.3%. Digital multi-channel TV is continuing to be the strongest area of growth, with the BBC reporting Freeview box ownership of five million, including one million sales in the last portion of 2004. Its share of the audience soared by 20% in January 2005 compared with last year, and currently stands at an average of 28.6%.

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"entertainment 217.txt Baywatch dubbed 'worst TV import' Surf show Baywatch has won the title of worst TV import of all time in a poll of UK television executives. The programme", which starred David Hasselhoff and Pamela Anderson during its 12-year run, was shown in 140 countries at its height. Model Anna Nicole Smith's reality show and The Dukes of Hazzard were runner-ups in the Broadcast magazine survey. The Simpsons and Dallas and 24 were among the magazine's list of the best all-time imports from the US. Soap operas Knots Landing, Falcon Crest plus The Bold And The Beautiful all made the top 10 of Transatlantic TV howlers. The Jerry Springer Show, which came in at sixth on the list," did not fare well. Broadcast magazine said: ""British TV never realised how low it could go before Jerry showed the way." Baywatch rose to the top of the list for having ""mind-numbingly predictable scripts: beachgoer is saved from drowning", according to the magazine. Just inside the all-time worst top 10 came Extreme Makeover, which sees members of the public given thousands of p

ounds worth of plastic surgery. Other American shows which won praise were The X-Files, I Love Lucy, Twin Peaks and Star Trek.

entertainment 218.txt Stern dropped from radio stations C  
ontroversial DJ Howard Stern has been dropped from four US radio stations because he keeps promoting his move to a network broadcasting on satellite. Citadel Broadcasting said Stern had transformed his show into a continuous infomercial promoting Sirius", "his new satellite radio employer". Stern will join the Sirius subscription service", which is not governed by US regulators, next year. Citadel pulled Stern's show from stations in New York and Pennsylvania. Stern had been holiday for two weeks but his show did not return to the four stations as expected on 3 January. Citadel said it did not yet know whether it would return to its network. Stern announced in October that he was leaving conventional radio, where his syndicated show goes out across the US, for the relatively restriction-free satellite service. The DJ's broadcasts are well known for landing in trouble with regulators for obscene and sexually explicit rantings. Stern was dropped by six stations owned by media giant Clear Channel in 2004 after it had to pay the Federal Communications Commission \$1.75m (£950,000), over breaches indecency laws. Media giant Viacom has also reportedly agreed to the FCC's demands that if Stern is issued with another indecency violation then his show must be pulled from all of its stations. Viacom has also been hit with record fines of \$3.5m (£1.8m) over Stern and two other New York DJs. But Stern continues to be one of the most popular talk show hosts, particularly in the 25-54 age category.

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"entertainment 219.txt US TV host Clark suffers stroke Ve  
teran US television host Dick Clark is in hospital in Los Angeles after suffering a mild stroke. The 75-year-old presented long-running show American Bandstand from 1956-87 and has since hosted game shows and produced award ceremonies. Clark is scheduled to welcome in the New Year on the ABC network", "a job he has done for 33 years. The presenter said that he is ""hopeful"" of getting better in time to lead the festivities in New York's Times Square. Clark's publicist Paul Shefrin said the television host was ""recovering"" and there was no cause for alarm. Clark", who produces the Golden Globe and American Music Awards, disclosed last year that he was suffering from diabetes. His popular music show American Bandstand was first broadcast in 1952, and attracted an audience of 20 million people after it was picked up by ABC in 1957. The long-running weekly series, which featured guests including Elvis Presley, Buddy Holly and Aretha Franklin, came to an end in 1989. Clark was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1993 for his contribution to the music industry. He has also been responsible for television series such as TV Bloopers, Celebrity Boxing and drama American Dreams. Clark is also expected to act as executive producer for the upcoming Golden Globe Awards ceremony, which is taking place on 16 January.

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"entertainment 220.txt New media battle for Bafta awards The BBC leads the nominations for the Bafta Interactive Awards", including one for the Radio Times website and one for Sport Interactive's Euro 2004 coverage. The awards, which were started in 1997, recognise the best websites, digital TV shows and CD roms. Other nominees include The Guardian news website, the National Theatre, MTV," the Science Museum and the London Stock Exchange. The winners from 12 different categories are crowned on 2 March 2005. There were nearly 400 entries this year - a third more than last year. The BBC has 16 nominations while The Guardian has three nominations. ""This year's nominees are a testament

to the creative and innovative work going on within the industry", " said Grant Dean, chair of the interactive committee. Categories include interactive TV, film, digital TV, mobile phones and music. Shaun of the Dead, Oasis' Definitely Maybe, Really Bend It Like Beckham, The Chaplin Collection and The Day Today will battle it out in the DVD category. ITV's Great British Spelling Test takes on the BBC's Olympics and Spooks Interactive for the interactive TV award. And the Guardian takes three of a possible five nominations in the news and sport category for its website coverage of Euro 2004, the Tour de France and the US elections. The BBC's iCan site is up for the technical and social innovation award alongside the likes of Nottingham University's Uncle Roy All Around You. In 2002, the British Academy of Film and Television decided to split the awards into separate games and interactive ceremonies, to fully cover the range of innovation outside the gaming industry.

entertainment 221.txt Bets off after Big Brother 'leak' A bookmaker has stopped taking bets on Celebrity Big Brother after claiming sensitive information" about the Channel 4 show had been leaked. William Hill made the move after four people tried to place bets on Friday's surprise double eviction. "This is highly unlikely to have been an inspired guess", William Hill spokesman Rupert Adams said. However, a Big Brother spokeswoman was satisfied" that sensitive information about the show remained confidential. The bookmaker said its suspicions had been aroused by betting for the last two contestant evictions", when people were still trying to place large sums despite odds as short as 1/14. But William Hill's "overwhelming evidence" came on Friday when four unknown callers asked to place bets on the show's surprise double eviction. Shortly afterwards model Caprice and actor Jeremy Edwards left the show. Mr Adams believed someone had gained access to figures which revealed how viewers were voting", and was using them to predict which celebrity would be evicted next. "We think somebody somewhere has got them and has been trying very hard to take us to the cleaners", he said. The bets were not taken. Mr Adams did not believe anyone from Channel 4 or Big Brother producer Endemol had tried to place the queried bets. But he added: They need to look at how many people are privy to the sensitive information." Big Brother's spokeswoman said: "Only a handful of senior production executives are privy to any sensitive information regarding eviction voting and there are strict procedures in place to keep this information strictly confidential. "We do not feel the need to investigate this further as we are satisfied that these measures are effective." The show's independent adjudicator - the Electoral Reform Services - was also satisfied", she added. The current series of Celebrity Big Brother ends on Sunday, with Happy Mondays star Bez, actress Brigitte Nielsen and Blazin' Squad rapper Kenzie competing for a £50,000 charity prize. Bookmaker Ladbrokes said it would continue to accept bets on the final," with Kenzie its favourite at 2/9. "We felt no need whatsoever to close the book", spokesman Warren Lush said. We've seen absolutely no suspicious betting patterns." Mr Lush added that people sometimes vote on short odds "because they think it's like buying money". "You do have to risk quite a lot of money for a very small gain but if they think there's no chance of an upset they will still do it", he said.

entertainment 222.txt School tribute for TV host Carson More than 1,000 people turned out on Sunday to pay tribute to late US TV presenter Johnny Carson in the Nebraska town where he grew up. Carson, who hosted the Tonight Show for 30 years, died on 23 January from respiratory disease emphysema. He lived in Norfolk, Nebraska from the age of eight until he joined the Navy, but returned regularly and donated \$5m (£2.7m) to local causes. Old school friends were among the crowd at the school's Johnny Carson Theater. Carson, who was one of the best-loved TV personalities in the US, asked not to have a publi

c memorial in Los Angeles, where he lived in later life. He began his showbusiness career in Norfolk, performing magic under the name The Great Carsoni from the age of 14. His donations included \$600,000 to Norfolk High School in the 1980s to build a new performing arts centre. When Carson died, President Bush led the public tributes, saying the presenter had a profound influence on American life and entertainment"".

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"entertainment 223.txt Singer Ferguson 'facing eviction' Three Degrees star Sheila Ferguson is the favourite to be evicted from ITV's I'm A Celebrity... Get Me Out Of Here on Monday. Bookmakers Ladbrokes says the singer has even odds of being the first contestant to be voted off the show. ""It's going to be close but Sheila is favourite as she has shown herself to be a bit of a troublemaker", said Ladbrokes' Warren Lush. Comic Joe Pasquale remains odds on favourite to win the reality show. Mr Lush added that Nancy Sorrell's chances of an early departure had increased since the surprise arrival of husband Vic Reeves in the jungle camp last Wednesday. Notwithstanding, comedian Reeves remains 3/1 favourite to win the show, after Pasquale. Huggy Bear actor Antonio Fargas also remains a contender for eviction having done nothing to live up to the pre-show hype". ""There has been a big gamble on Natalie [Appleton] to go... but bookies fancy the millions at home will keep piling on the misery by putting her through more bushtucker trials", added Mr Lush. The former All Saint star has performed dismally in bushtucker trials which have seen her plunged into glass tanks containing putrid waste and challenged to eat fish eyes. On Friday, Ladbrokes suspended betting after singer Brian Harvey quit the show following a blazing row with Janet Street-Porter. Harvey, who entered the camp a day later than other contestants after learning that his grandmother had died, reached the end of his tether following days of meagre rations and rows.

entertainment 224.txt Farrell due to make US TV debut Act or Colin Farrell is to make his debut on US television in medical sitcom Scrubs, according to Hollywood newspaper Daily Variety. The film star, who recently played the title role in historical blockbuster Alexander, will make a cameo appearance as an unruly Irishman. The episode featuring the 28-year-old will be screened on 25 January. Farrell's appearance is said to be a result of his friendship with Zach Braff, who stars in the programme. It will be the actor's first appearance on the small screen since he appeared in BBC series Ballykissangel in 1999. The gentle Sunday night drama came to an end in 2001. He has since become one of Hollywood's fastest-rising stars, with a string roles in major league films such as Minority Report, Phone Booth and Daredevil. Farrell is pencilled in to play the role of Crockett in a film version of 1980s police drama Miami Vice. Scrubs, which appears on the NBC network in the US and has been shown on Channel 4 on British television, is an off-beat comedy about a group of hospital doctors. Other film stars to have appeared in Scrubs include Heather Graham, while Friends actor Matthew Perry has guest-starred and directed an episode of the show. Its leading star, Zach Braff, has recently been seen on the big screen in Garden State, which he also directed.

entertainment 225.txt Stallone evicted from Big Brother Jackie Stallone, mother of actor Sylvester, has become the first star to be evicted from Celebrity Big Brother. She and John McCririck faced the public vote on Friday - 67% of people voted to keep the racing pundit in the house. Stallone, 71, appeared not to have enjoyed her time in the house saying: I'm a total wreck", I need a vacation," this was a nightmare"". But she was pleased to have patched things up with actress Brigitte Nielsen", her former daughter-in-law. ""That alone was worth \$1m", she said. Stallone joined the Channel 4 show on M

onday as a surprise for Nielsen. She was hot favourite to be evicted first, with odds of 1/4 to leave. But McCririck has made some enemies with his outspoken views about women. Ladbrokes spokesman Warren Lush said: We may have underestimated the power of the anti-McCririck brigade", but it's so hard to call with him, there are people out there who either love him or hate him," there is no middle ground." The bookmakers have made former Happy Mondays dancer Bez favourite to win the show at 7/4", " while Blazin' Squad singer Kenzie is second at 2/1. "Bez has wooed the viewers and looks the one to beat", he's kept his nose clean and doesn't take anything too seriously," Mr Lush said. Earlier on Friday 15 protesters from the Fathers 4 Justice campaign group were arrested after entering the Big Brother compound at 0300 GMT and throwing fireworks. Feminist icon Germaine Greer quit the show earlier in the week over what she called bullying" tactics used by the programme's producers. The show is currently attracting an average audience of about 4.2 million viewers a night.

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"entertainment 226.txt Fox 'too reliant on reality TV' Th  
e head of US TV network Fox has admitted the broadcaster had relied too heavily on reality TV shows such as the poor-rating Who's Your Daddy. Chief executive Gail Berman said ""in the case of this fall we drifted to too much on the unscripted side"". The series Who's Your Daddy", where a young woman tries to pick her natural father for a cash prize caused outrage from adoption groups and rated badly. Last season, Fox's prime-time audience fell by 600,000 to 5.9 million. Ms Berman said: ""I think the audience expects loud things from Fox. Sometimes they work", and sometimes they don't." Who's Your Daddy", the first episode of which was shown on 3 January, pulled in a disappointing audience of 6.3 million, according to the Nielsen ratings system. Five other episodes of the show had also been filmed will be dropped from Fox's schedules, Ms Berman said. She was predicting a drop in ratings even for some of the network's established reality shows, such as American Idol, which is due to start its fourth series this week. Fox had unveiled a new strategy last year promising to launch new shows every season, including the traditionally quiet summer season. Though that had met with a poor reception," Ms Berman said ""there's no question that the audience", in our mind, is ready," willing and able to accept new programming in the summer"". Fox has changed this plan", launching new shows in May instead of June. One of the new shows will be the animated series American Dad, made by Seth MacFarlane, the creator of Family Guy. That series, after becoming a hit on DVD, is also set to return with new episodes.

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"entertainment 227.txt George Michael to perform for BBC  
George Michael is to perform live at London's Abbey Road studios as part of a BBC Radio 2 special next month. The session", which will broadcast on 18 December, will also see him talk about how his biggest hits came about. Michael's appearance is part of the station's Sold on Song initiative, which explores the art of songwriting. The station also confirmed that Chris Tarrant will be hosting a one-off New Year's Eve programme. He left London's Capital FM this year after 17 years. The former breakfast show host - who attracted some of the highest ratings in Britain," despite only broadcasting to London - will offer his own individual take on the year in the two-hour show. ""This should be great fun", " Tarrant said. I've had a fantastic year and I know that lots of other people have as well. I'm definitely looking forward to being on Radio 2." Other Christmas specials from Radio 2 include singer Jamelia hosting a Christmas Day concert from the London Community Gospel Choir", while actor Christopher Lee will read Fi

reside Tales from the likes of Edgar Allan Poe, E Nesbit and Ambrose Bierce. Comedian Harry Hill will host a spoof nostalgia show on Christmas Day, while singer Jamie Cullum will perform a live concert for the station.

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"entertainment 228.txt Joy Division story to become film  
The life of late Joy Division singer Ian Curtis is to be made into a film", it has been announced. The Manchester-based production is called Touching From A Distance, after a book by Curtis's widow Deborah which forms the basis for the film. Music mogul Tony Wilson, who headed the record company Joy Division were signed to, will be co-executive producer. The musician committed suicide in 1980 aged 23, shortly before the band were due to go on tour in the US. Mr Wilson, who has remained friends with Curtis's widow and daughter Natalie," who he says asked for his involvement to make the film ""official"". ""People have different ideas as to why Ian committed suicide", so maybe the film will reflect those different views," he told the BBC News website. Plans for a separate Joy Division film had been announced at the Cannes Film Festival earlier this year, but the project did not get off the ground as it failed to get the backing of Curtis's family. Mr Wilson, who was also involved with Joy Division's successor band New Order, as well as the Happy Mondays, said he would rather not"" appear in the film. He made a cameo appearance in 24 Hour Party People", "in which his leading role was played by Steve Coogan. ""I'm not an actor and I did a lousy job playing my part in 24 Hour Party People", " said the Factory Records founder, who has been associated with the Manchester music scene since the 1970s. Film people have a tendency to mess up when they touch music", " but I hope this one works. ""This is much more than the music - they want to do the real story of Ian", " he said. The film is to be directed by Dutch-born Anton Corbijn, who has made music movies for Depeche Mode and U2. It will be produced by a US production company, while the widow of Ian Curtis will also be an executive producer.

"entertainment 229.txt New York rockers top talent poll  
New York electro-rock group The Bravery have come top of the BBC News website's Sound of 2005 poll to find the music scene's most promising new act. The Bravery, who have been compared to The Cure and New Order, were the most heavily-tipped act in the survey of 110 impartial critics and broadcasters. Rock band Keane won Sound of 2004 while US rapper 50 Cent topped Sound of 2003. Other new artists in this year's list include London indie group Bloc Party at second and UK rapper Kano third. The Bravery played their first gig in 2003 and have since supported bands including The Libertines, Interpol and Echo and the Bunnymen. They were the subject of a record company bidding war in 2004 and their debut single, Unconditional, caused a huge buzz when it was released in the UK in November. Singer Sam Endicott said he felt great"" about coming top of the Sound of 2005 list. ""Anyone that says they don't want a zillion screaming fans is a jackass", a liar," he said. One of the experts to tip The Bravery was The Times' music critic Paul Connolly, who said they were spiky but in love with pop"". Chris Hawkins", host of BBC 6 Music's chart show," said the band had ""great guitars and a mastery of the electro-clash sound"". ""The Bravery are proof alone that New York City is still home to hot new talent", " he said. Alison Howe, producer of TV show Later... With Jools Holland, booked the group to appear the day after seeing them at a west London pub. They played like they were headlining the main stage at Glastonbury", she said. Great songs, a good look," a touch of attitude and a cracking live band." " Q magazine reviews editor Ted Kessler said they were ""pretty-boy New York clothes horses"" with ""an unusually nimble ear for concise", " yearning pop in the mould of Duran Duran or The Strokes"". Other pundits to take part in the survey included BBC Radio 1 DJ Trevor Nelson", NME

editor Conor McNicholas, Top of the Pops presenter Fearne Cotton, Glastonbury organiser Emily Eavis and BBC Radio 2 music editor Colin Martin. Elsewhere on the top 10, second-placed rock band Bloc Party began their rise after supporting Franz Ferdinand and UK garage MC Kano, in third, is signed to The Streets' record label. US rapper The Game is hip-hop great Dr Dre's latest protege while Leeds group Kaiser Chiefs came fifth with a promise to lead a Britpop revival. In last year's survey, Keane were followed by Franz Ferdinand, Razorlight and Joss Stone in the top five - all of whom were virtually unknown outside the music industry at that point. Boy band McFly were sixth while Scissor Sisters, who had the UK's best-selling album of 2004, were seventh. In the survey, the pundits were asked for tips for three acts they thought were capable of reaching the top in their chosen genre, either in terms of sales or critical acclaim. The artists could be from any country and any musical genre, but must not have had a UK top 20 single, been a contestant on a TV talent show or already be famous for doing something else, such as a soap actor. Those tips were then counted and compiled to make the top 10.

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"entertainment 230.txt Aaliyah claim dismissed by court L  
ate R&B star Aaliyah's record company has failed in an attempt to sue the video producer who booked the ill-fated flight on which she died in 2001. A New York appeals court has told Blackground Records that only the singer's parents had the right to launch a claim for wrongful death. The 22-year-old singer's family came to an undisclosed settlement over a negligence claim in 2003. Aaliyah had completed a music video when the plane crashed in the Bahamas. She and eight others were killed on the plane", which crashed as if left for Florida. Blackground Records' lawyer Frank Penski said he had yet to examine the decision and did not know whether they would pursue the case. An investigation into the crash revealed the twin-engined Cessna was overloaded by 700 pounds (320kg). A post-mortem carried out on the remains of the pilot showed there was cocaine and alcohol in his body. Aaliyah was a rising star in music and film before she was killed. She was honoured with a string of posthumous awards and her single More Than A Woman went to number one in the UK.

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"entertainment 231.txt Three DJs replace Peel radio show  
The late John Peel's BBC Radio 1 show is to be succeeded in February by three shows hosted by three DJs focusing on diverse", non-commercial music. Huw Stephens, Ras Kwame and Rob Da Bank will each host the mid-week, late-night timeslot, showcasing UK talent. Radio 1 said the show would not try to replace Peel," but would rise to the ""challenge"" of ""keeping his legacy alive"" with unpredictable music. Peel died after suffering a heart attack in Peru in October. Radio 1 said the three DJs had been chosen for their ""in-depth musical knowledge across a variety of musical genres"". Rob Da Bank has been hosting The John Peel Show since the DJ's death. He is also one of the hosts of The Blue Room", an early morning weekend show that plays a mix of old and new electronic and dance music. Huw Stephens is currently one half of the Radio 1 Thursday night show Be than and Huw in Wales, which explores new music, especially up and coming acts breaking through in Wales. And Ras Kwame is the host of 100% Homegrown on Radio 1's digital station 1Xtra. His show is dedicated to showcasing the best of UK black music and broadcasts live sessions," often giving new artists their first chance to perform on live national radio. All of the three DJs will continue to host their current shows on Radio 1. ""It is widely accepted that John Peel c

an never be replaced", " said the radio station. It added that One Music would support both signed and unsigned talent, and said: It will seek out those making music for music's sake rather than for commercial success. ""Above all it will provide support to emerging genres of music and styles that have not yet and may never reach the mainstream." One Music is not new to Radio 1 as it already exists as a website", offering advice on aspects of the music industry, such as recording a demo and signing a record contract. Radio 1's controller, Andy Parfitt," said: ""We believe that by having a series of DJs hosting a selection of shows under the One Music title", " we will ensure that his legacy lives on." Stephen said he grew up ""listening to John"" and that it was a ""massive honour"" to continue Peel's work championing new music. The show will be broadcast from 1 February on Tuesdays", Wednesdays and Thursdays from 2300 GMT - 0100 GMT.

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"entertainment 232.txt Connick Jr to lead Broadway show S  
inger and actor Harry Connick Jr is to star in a Broadway revival of 1950s hit musical The Pajama Game. He will play the supervisor of a US pyjama factory who has a romance with a union activist during labour unrest. Jeffrey Richards", the show's co-producer," said Connick was ""an actor of enormous charisma and skill", " a wonderful singer and a bona fide star"". He has recently starred in hit US comedy Will and Grace as the husband of Grace", played by Debra Messing. The musical will open in November, said Mr Richards, who added that no other casting had been announced yet. The original book by George Abbott and Richard Bissell will be revised by playwright Peter Ackerman, who co-wrote the screenplay for the movie Ice Age. It has a score by Richard Adler and Jerry Ross, and Adler is writing two new songs for the score, which includes numbers including Hey There, Small Talk and Steam Heat. Connick appeared with his band on Broadway in 1990, and he wrote the score for a musical based on Emile Zola's novel Therese Raquin, called Thou Shalt Not. It had a three-month run on Broadway in 2001.

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"entertainment 233.txt Elvis fans hold birthday bash Elvi  
s fans around the world have been marking the legendary singer's 70th birthday on Saturday. A three-day Elvis convention took place in Blackpool", England, over the weekend with the aim of finding the best European Elvis impersonator. His Graceland, Tennessee, home was the focus for US celebrations with four days of events including a concert by the Memphis Symphony Orchestra. Elvis' single Jailhouse Rock became the UK's number one on Sunday. Fans in France celebrated with a tribute concert by Elvis cover bands and a special exhibition of memorabilia is on display in Bonn, Germany. Jailhouse Rock is now the 999th number one single in UK pop history. Record company SonyBMG are releasing Elvis' 18 number one singles at the rate of one a week in Britain, complete with original artwork and a collector's box. Hit single One Night will follow next week - with the chance of becoming the 1,000th number one as interest surrounding Elvis' birthday grows. HMV spokesman Gennaro Castaldo said: ""It would be a fantastic and truly fitting way to celebrate Elvis' landmark birthday.""

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"entertainment 234.txt Elvis regains top chart position E  
lvis Presley has scored his 19th number one single in the UK charts with the re-release of Jailhouse Rock", 27 years after his death. Elvis knocked X Factor winner Steve Brookstein down into second place after three weeks in the charts. In at number three was Iron Maiden for the Number Of The Beast and Erasure entered the chart at four with Breathe. Elvis's number one is the 999th in chart hi

story and comes the day after what would have been his 70th birthday. Fans around the world held tribute events for the singer on Saturday, ranging from concerts to memorabilia exhibitions. Meanwhile, a poll carried out by royalty payments group the Performing Right Society found that The Wonder of You is the Elvis song most performed by live bands and tribute acts. Record company SonyBMG are releasing Elvis's 18 number one singles at the rate of one a week in Britain, complete with original artwork and a collector's box. Hit single One Night will follow next week - with the chance of becoming the 1,000th number one as interest surrounding Elvis's birthday grows. Elsewhere in the singles charts, the Scissor Sisters went straight in at number five with Filthy/Gorgeous. Band Aid 20 slipped to six after seven weeks in the chart with Do They Know It's Christmas. The other two new entries are Dana Rayne with Object of My Desire at seven and Kasabian who are at number eight with Cut Off. Making up the top 10 are Boulevard of Broken Dreams by Green Day, down three places to number nine, and Out of Touch by Uniting Nations, also down three places to 10. In the album charts, the Scissor Sisters went to number one with their self-titled release, knocking Green Day's American Idiot to third place. The Killers' album Hot Fuss moved up three to number two.

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"entertainment 235.txt Pop band Busted to 'take a break'  
Chart-topping pop band Busted have confirmed that they plan to ""take a break""", following rumours that they were on the verge of splitting. A statement from the band's record company Universal said frontman Charlie Simpson planned to spend some time working with his other band," Fightstar. However they said that Busted would ""reconvene in due course"". The band have had eight top three hits", including four number ones, since they first hit the charts in 2002. Their singles include What I Go To School For, Year 3000, Crashed The Wedding, You Said No, and Who's David? The band, which also includes members Matt Jay and James Bourne, made the top ten with their self-titled debut album, as well as the follow-up, A Present For Everyone, in 2003. They won best pop act and best breakthrough act at the 2004 Brit Awards and were nominated for best British group. Most recently they topped the charts with the theme from the live-action film version of Thunderbirds, which was voted Record Of The Year on the ITV1 show. The band have capitalised on a craze for artists playing catchy pop music with rock overtones. The trio are seen as an alternative to more manufactured artists who are not considered credible musicians because they do not write their own songs or play their own instruments. However, recent rumours have suggested that Simpson has been wanting to quit the band to focus on Fightstar. He now plans to take Fightstar on tour.

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"entertainment 236.txt Franz Ferdinand's art school lesson  
Scottish rock band Franz Ferdinand", who shot to prominence in 2004, have won two Brit Awards. With their self-titled debut, Franz Ferdinand have achieved what most rock bands crave - high credibility and critical acclaim while also selling stacks of CDs. They have risen to the head of the UK's art rock ranks with an album of songs that are catchy, creative and original enough to sound fresh. With a cool, spiky, fun sound previously associated with bands like Talking Heads, they hit upon a style that had been out of fashion for a while and so was ripe for another airing. Their first UK single hit number three last January, followed by two more top 20 hits, while the album has sold more than 600,000 copies in 11 months on release. In September it was named album of the year winning the prestigious Mercury Music Prize. On the festivals circuit, they have been

one of the main attractions for huge crowds at Glastonbury, T in the Park and Reading/Leeds. They have also found success in Japan, Europe and the US. By September the album had sold 500,000 in the States and total sales were pushing two million worldwide. They have been nominated for three Grammy awards in the US as well as the US music industry's Shortlist award, but lost the Shortlist prize to US band TV on the Radio. Nevertheless Franz Ferdinand were the only UK band to win an MTV Video Music Award this year, taking the breakthrough video crown for Take Me Out. The four-piece met two years ago when drummer Paul Thomson was working at the Glasgow art school where bassist Bob Hardy was studying. Singer Alex Kapranos was studying English at university but had friends at art school, and the line-up was completed when guitarist Nick McCarthy moved from Munich, Germany, to the city. At the turn of the year," Kapranos told BBC News Online the band were fed up with serious bands in ""that post-rock thing that seemed to be doing its damndest to avoid any bloody tune""." "We want people to go away from the gigs humming the tunes that we were singing. But at the same time bringing an edge to it." Franz Ferdinand had a question they asked themselves every time they wrote a song"," Kapranos said. ""Where's the fun in that?"" they pondered at every stage", making enjoyment the top priority and ensuring they did not disappear up their own muso posteriors. The band started out with a DIY ethic that saw them take over a disused art-deco warehouse in Glasgow and rename it The Chateau. The venue soon became legendary - so well-known that the police spent a month trying to find it, eventually raiding it and arresting Kapranos. But the charges of running an illegal bar and contravening health and safety, fire hazard and noise abatement laws were dropped. The band took over an abandoned Victorian courtroom and jail instead," and named that The Chateau. The buzz about the band soon spread around the music industry and 40 record labels turned up to one gig in Glasgow - which the band thought was ""totally ridiculous""." "I'm really glad it was almost comical because we weren't overwhelmed by the seriousness of it", Kapranos said. They signed with independent label Domino, home of Smog, Sebadoh and Four Tet, in June 2003.

entertainment 237.txt Singer Knight backs anti-gun song  
R&B star Beverley Knight said she sang on an anti-gun single after being haunted by the fatal 2003 shooting of two teenage girls in Birmingham. Knight and drum 'n' bass star Roni Size have released No More in a bid to reduce gun use among young people. She said she was ""horrified"" by the deaths of Charlene Ellis, 18, and Letisha Shakespeare, 17. Size, whose New Forms album won the 1997 Mercury Music Prize," said gun use was ""nothing to be glamorised""". There were more than 10",500 firearms offences and 70 gun crime deaths in England and Wales between June 2003 and 2004, according to Home Office figures. Knight said the scale of the problem became clear to her after the 2003 shootings in Aston," near Knight's Birmingham home. ""It haunted me to be honest", it haunted my sleep," she said. Size became involved after two friends, Donna Small and Asha Jama, were shot in his Bristol hometown in October. Jama, 25, lost her sight in one eye while 22-year-old Small suffered serious head injuries. Size said he collaborated on the single, which was released on Monday, because he has a bird's eye view of what's going on"". ""Over the last 10 years", I have seen a lot of things happen and it is nothing to be glamorised, it really isn't," he said.

entertainment 238.txt Portishead back after eight years C  
ult British group Portishead have revealed they are writing their third album, their first in eight years. Founding member Geoff Barrow told BBC 6 Music the record was well on the way to being completed. We're actually into it as we speak. We took some time off for Christmas", but generally we're doing another record," Barrow told the digital radio station. News of their album plans comes after confirmation the Bristol band will play a tsunami charity show next month.

Portishead will play alongside fellow Bristol band Massive Attack at Oxfam's Ts umani appeal, held at the Bristol Academy on 19 February. Barrow said he was surprised people thought the band, who won a Mercury Music Prize in 1995 for their debut album Dummy, had split up. "We've just had our heads down really", we've never actually broken up, or parted," or whatever. ""So for us it just seems", even though we haven't played for years," we still see each other and write - we just haven't released a record for a long time." Portishead will not play any new material at next month's concert", which will feature singer Beth Gibbons playing with an acoustic backing. Other acts appearing include Liverpool band The Coral and former Led Zeppelin singer Robert Plant. Portishead became an international success and a deeply influential band despite their scant recorded output. Dummy was a critics' favourite in 1994, hailed for its blend of menacing sounds and hip-hop beats married to old soul samples. The follow up, Portishead, was released three years later.

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"entertainment 239.txt Fightstar take to the stage Charlie Simpson took his new band Fightstar to the stage on Friday night", just hours after officially announcing his departure from pop band Busted. He was greeted by a sell-out crowd at the University of Warwick. Confirmation of Busted's long-rumoured split had come earlier in the day, when Simpson held a press conference in London with bandmates Matt Willis and James Bourne. All three band members stressed that the break up was amicable," although Bourne admitted he was ""devastated"" to hear of Simpson's departure. ""This has been a really difficult decision," 19-year-old Simpson revealed, I hope the fans will understand." While Simpson declared he would look back with pride on Busted's enormous success", his focus turned immediately to Fightstar, with Friday's press conference coinciding with the start of the band's 13-date tour of the UK. Fuelled by this news, all 1,400 tickets to see Charlie's first post-Busted live appearance - at the University of Warwick's Student Union - sold out rapidly. Mike Eccleshall, the venue's Promotions Coordinator," said: ""Tickets had been selling strongly over the past few days", but sales went mad after the news broke. We had completely sold out by 4pm." With queues outside the venue long and expectations high", the pressure was on Fightstar to impress. Although many dedicated fans travelled to the gig from around the country, they faced a tough crowd made up chiefly of students, the average age of the audience far exceeding that of any Busted concert. Gone were the screaming girls to which Simpson had become accustomed. Support act Brigade, fronted by Simpson's brother, played a short set first and were met with general approval. When Fightstar eventually took to the stage around 11pm, however, a riotous cheer easily drowned out any hecklers lurking in the crowd. Unfortunately, the band were initially hindered by technical teething problems as Simpson's guitar amplifier failed to work. As sound technicians rushed to fix it, other band members did their best to improvise. When they eventually got under way, Fightstar's blend of emotionally charged rock was warmly received. Far heavier and less commercial than Busted's chart-topping pop-punk," the band will undoubtedly appeal to a more mature fan-base. Warwick student Helen Clutterbuck admitted: ""I came to check out Fightstar because of all the controversy. ""I've never heard them before," but I'm pretty impressed." Less impressed were fellow students Ryan Crabbe and Gordon Rennie", who observed, ""With Fightstar", Charlie has clearly progressed from Busted's sound," but they're still not very inspiring."" Fightstar played for around 45 minutes", showcasing material from their forthcoming EP called They Liked You Better When You Were Dead, due for release in February.

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"entertainment 240.txt Elvis 'set for chart hat-trick' Th  
e late US legend Elvis Presley is likely to score his third UK number one single in three weeks on Sunday", according to early sales figures. The king of rock 'n' roll has already had consecutive chart-toppers with Jailhouse Rock and One Night. A Fool Such As I, the next in a series of 18 reissues, is on course to beat the Chemical Brothers to the top. But his next single, It's Now Or Never, will face a challenge from tsunami charity single Grief Never Grows Old. Sir Cliff Richard, Russell Watson, Boy George, Bill Wyman and members of the Bee Gees, the Beach Boys, America and the Eagles are expected to feature on the charity song. Bookmakers have offered odds of 10/1 for all Presley's 18 hits to go back to number one. A Fool Such As I would become the 1,001st number one single in UK chart history after One Night took the 1,000th place on Sunday. The latest release is currently outselling the Chemical Brothers' comeback single Galvanize plus other new releases from Athlete, Ciara and Feeder. Presley's 18 original number ones are being reissued as limited release singles, with fans eager to buy the set to fill a collector's box that went on sale in the first week. Record company Sony BMG is now manufacturing 5,000 more copies of each single than originally planned to meet demand, taking the total number of copies of each song on sale to about 2

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..... "entertainment 241.txt Youssou N'Dour wins music prize Se negalese musician Youssou N'Dour has been named a winner of a BBC Radio 3 World Music Award. His album Egypt won the critics' award for album of the year", while the best newcomer accolade went to Argentine Chango Spasiuk. Winners were chosen from ten categories to reflect different continents. A special Poll Winners concert, hosted by Eliza Carthy and Benjamin Zephaniah will take place at The Sage in Gateshead on 5 March. The concert will be broadcast on Radio 3's World Music Day the following evening and will feature performances by many of the award winners. It will also include the announcement of the Audience Award, chosen by Radio 3 and BBC World Service listeners, alongside BBC Four viewers. Winner in the Africa category was Malian desert blues band Tinariwen, formed from the nomadic people of the southern Sahara. Cuban pianist Bebo Valdes and flamenco singer Diego El Cigala, responsible for critically acclaimed album Lagrimas Negrasmusic," won an award in the ""boundary crossing"" category. Each winner will receive a specially commissioned sculpture entitled Planet by Anita Sulimanovic who won a competition to design the award. Highlights of the Poll Winners Concert", to be held at The Sage, Gateshead, will be televised on BBC Four on 1 March.

"entertainment 242.txt TOTP turns to Elvis impersonator T  
op of the Pops has turned to the star of Elvis Presley musical Jailhouse Rock a  
fter the late rock legend scooped the UK's 1",000th number one single. Mario K  
ombou, who plays the Presley role on stage," will sing One Night on Friday's BB  
C One show as producers are unable to use Presley video footage. It is his seco  
nd number one in a row. The show used Presley photos last week. Presley will fe  
ature in the charts for several more months as all 18 of his original UK chart-  
toppers are reissued. A Top of the Pops spokesperson said: ""It's a very speci  
al number one as it's the UK's 1",000th. ""We wanted to pay tribute to Elvis i  
n the best way we knew how", " so we thought getting a professional would be the  
best way for Top of the Pops to do that." Kombou is likely to appear on the sh  
ow again next week as the next Presley re-release", A Fool Such As I, is on cou

rse to give him his third number one in three weeks. Kombou plays Vince Everett in Jailhouse Rock - the same role Presley played in the 1957 film of the same name.

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"entertainment 243.txt Blue beat U2 to top France honour  
Irish band U2 have been honoured at France's biggest music awards", but were beaten to a prize by boy band Blue. U2 received a special achievement prize at the NRJ Music Awards, but Blue beat them to the international group award. US band Maroon 5 was named best new international artist, and took the best international song title for This Love. More than five million radio listeners voted in the awards. The international male and female prizes went to Usher and Avril Lavigne respectively. Collecting his band's award from model Naomi Campbell at the Cannes ceremony," U2 frontman Bono said in French: ""I'm not from this country but I'll make a little confession to you - it's at the Cote d'Azur I feel at home."" Hosted by radio group NRJ", the ceremony featured performances from Usher and Jennifer Lopez, who was accompanied by dancers clad in schoolgirl outfits. US pop act Black Eyed Peas picked up the best international album gong for Elephunk. Singer Jenifer also took home two awards, for best French female singer and best French album. French-Canadian pop star Roch Voisine was named best Francophone male artist.

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"entertainment 244.txt Ten-year tragedy of missing Manic  
Richey Edwards", guitarist and lyricist for The Manic Street Preachers, vanished 10 years ago, on 1 February 1995. His disappearance remains one of the most tragic mysteries in rock music. For his devoted fans, Richey Edwards was an inspired and inspiring poet, a man who articulated their desperation and despair, who shouted the things most kept hidden. The Manic Street Preachers may only have become stadium-conquering rock giants since his disappearance - but Edwards was the figurehead for their first, dangerous and dazzling incarnation. Edwards did not feature in the original line-up of the band, though. Singer/guitarist James Dean Bradfield, bassist Nicky Wire and drummer Sean Moore were originally accompanied by a rhythm guitarist called Flicker. But Edwards replaced Flicker in time for the band's self-financed debut, Suicide Alley, after designing the record's artwork. After becoming a full-time member, Edwards became a critical part of the band, writing lyrics and playing guitar - though in many concerts, he was not actually plugged in. But the fiercely intelligent Edwards - who named e-checked writers such as Sylvia Plath, George Orwell and Philip Larkin - battled depression, alcohol problems, eating disorders, and self-harm. By the time the band released their third album, The Holy Bible, in October 1994, Edwards had been admitted to hospital with depression. But in his last interview a few months later, seemed to be making plans for the future. Edwards walks out of the Embassy Hotel in London in the early morning, ahead of the band's US tour to promote The Holy Bible. In the following days, police issue a missing person alert and his parents, Graham and Sherry, plead for their son to let them know he is safe and well. Police discover Edwards' car in a car park near the Severn Bridge near Bristol - a notorious suicide spot. The discovery leads many to believe he has killed himself. The rest of the band stop touring and recording. The band play their first concerts since Edwards' disappearance as a trio, performing support slots for The Stone Roses on their UK stadium tour. The Manic Street Preachers release their first music since Edwards' disappearance. A Design For Life reaches number two in the UK singles chart. The album Everything Must Go follows. The Manics win best band and best album for Everything Must Go at the

Brit Awards. A fan says she saw Edwards in the hippy resort of Goa," India. Interpol are alerted but do not track him down. Graham and Sherry Edwards fly to the Spanish island of Fuerteventura six weeks after reports a man fitting their son's description has been seen in a bar called Underground. The report comes to nothing. Edwards' sister Rachel makes an emotional TV appeal five years after the disappearance. ""I'd just like to say to him if he is able to listen that we do love him very much and we'd like him to come back - me", mum and dad," she said. The band play a concert in the Cuban capital, Havana - the first contemporary western rock band to play there. On the seventh anniversary of his disappearance, police offer Edwards' parents the opportunity to sign a death certificate. They refuse. The Big Issue magazine, which supports homelessness charities, prints the last known picture of Edwards in a fresh plea for information. A pair of trainers containing human bones washed up on the banks of the River Severn have no link to Edwards, police say. The last song written by Edwards - a song called Judge Y'Self, which was to have been used for the Judge Dredd film soundtrack - is released on the B-side compilation Lipstick Traces. A skeleton found by the River Severn is not Edwards, tests reveal. The Manics' seventh studio album, Lifeblood, features a song dedicated to Edwards called Cardiff Afterlife. The remaining Manic Street Preachers members continue to pay a quarter of the band's royalties into an account held in his name.

entertainment 245.txt Mogul Wilson backing UK rap band To ny Wilson, the music mogul who established the influential Factory Records in the 1980s, is to launch a new label - convinced he has discovered his third major band"". Factory were the label of both Joy Division - who became New Order after singer Ian Curtis committed suicide - and the Happy Mondays. Now Wilson believes rap act Raw T - signed to his F4 label"," the fourth incarnation of Factory - will ""complete the hat-trick"". ""Suddenly", when Raw T came into my life, I realised they are my third major band," he told BBC World Service's The Music Biz programme. The group are set to release their first single on 21 February, and follow it up with an album, Realise And Witness, in March. Wilson has twice tried to resurrect Factory - which lasted for 14 years before folding - but conceded these efforts had been despondent and dismal experiences"". But it has not put him off. ""Of all the things I do in my life the most exciting thing I've ever done", and the thing I have most loved, is being part of a record company, he added. The idea of working with brilliant young musicians, and being close to the centre of popular culture," is just the biggest thrill in my life." Wilson explained how his son persuaded him to go and see Raw T", but he had initially been reluctant saying he ""detested"" young British people rapping. ""It's always inauthentic", it's always crass, it never really works for me, he said. I went to see this group, Raw T - which stands for Realise And Witness Talent - and like everyone else in the room that night," we were utterly blown away." Wilson believes Raw T could be ""to F4 as Joy Division were to Factory records"". The story of Factory records - which also owned the legendary Hacienda club in Manchester - was told in the Michael Winterbottom film 24 Hour Party People", in which Wilson was played by Steve Coogan. Wilson stressed that the independent music scene remained ""as important"" as it had been during the 1980s", when labels such as Factory and Rough Trade proliferated. He pointed out that Franz Ferdinand and The White Stripes - ""perhaps the two most important bands since the millennium"" - were signed to indies. ""I think that is a reflection of how useful and how powerful the indie philosophy is", and how bands prefer it, he added. They can make more money that way - it's a more generous relationship," and also it's a more understanding relationship. ""I think independents are in a wonderful position at this moment in time.""

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"/" entertainment 246.txt Singer Sizzla jailed for swearing  
Reggae star Sizzla", " whose UK tour was cancelled after protests at his ""anti-gay"" lyrics", has been jailed in Jamaica for swearing on stage. The singer must serve 15 days in prison after he consistently swore during a concert in St Thomas, Jamaica, in January despite warnings by police. He was charged under a law which prohibits indecent dress or expression. Sizzla's five-date UK tour was cancelled last November after protests by gay rights campaigners. Sizzla, whose real name is Miguel Collins, has released 25 albums since 1995 and is credited with taking dancehall music back to its reggae origins. Many Jamaican entertainers have appeared before the courts for use of profanity in recent years but they usually receive a verbal warning, a suspended sentence or community service. Sizzla's UK tour was cancelled after Scotland Yard's Racial and Violent Crime taskforce announced it was examining lyrics by eight reggae artists. It would not confirm that Sizzla was among them. One of his most controversial songs, Pump Up," contains the Jamaican patois lyrics ""fire fi di man dem weh go ride man behind""", translated by gay rights group OutRage! as ""burn the men who have sex with men"".

"/" entertainment 247.txt Spears seeks aborted tour payment  
Singer Britney Spears is suing eight insurance companies that have refused to reimburse her for cancelling her 2004 world tour. The pop star cancelled her Onyx Hotel tour last June after suffering a knee injury during a video shoot. She is now seeking to be reimbursed for the tour's £5m (\$9.3m) costs in a claim filed at New York State Supreme Court. Seven London-based companies and an eighth Paris firm have been given up to 30 days to respond to the complaint. The 22-year-old star initially missed a number of shows on the 82-date tour after injuring her knee during a show in Illinois last March. But she was rushed to hospital and needed surgery after a later incident while filming a video for her song Outrageous", leading her to cancel the rest of the tour," including dates in China. ""She obviously took a wrong step and blew out her knee", " a Jive spokesman said at the time. It was an old dance injury." The legal submission described Spears as ""one of the most recognised performers in her industry"". The Onyx Hotel tour was cited as ""a highly crafted production which included the well-known music and dancing of Spears", supported by elaborate costumes, complex choreography as well as cutting-edge video production," lighting and other effects"". In September Spears married Kevin Federline", who had been a dancer on the aborted tour.

"/" entertainment 248.txt Deal to ban 'homophobic' reggae The reggae industry is to refuse to release or stage concerts featuring homophobic songs under a global deal struck with gay rights groups. A damaging campaign against stars such as Beenie Man and Sizzla has been waged over lyrics that allegedly call for gay people to be killed or assaulted. The campaign", which led to gigs being scrapped and a UK police investigation," will now be dropped under the truce. Brett Lock of gay group OutRage! said they were ""wiping the slate clean""". The protests had been led by the Stop Murder Music coalition", an umbrella group including OutRage!, the Black Gay Men's Advisory Group and Jamaican movement J-Flag. That coalition has reached a verbal agreement with major dancehall reggae record labels and concert promoters covering eight of the scene's biggest stars. But the artists themselves were not involved in the negotiations and have not directly signed up. Instead," the record companies have pledged no

t to release or re-release any offensive songs - many of which date back a number of years. And it is believed promoters will make stars agree not to perform such tunes on stage. ""The reggae industry will work with the artists while still maintaining their freedom of speech and artistic freedom", " according to media and PR strategist Glen Yearwood, who is representing the reggae industry. The industry would halt any attempt by an artist to perform or release a song in citing violence against any group or gender, he said. We'll advise them this is not the way forward in a civilised society." " The Stop Murder Music campaign saw protesters picket gigs", resulted in Sizzla's UK tour being cancelled in November, forced Mobo award organisers to drop artists from nominations and saw Beenie Man dropped from an MTV show in August. Police have also been investigating whether lyrics incite the assault and murder of gay people. The campaign was a blow to the reggae industry," Mr Yearwood admitted. ""If you can't have major stars touring", then you don't sell many albums," he said. But the artists - Beenie Man, Sizzla, Elephant Man, Buju Banton, Bounty Killer, TOK, Capleton and Vybz Kartel - will not have to apologise for past songs or comments. OutRage!'s Mr Lock said: The main players in the dancehall reggae industry will attempt to regulate the industry themselves to ensure that there aren't any violently homophobic or gay-bashing lyrics in the future. ""As a gesture of good faith", " the Stop Murder Music coalition has agreed to suspend our aggressive campaigning against murder music. ""So we shall not be picketing concerts or calling for prosecutions to give the industry the space to regulate and reform itself." " Record companies VP and Greensleeves", distributor Jet Star and concert promoters including Jamminns and Apollo Entertainment are all on board.

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"entertainment 249.txt Soul sensation ready for awards South West teenage singing sensation", Joss Stone, has been nominated in three categories in Wednesday's Brit awards. The 17-year-old from a small east Devon village near Cullumpton, received nominations for Best Solo Female, Best Urban Act and Best Breakthrough Artist. Her second album Mind, Body & Soul reached number one in the UK charts last October and went straight into the US charts at number 11. Ms Stone is due to perform at the 25th award ceremony at London's Earls Court. The teenager also has Grammy nominations in the US, normally dominated by home-grown acts. Born Jocelyn Stoker, the Devon diva started her career in a BBC talent programme, and was then discovered at a New York audition by a US record executive, Steve Greenberg. The 17-year-old singer is hoping to tour in Japan, Australia and the US in 2005.

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"entertainment 250.txt Prince crowned 'top music earner' Prince earned more than any other pop star in 2004", beating artists such Madonna and Elton John in US magazine Rolling Stone's annual list. The singer banked \$56.5m (£30.4m) from concerts, album and publishing sales with his *Musicology* tour and album. He kept Madonna in second place, as she earned \$54.9m (£29.5m) while embarking on her global *Re-Invention Tour*. Veterans Simon and Garfunkel were in 10th place," their comeback tour helping them earn \$24.9m (£13.4m) last year. ""Prince returned to centre stage after a decade in the commercial wilderness", " the magazine reported. The singer's 2004 tour took \$90.3m (£48.5m) in ticket sales and he sold 1.9 million copies of his latest album *Musicology*. Although she grossed more than Prince last year, Madonna remained in second place because of the monumental" production costs of her tour. Heavy metal band Metallica's *Madly in Anger with the World* tour helped push their 2004 earnings up to \$43.1m (£23.1m). They were ahead of Sir Elton John", who took fourth place an

d almost \$42.7m (£23m) from performances including a debut on the Las Vegas Strip. Other seasoned performers in the list included Rod Stewart, whose sold-out shows and third volume of The Great American Songbook covers album helped net him £35m (£19m). The highest-ranking rap act in the list was 50 Cent, who at number 19 took \$24m (£13m) to the bank.

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"entertainment 251.txt Brit awards for Devon music acts D  
evon singer Joss Stone and rock band Muse won coveted Brit awards during the event's 25th anniversary. Seventeen-year-old Stone", from near Cullumpton, won two awards: best British female act, and best urban act out of three award nominations. Muse, whose members met in south Devon, beat Franz Ferdinand, Jamie Cullum, Kasabian and The Libertines for best British live act. The band has sold about two million records worldwide. After beating Amy Winehouse, Jamelia, Natasha Bedingfield and PJ Harvey to the best British female prize," Joss Stone said: ""I don't know what to say. I don't like doing this at all. I'd like to thank my family for being really supportive and everybody that made my record with me." "I don't even know what to do right now. Thank you all you guys for voting for me", " I feel sick right now." Viewers of digital music TV channel MTV Base voted Stone the winner in the best urban act category. Ms Stone also performed her song Right To Be Wrong", backed by a gospel choir, at the 25th award ceremony at London's Earls Court. Her second album Mind, Body & Soul reached number one in the UK charts last October and went straight into the US charts at number 11. The teenager also has Grammy nominations in the US, normally dominated by home-grown acts. Born Jocelyn Stoker, the Devon diva started her career in a BBC talent programme, and was then discovered at a New York audition by a US record executive, Steve Greenberg. Indie Rock group Muse consists of Matthew Bellamy, Chris Wolstenholme and Dominic Howard who met in their early teens in Teignmouth," south Devon. Dominic Howard said of winning: ""We love playing live", " it's very important for our band. So to win something like this really feels great." The trio met aged 13 and formed the band Gothic Plague", changing its name to Fixed Penalty, Rocket Baby Dolls and finally Muse. The band released its first self-titled EP in 1998. The third studio album, Absolution, was released in 2003, providing the hit singles Time Is Running Out, Hysteria, and Butterflies And Hurricanes.

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"entertainment 252.txt Rock star sued by ex-girlfriend Mötley Crüe guitarist Mick Mars is being sued by his ex-girlfriend for \$10 million (£5.4 million)", claiming he broke a promise to take care of her. The woman, Robin Mantooth, said Mars promised her repeatedly that he would provide financial support in the event of the couple breaking up. When they split in December, Mantooth says Mars denied any such agreement. She is asking a Los Angeles court to award her half the musician's property, a monthly allowance and damages. Mantooth added that the pair became lovers in 1990, after which she abandoned her career as a documentary film-maker to move in with the guitarist at his Malibu home. She is also claiming that Mars, 53, has failed to provide her with any material support since they ceased to be a couple. Motley Crüe recently reunited after being apart for a period of five years. They originally formed in the early 1980s and scored six hits in the UK, including Girls Girls Girls in 1987. They are embarking on a world tour later this year which will take in 60 cities across the US, Europe, Asia and Australia. Mars - real name Bob Allen Deal - underwent hip replacement surgery in October. He suffers from a degenerative rheumatic disease which causes ligaments and tendons to attach to the bone.

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"entertainment 253.txt Scissor Sisters triumph at Brits U  
S band Scissor Sisters led the winners at the UK music industry's Brit Awards", walking off with three prizes. The flamboyant act scored a hat-trick in the international categories, winning the best group, best album and best newcomer awards. Glasgow group Franz Ferdinand won two prizes, as did Keane and Joss Stone," who was voted best urban act by digital TV viewers. Robbie Williams' Angels was named the best song of the past 25 years. Scissor Sisters frontwoman Ana Matronic collected the best international album prize from singer Siouxsie Sioux. She told the audience: ""If you told us a year ago we would be getting these awards today we would have called you crazy. You guys made our dream come true."" The band - whose self-titled LP was 2004's biggest-selling album - thanked ""all the members of the sisterhood""", adding: ""We wouldn't be here without you." The US band", who opened the show with Take Your Mama, won the best international act and newcomer awards, as well as best international album. Franz Ferdinand, who were shortlisted in five categories, won best rock act and best British group, an award they dedicated to late DJ John Peel. But they missed out on best British live act, which went to Muse. Keane won best British album and breakthrough act. Will Young won the best single prize for Your Game. McFly won the best pop act prize, and Gwen Stefani picked up the best international female artist award. Eminem won the male prize. Best British male artist winner Mike Skinner - aka The Streets - does not usually attend award ceremonies, but the Birmingham hip-hop artist performed his hit Dry Your Eyes at the ceremony. However," he did not collect his prize. A bandmate informed the crowd Skinner was ""in the toilet"". After beating Amy Winehouse", Jamelia, Natasha Bedingfield and PJ Harvey to the best British female prize," Joss Stone said: ""I don't know what to say. I don't like doing this at all. I'd like to thank my family for being really supportive and everybody that made my record with me."" ""I don't even know what to do right now. Thank you all you guys for voting for me"," I feel sick right now."" Viewers of digital music TV channel MTV Base voted Stone the winner in the best urban act category. Little Britain comedy duo Matt Lucas and David Walliams presented the best song prize to Robbie Williams dressed as his former Take That colleagues Gary Barlow and Howard Donald", leading him to quip he was ""always the talented man of the band"" . Williams' track beat songs by Will Young", Queen, Kate Bush and Joy Division in a vote by BBC Radio 2 listeners to mark 25 years of the UK music industry ceremony. It is his 15th Brit award," having already received 10 solo awards and four with Take That. He told the audience: ""I'm just amazed that my career keeps going."" Keane frontman Tom Chaplin thanked fans for enduring ""rubbish gigs"" after they won the British breakthrough act prize. He added: ""A lot of people don't think it's cool that we've had the guts to be ourselves but it's a vital part of who we are as a band and receiving this is recognition of that."" Natasha Bedingfield - in the running for best British female and best pop act - performed with her brother Daniel for the first time at Wednesday's event. The chart-topping siblings duetted on the Chaka Khan hit Ain't Nobody. Meanwhile", Joss Stone performed Right To Be Wrong backed by a gospel choir, while Lemar and Jamelia performed the Robert Palmer track Addicted To Love. Bob Geldof won a prize for his outstanding contribution to music. Of the 15 Brit awards for achievements in 2004, 10 were won by artists tipped in the BBC News website's Sound of 2004 list of artists to watch, published at the start of last year. Scissor Sisters, Franz Ferdinand, Keane, Joss Stone and McFly were all in the Sound of 2004 top 10. The other five Brits winners were already established before Sound of 2004 was compiled. The ceremony will be televised on ITV1 on Thursday. I'm speechless. Best song of th

e last 25 years? Yeah right. I very much doubt that 'Angels' was even the best song of the week that it came out. Like every track Robbie has released as a single, it's a blatant but poor facsimile of something that someone else has done better before. Give us a break....!!! Best song in 25 years, you must be joking. Its good if you like that sort of thing, but really! Listened to Angels on Radio 1 this morning when I was driving into work. Had not heard it for a while. I love Robs voice, the lyrics and tune. Perfection! As usual," the public have short memories when it comes to voting for ""the greatest"". There must be more than a dozen songs in the last 25 years that deserve this award more. It's not exactly groundbreaking. Presumably", the age range that could be bothered to vote is pretty low... I'm actually embarrassed to be British if that is the best song we have produced in the last 25 years!! What about The Specials - Ghost Town, The Buzzcocks - Ever Fallen in Love With Someone... Happy Mondays - Kinky Afro, McAlmont & Butler - Yes, Joy Division - Love Will Tear Us Apart... Angels is middle-of-the-road rubbish. Angels is a awful piece of sentimental claptrap. It's musically and lyrically inept; and fantastically overrated, a bit like Mr Williams himself. This result isn't very surprising though, The Brits has a long history of celebrating rubbish music! Best of the last 25 years? Maybe. Cunning to make the timescale not include Stairway to Heaven or Bohemian Rhapsody, but it does kind of make it a bit of a hollow award really. Not much competition in the last 25 years after all. It's alright for a pop song - but the best song of the last 25 years??? There is no way on earth that song should have been voted the best of the last 25 years....it's a travesty. Rubbish! Who voted it for it to be included in any list? I am a regular listener to Radio 2 but I don't recall the invitation to vote for this bland, slushy rubbish which might appeal to the masses who wouldn't know a good song if it jumped up and bit them on the nose but is certainly NOT the best song of the last 25 years. How depressing and just when we thought manufactured 'pop' was on the way out - where on earth did this dreadful list appear from? While I am biassed in that I thought Love Will Tear Us Apart should have won, in all seriousness, I think that the best song of the last 25 years should not include songs less than 5 years old as that would exclude songs which are popular because of novelty. Then again, well done Robbie, good show. You've got to be kidding. Angels is a great song, but not the best song of the last 25 years. Only the best song to be up for nomination at the Brits. I think Angels is a great song and deserved to be in the run up for this award but I don't think its the best song from the past 25 years! Right enough, it is better than some of the others in this category, for example, what was Will Young doing being nominated in the first place - he is alright but the song isn't that good! I'm happy for Robbie himself though! Best song in the last 25 years? What a Joke! Think of all the great rock and pop songs released in the 80s and pretty much all of them are better than Angels. Phil Collins doesn't deserve awards for all the good songs he wrote? Angels is an overrated song, that got tiresome even before you had finished listening to it. Soppy rubbish at best. Hopefully manufactured rubbish will die down soon, and let the real artists who worked hard for there glory receive awards. So boringly obvious and typical of the bland nature of mainstream music in Britain today, for me it's proof that music and democracy just don't mix. Still, at least it wasn't Will Young... Oh it's all just a bit of fun. People take these awards too seriously! Robbie has millions of loyal fans, while even non-fans know the words to angels. Him winning obviously reflects who votes in these awards. Personally I wanted Will Young to win, but that was not really due to his musical talent! I hate the song, all it brings back is memories of school discos and no-one to slow-dance with! I agree about Angels. I never get fed up hearing it. Whenever the song comes on the radio I turn the radio up, smile and sing along

(very badly, that is why the radio has to be turned up to drown my voice out). The song makes me calm and serene and happy. Well done Robbie. I think that although Robbie Williams is a good performer, that Angels isn't really that good a song. It certainly isn't anywhere near as good as Love Will Tear Us Apart by Joy Division or Wuthering Heights by Kate Bush. Angels is a fantastic song. All credit to Robbie Williams and Guy Chambers. It's a song that will be played forever and bridges all age groups. Robbie did in no way deserve that mantle. Whenever we have these awards it is always 'artists' from the past five years that seem to win the best of the best...We forget about the late 80s and early 90s for example. They weren't cool at the time, but because they are cool again now shows that the songs have greater longevity than people think. Yes Angels is the best song since the past 25 years, because it touches the soul as it carries a lot of meaning. I've always disliked Angels intensely. I believe it to be symbolic of the general capacity of British pre-teens," teens and middle aged women to accept low quality/ low aspirational music as ""classic"" songwriting. It's 'orrible. It seems obvious to me that people who like Robbie are people who don't particularly like music all that much. Folks without collections; folks who have never engaged in that madness one experiences when falling under the spell of pop music. Angels adds nothing - it is merely an irritating distraction - a wasp that refuses to go away on a summer's afternoon picnic. What a dreadful result. If you voted for it - you should feel ashamed of yourself - you probably only know a dozen songs or so don't you - so where do get off applying this uninformed filter and casting this ridiculous vote. Booo hisss Angels", best song? You are kidding, right? Last five years I might be willing to accept, but 25, no way. Did whoever voted for this actually have ANY music knowledge prior to, say, 1995? Really quite insulting to the British music industry of the past quarter of a century. No surprise about Robbie Williams considering the list. Where on earth did the nominations list come from???? Compiled by an eleven year-old girl perhaps?? I mean, Will Young? Come on. What a load of crap, best song in the last 25 years - I don't think so!! What about all the REAL artists out there over the last 25 years - the list is endless, but Robbie Williams doesn't even come close. What a joke. That song has become such a bane to me that I have developed a Pavlovian response to the word 'Angels' where I thrash around," and scream ""no no no no no"" until someone tells me ""the radio's off"". Why a half-baked cheesy ditty like Angels", which has become the anthem for millions of romantic sops (think how many times it was sung on Pop Idol for example, and by whom), should be voted the best song of the past 25 years, is beyond me. If this is the song against which all others are judged, then musicians may as well give up. Why do we reward mediocrity so highly in this country?? The initial list was very weak anyway, but Angels the best song of the last 25 years!!!! I think not, I didn't realize Radio 2 had so many listeners under the age of 10!! People have such short memories! A great song yes, but the best of the last 25 years? Not a chance. I think the person as opposed to the song has been voted for here. The Great British Public at work again. It's a mediocre, sentimental and safe song. Granted, it's not too bad," either. But can it stand up against ANYTHING by The Smiths (in particular ""How Soon is Now?"") or anything from the Stone Roses' first album? Nope. No", Because I'm not female and I'm not 10! Ok I like Robbie and Angels is a decent song. But it is no way the best song of the past 25 years! The shortlist wasn't great but him winning it is a joke! Predictable and laughable. The success of Angels at this years Brits reflects poorly on the state of British music over the last 25 years. The British public are brainwashed by the corporate pulp that is presented to them as cutting edge music and true talent is being sadly missed. Whilst Angels is a popular song it is not even the best song in Robbie's repertoire never mind best song o

f the last 25 years. I am a huge Robbie fan and love that song. But I think there are a lot more outstanding songs / music out there that influenced music today, unfortunately they were left out of the list. Have Radio 2 listeners even heard of Joy Division? A band who, through two albums, have had a bigger impact on music, and continue to do so, over the last 25 years than Robbie Williams ever will. No doubt about it. There's not a song done by anyone with more emotion and feeling. Some people will adopt their slightly snobby stances, but Angels has hit home with a far larger audience than any other song. It should have been Joy Division. Those guys have played an influential part in shaping modern day music while Angels remains yet another pop song. I sincerely do not believe that in 25 years from now, the most influential artists will argue that Robbie Williams inspired their art in the way that the Byrds, the Beatles and Nick Drake have done for music today. Yes!! I think its a brilliantly written song with different meanings to different people. There were other great songs in the category... but somebody had to win! Robbie was a deserved winner. I am astounded that such a second-rate record has beaten such a line up of amazing songs! it's a terrible song, voted for by the masses who don't have the brains to appreciate innovative and exciting music. The best song of the past 25 years? Really? Come on, this is surely a joke? No? I think I need a long lie down... It just goes to show that the British public do not have a clue about good quality music when they pick Robbie Williams over the beautifully talented Kate Bush and Joy Division. I suppose it's confirmed one thing - the British public are consistently dull :- &lt;(` No offence Robbie, but pleeeease! There must be a thousand better songs than a formulated cheesy pop song for kids. No one agrees with this and quite frankly it is an embarrassment to the integrity of British music, and a further nail in the coffin! I think Robbie deserves it, he has been the most iconic of any stars we have had in Britain since John Lennon and is an idol to millions worldwide. Anybody who says he doesn't deserve it is jealous of his success. The only real challenger was Queen but hey, Another One Bites the Dust!! Obviously all the Karaoke singers in the UK voted for it. If this is the best song of the last 25 years then the British Music industry is in trouble. Sure Robbie is talented and produces excellent material, but this is not the best record. A sad day for music. It's not the type of music I normally like, but even as a diehard rock fan," I recognise that it is a good song and appealas to most people. That's why it has been voted best song of the last 25 years. It's a good all-rounder. Just like Robbie. Best song in 25 years? Since 1980? I'm confused. ""Angels"" isn't a bad song. It's a nice", catchy, formulaic anthem that ticks all the boxes. But this is not great music. If anything it's regressive. Blah and even. I suppose it's just more evidence of how redundant the Brit Awards have become. Granted angels is a good song, however it really wasn't up against any other proper competition. The Queen's song was lackluster, and apart from Kate Bush, the other choices were pathetic! Also, why weren't the Stones there, David Bowie, etc, there are so many greater songs than Angels...I wonder if it was simply the fact that Robbie wasn't getting more awards so they had to make one up for him! Best song of the last 25 years? What a ridiculous concept, and an even more ridiculous winner. Sigh. On the upside, at least it wasn't Bohemian Rhapsody, for which we should all be thankful. Angels is without doubt a great song but I really don't think it deserves the title of best song in 25 years. perhaps the vote had more to do with teenage opinion on Robbies' goodlooks than the actual song!!! Don't get me wrong, I'm not disputing his looks, but there are more deserved winners. It would have been a travesty had Angels not won. Without Angels, Robbie Williams may well not be where he is now, and Britain would have been deprived of one of its most charismatic and talented performing artists. It has to be seen performed live, with 125,000 people singing along to

be fully appreciated. Well done Rob. I find it hard to believe that 'Angels' is the best we have to show for the past 25 years! I'm rapidly redefining 'best' in my own head now to mean 'most gratuitously played at weddings and funerals because people think it has deep meaning'. What about Britpop? Blur, Oasis, Suede, Pulp... not only making fantastic songs but also making changes, doing something different. Why must 'best' always come down to most commercially popular? I've nothing against Robbie, I actually like his music, but how can this possibly be the best song from the last 25 years? The Brits has proved to be nothing more than a bargaining tool between the pop moguls to boost band profiles and record sales. The same goes with the Scissor Sisters, I think this is a superb record and thoroughly deserves the newcomer award, but the album comes nowhere near U2's new record, neither are they in the same league. Once again there have been some baffling decisions made, they are not for artistic reasons, but for profit. No surprise really, it's voted for by the general public. Since when did they have taste in music? Personally I find Angels by Robbie Williams to be one of the most irritating songs I have ever heard! It absolutely deserved to win. It is a song that has united the generations and will continue to be played for many years to come. It's an absolute joke, however most of the original 25 were very poor choices as well. All in all a pretty pointless exercise! The song is overplayed and oversentimental. Out of the rather poor five choices that were left, it should have gone to either Joy Division or Queen. I suppose we should be thankful that it didn't end up in the hands of Will Young though. Although it has nostalgia value, there is no way it deserved to win. Everybody knows the words to Bohemian Rhapsody, Nothing Compares 2 U, etc. Much better songs and more timeless. Give it to someone with real talent. Although Angels is a good song I think that anyone with the slightest musical taste will realise that this is not the best song of the last 25 years. This is just another example of record company manipulation to keep an artist in the public eye. Why not give him an award for the greatest pair of trousers if that's all it means!

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"entertainment" 254.txt Jamelia's return to the top R&B star Jamelia had three Brit nominations to go with her triple triumph at last year's Mobo awards. The Birmingham-born singer", full name Jamelia Davis, was signed to a record label at the age of 15 and released her first single So High at 18. She released four number ones from her 2000 album Drama, including the top five hit Money featuring the vocals of reggae artist Beenie Man. She racked up five Mobo nominations in 2000, winning one for best video. But in the same year she also fell pregnant and decided to take a break from music to bring up her daughter Teja, who was born in March 2001. While she originally planned to get back to work pretty swiftly after giving birth it was actually two years before she released another single. During her absence R&B music exploded and a whole host of female artists were on the scene, meaning Jamelia had to once again prove herself. Her comeback song Bout featuring Rah Digga only just scrapped into the top 40. It was her next single, Superstar, that really put her back on the map as one of Britain's most popular female R&B singers, holding her own in a music scene dominated by US artists such as Beyoncé and Ashanti. Superstar was followed by Thank You, winner of best single at the 2004 Mobos, which reached number two in the UK charts. The autobiographical song, which deals with domestic abuse, hit number one in New Zealand and Australia. Next came the song See It In A Boy's Eyes, which was especially written for her by Coldplay's Chris Martin. His involvement with the song meant not only was it given massive publicity but it was also greeted favourably by a new audience who would not usually listen to R&B. She now combines singing with modelling and supporting charities including the NSPCC and Make Trade Fair. Despite her huge success in recent years,

Jamelia remains down-to-earth about her fame and her chances of lasting in the fickle music business," partly due to motherhood. ""When I first got into the industry", I'd be away from home for months at a time. But now I have other things in my life. I still want to make it, but it's not the end of the world if I don't," commented Jamelia.

entertainment 255.txt Cult band Kasabian surge forward In die dance band Kasabian built up a cult following throughout 2004 to secure three Brit Award nominations. The four-piece Leicester band blends dark electronics with rock, earning Kasabian places on the best British group, rock act and live act shortlists. They have also earned a reputation as outspoken and charismatic, in contrast to fellow Brit nominees such as Keane and Snow Patrol. British music needs a kick up the arse and Britain needs a new band to breathe life into the British people again", " declared Kasabian's singer Tom Meighan. No-one's doing it at the minute. Music feels like it's in the afterlife right now. We don't want people to give up on it. ""The serpent's going to rise from the sea and scare all the pirates away!"" Meighan grew up in Leicester with Kasabian songwriter/guitarist Sergio Pizzorno and bassist Chris Edwards", " a trio which began making music from the age of 17. They enlisted guitarist and keyboard player Christopher Karloff after spotting him in a pub. ""We saw his long sideburns and thought 'hey', he looks the part, we'll ask him," "" said Meighan. Inspired by Britpop and a mutual love of hardcore", an early 1990s genre that fused house music with hip hop beats and a dark sensibility," they added an electronic element to the traditional guitar sound. ""We got a computer and we cut rock'n'roll up", because there's no point in going back to how it was," said Meighan. It's all about new ideas and creativity." " The band's original approach is reflected in its name", " inspired by Linda Kasabian - the getaway driver of US serial killer Charles Manson. Coincidentally it is also the Armenian term for ""butcher""". Kasabian moved into a remote farmhouse in Rutland to record their debut album", benefiting from its isolation but also managing to sneak in a few parties while they were there. Signed to the RCA record label, Kasabian tested the water with two singles, Club Foot and LSF, which reached numbers 19 and 10 in the UK singles chart respectively. They built up their following on the summer festival circuit, opening both Glastonbury and T in the Park," and at a series of ""guerilla gigs"" at unusual venues including Half Time Orange", a pub next to Leicester City football club's headquarters. Kasabian's self-titled album was released last September to widespread critical acclaim, its indie dance stance drawing comparisons to The Stone Roses," Primal Scream and The Happy Mondays. Regarding it as ""both a fiery assertion of rock 'n' roll ethics and proof that a siege mentality is alive and well in the badlands of Rutland Water""", the NME's praise was typical of the album's reception. As 2004 progressed Kasabian would score a further two hits - Processed Beats and Cutt Off - and embark upon a well-received UK tour. ""We take our music seriously", definitely, but we want to have fun with it, said Pizzorno. This is not a job to us," added Meighan. This is the best life we could ever have. This is what it's all about and without it we'd be lost souls. But music needs us as well." "

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entertainment 256.txt Brits debate over 'urban' music Jooss Stone", a 17-year-old soul singer from Devon, beat Dizzee Rascal, Jamelia, Lemar and The Streets to win best British urban act at the Brit Awards. Her victory has reignited the debate about what urban music is. I'm not really comfortable with the word urban. It's a word that's been manufactured in this country and America to describe black music. The word urban seems to cover such a broad range of black music that it's wrong. How far are the Brits removed from i

nner-city music and what people are doing? It's so far removed that I don't expect them to get it bang on. The music industry isn't championing music from our particular genre very well anyway. People don't feel like that's anything to do with us. I don't feel like urban music's just been celebrated by [Joss Stone] winning or her being nominated, or by the Brits acknowledging that there's an urban music scene because it's all a kick in the teeth at the end of the day. It's not really relevant. If Joss Stone is the closest thing that they feel comfortable championing because of what she looks like and how she sounds and who she's signed to, then so be it. It's got nothing to do with what's really going on.

Urban as a genre is very broad. If you look underneath urban, there are a number of core elements that include hip-hop, R&B, garage and into that obviously comes soul. Joss Stone is a soul artist. Her first album was called The Soul Sessions. So urban is a very broad brushstroke that is the umbrella over the top of sub-genres, and there are offshoots of all of those. Joss Stone has had amazing success [in the US] given that she's a UK artist. What has really captured everybody's imagination is that here you have a 17-year-old from Devon with a voice to die for and a bunch of really, really good tunes and she looks good - I think that's what's done it. The award for best British urban act was voted for by viewers of MTV Base. I don't think Joss was not a worthy winner. She makes soul music and that definitely comes under the category of what we describe as urban. The fact that she's from Devon is the interesting thing because most of the music we cover is made in large cities and she's literally rural. The great thing about urban music is that there's a big range. If there is some sort of root with black music or dance music in Britain, I think that's where you can call it urban - that's where this new sub-category, or uber-category, has come from. Joss Stone is certainly not old enough to have had some of the experiences of an older soul singer, but you couldn't argue that she was being inauthentic with her emotions - it is coming from somewhere genuine. It has to come across as real. That's the only cut-off point we have here and that's the only way by which we judge people.

What urban means to us as an organisation is the politically correct term to describe music which originated from a black background. Music should become inclusive and if we are fighting for a multi-cultural Britain, then we should be fighting for inclusion rather than exclusion. If Joss Stone can be accepted within the urban music community, I think acts from other ethnicities doing classical music and rock should be accepted too. Race doesn't make a difference if everyone is included. Out of all the awards dished out yesterday, I'm still trying to find out what people of other races received any sort of recognition or award.

A type of music (especially street music) that originates from a city, and typically reflects or is characteristic of urban life. She might not be urban, but when did R&B become the hip hop tainted thing it is now? R&B stands for Rhythm And Blues, remember! That Joss Stone is rubbish is certain. If anyone deserves to win an award for urban music (I think probably should include Hip-Hop, Soul & Funk at least but not rock or pop) this year its the Streets, although Dizzee Rascal stakes a good claim. She definitely deserved to win a prize, Joss Stone's albums are quite simply amazing, easily better than anything else that was released last year. This whole debate about what is urban, what isn't urban is completely pointless and probably fueled by urban artists who weren't nominated or didn't win. I can't see why people can't just congratulate her for the talent that she is. She did deserve it, but I agree with the comments about urban music. Its a stupid phrase, and particularly British. In the states they tend to use hip hop and R&B, if I say hip hop here a lot of people have no idea what I'm talking about. Very strange. What's in a name? A rose by any other name etc... If people want to call it urban, why not? If we really analysed it, the term 'dance music' is misleading because it does

n't describe everything you can dance to. Whilst I agree that the term 'urban' is open to interpretation, it strikes me as simply weird that Joss Stone has won. 'Urban' to me is what I hear being played in parties in the inner cities - I live in Brixton and have never heard The Soul Sessions pumping out of a bass heavy sound system in any parties I've been to. Good luck to Joss Stone, let's celebrate her victory - let's also question why, with artists so successful and talented as Jamelia, Lemar, Kanye West, Dizzee Rascal, Alicia Keys and Outkast - we didn't see a single black artist on stage collecting an award. So, what you're saying is that any music that has black heritage is not allowed to be sung by anyone who isn't black. And, if it is, then they shouldn't be acknowledged for it even if they're pretty dam good at it? She's 17, has an amazing voice, and won. Good on her. Oh," but she's not ""black"" well", let's make her feel real bad about it then. How dare she! Though hang on," didn't the so-called 'public' vote on this one? This idea of pigeonholing whatever is popular at the time is no different than what was happening in the 1940s and 50s in relation to what ""Jazz"" was. The media then called anything that had a swinging beat", "incopated melody or soulful feeling ""Jazz""", much to the chagrin of the artists. It would mean that ""blues"" would be put in the same mould as ""bebop""", ""cool"" and ""ragtime""", all very different styles at that time. Jazz was and remains such a massively misunderstood term. And so what of ""Urban"" music? In truth it's a lazy term to categorise music that you don't really understand. Soul and garage are worlds apart musically (Marvin Gaye v Tuff Jam?)", but no doubt have their connections. If we just let the music speak for itself and not judge the success of an artist by the number of awards won, then maybe we can enjoy the music for what it is, rather than what it represents. I demand a prize for rural music! Sucks to the cities- it's way better out here. We have hay, for one thing. Excluding her from what has become known as urban music would be as bad as excluding Lenny Kravitz or Hendrix from rock music for being black surely? I dont understand the point that Ty is making. If Lemar, who makes music which is less soulful than Joss' work won," he might have said nothing. (btw i'm black too) How can she be ""urban"" if she spent most of her life in the Devon countryside? Nonsense. I love Joss to bits and don't care what her branding is - it's amazing music", full stop. Stop putting it all in brackets and let's just call it music, and let's especially drop the black / urban tag - nearly all music came from black origin, this just sets an example that it is ok to pigeonhole people and their music by their colour. Surely the point of having an urban music category is simply to acknowledge artists that are making what is (historically) considered urban music, irrelevant of the colour of their skin, or where they originate from. Joss Stone is simply singing a certain type of music that can be considered urban in style, just as someone from an inner city, and indeed not from the USA could sing country music. If that person was good at it and authentic in sound, would we criticise it being referred to as country music or the artist for representing that style? The term urban in reference to a music genre in UK has developed, in part, from the controversy surrounding the branding of the MOBO Awards. The very term 'Music of Black Origin' has confused and offended many people. This is particularly strange given the existence of the Asian Music Awards. It appears that the use of 'black' or 'white' in relation to music makes people feel uncomfortable. The term 'urban' therefore, has been invoked to sidestep the debate of which type of music came first 'black' or 'white' thereby rendering the issue colourblind. The result is now a redundant new debate as to what 'urban' also means. Perhaps we should have created a new term altogether to describe the various strains of soul/RnB and Hip-Hop," one which does not also mean something else - as we have done with 'Crunk'. Urban is just a word that's come about recently to describe ""black"" music tha

t's become popular now. The word wasn't even in use", or common use five of six years ago. It's just a way of the industry clumping it all together without having to call it black music," because some people are oversensitive and might call them racist for it. I'm in a band that has been called ""urban""", and I despise the label. I'd hate to think I belonged to any neat marketing niche, because that's all it is. Ever since the music channels and record companies tried to fracture what they consider 'music of black origin', these labels have been used to undermine the status of good music into a commodity. Look at all the TV broadcasters, unable to reach young people without condescending, they simply play some 'urban' music on the soundtrack as if its some dreadful cheap lift music. Ignore the labels, it is what it is, just music. As a black man, I think I agree with some of the statements at least the statements made by the key executives. Black people should lead the music they invented . We should stop calling a genre meaningless, nothing is meaningless. The real question is would Joss Stone would have been that successful doing the music she was doing if she were black? Same thing, with Streets, Amy Winehouse, etc. Who's ever heard of Terri Walker or Rhian Benson.. They are both 10 times better than Joss Stone and both of them have won Urban Music Awards and i think Mobos , but why not Brits???? So what if Joss Stone won the Urban awards. Her music is great soul and surely that is under the 'Urban' banner? What if The Streets had won? Would people be whining because Mike Skinner is white... It seems that a lot of the fuss is about race where the real issue should be music and nothing else. Urban is PC version for saying black music. I'm not doubting Ms Stone's talent, but why didn't Jamelia or Lemar get a Brit? This reminds me of what happened to Craig David and Soul II Soul in the past, getting nominations are easy to get, but picking up a Brit seems to be the hardest thing. Refreshing to see people making reasonable, intelligent comments on any topic these days. More power to you, people! You have said it: there is music you like and music you don't like - who cares what label you put on it? That entire category was a mess. How can you have people like Dizzee Rascal up against Joss Stone? Its like putting Eminem against Bob Geldof. She should have been nominated for Best British R & B act. Joss Stone deserved to win an award for her talents, but I don't think it was very 'urban' of her to sing angels with Robbie Williams. Urban is a nonsense term - music of black origin? Well doesn't that include rock? Music made in the inner cities? Well almost all bands end up making music in London/Manchester etc. And doesn't that make some weird implication that all black people live in cities? It doesn't make any sense. Why does music have to be put into a genre? It's music," you like it or you don't. Simple as that. I play in a heavy metal band. We are urban music as far as I'm concerned. We live in cities and spend our working life in an urban environment; It therefore directly shapes what we write musically. ""Urban"" seems to be the new name for all styles of black music. Why it needed a rebrand I don't know as the name is misleading. Oasis originate from a city and characterise the urban life they know"," therefore more than fit the term ""urban"" yet as they're a white rock band they won't be described as such. Joss Stone has a fantastic voice and great timing and delivery - what other reason do they need to award her the Brit? All this ""urban"" and other such categorisation is just the red-tape of the music business and is best ignored. Yeah", she deserved it. She is talented. Urban is a crap, meaningless, politically correct and probably actually racist marketing term though. There's only two kinds of music: good and bad.

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"entertainment 257.txt Row threatens Hendrix museum plan  
Proposals to open a museum dedicated to Jimi Hendrix are flailing because of a row over the home of his late father. The run-down house in Seattle has already

y been moved wholesale once and local authorities are now demanding it be moved to another site. Hendrix supporters hoped to turn the home into a museum for the guitarist. ""The mayor is going to go down as the mayor who destroyed Jimi Hendrix's house", said Ray Rae Marshall of the James Marshall Hendrix Foundation. The foundation moved the building, in which Al Hendrix lived between 1953 and 1956, when the land it was built on was to be developed for housing in 2002. Now the City of Seattle wants its new plot to be used for development, giving a deadline of 22 February for the home to be moved. Mr Goldman said the authority had promised the house could remain on its new site and be turned into a memorial and community centre. Seattle officials said no such deal had been offered. We never said", 'You can own this property,""" said John Franklin"," chief of its operations department. ""From our perspective", it was a temporary situation. We have not threatened to demolish the house. We've simply asked that they have to move it." Now Mr Goldman is calling for the authority to pay to move the building to Seattle's central district", where Hendrix grew up. Janie Hendrix, the guitarist's stepsister," said the family were still hoping the guitarist would be honoured by having a road named after him. ""That's something my father really wanted to see", she said. It would be nice if we didn't have to fight for everything to get it." Hendrix was widely considered one of the most important guitarists of his time. He died of drug overdose in 1970 at the age of 27.

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"entertainment 258.txt No jail for singer Courtney Love S  
inger Courtney Love has been spared jail for assault and drug offences", but must serve three years probation. She had back-to-back court appearances in two separate cases in Los Angeles, first pleading no contest to attacking a woman with a whisky bottle. In the second, Ms Love,40, pleaded guilty to possessing a forged prescription and painkiller oxycodone. She must also do 100 hours community service, have drug treatment," attend Narcotics Anonymous and pay a fine. The ex-Hole singer's lawyer Howard Weitzman said Ms Love had ""turned her life around"" and she was ""clean and sober"". The assault charge stemmed from April 2004", when Ms Love found musician Kristin King in her boyfriend's home. Ms King said the singer ""threw the bottle at the left side of my face"" in an ""angry""" vicious and erratic"" attack. Ms Love was originally charged with the more serious offence of assault with a deadly weapon", but that was reduced to assault. Judge Rand Rubin said she must: - Spend three years on probation - Have one year's anger management counselling - Have one year's drug rehabilitation - Do 100 hours community service - Pay \$1,000 (£535) fine - Have random drug tests - Go to three Narcotics Anonymous meetings per week In the drug case, she was sentenced to 18 months probation, to run concurrently with the probation for the assault. That offence stemmed from October 2003, when she suffered an overdose after breaking a window at her boyfriend's home. In a separate case relating to the same incident, Ms Love was sentenced to 18 months in drug rehabilitation for being under the influence of cocaine and opiates. In another case last October, she pleaded guilty to disorderly conduct for hitting a man on the head with a microphone stand at a New York City nightclub. Last month her lawyers said she had won back custody of Frances Bean, her 12-year-old daughter with former Nirvana frontman Kurt Cobain. The girl was removed from her care following her double arrest in October 2003. Cobain committed suicide in 1994.

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"entertainment 259.txt Rapper Kanye West's shrewd soul US  
hip-hop star Kanye West - who leads the race for this year's Grammys with 10 no

minations - rose to prominence by producing songs for artists such as Jay-Z and Alicia Keys. He then emerged from his behind-the-scenes role to become an artist as well as a producer. But his solo career almost ended before it began after a near-fatal car crash left West with his jaw wired shut in 2002. The resulting song", Through the Wire, became West's first UK hit in April 2004 and subsequent album The College Dropout became a transatlantic success, both critically and commercially. West, 26, began rapping as a teenager at his Chicago school, inspired by the beats and rhymes of 1980s pioneers Run DMC. Hip-hop producer No ID encouraged West to sample old soul and R&B hits then revive them with an updated sound," an approach that would become his trademark. ""I feel like a lot of the soul that's in those old records that I sample is in me", he said. So when I hear them and I put them with the drums and I bring them to the new millennium," it's just like God's doing that. I'm one with them records right there. It's a blessing." Leaving his Chicago art school after only one year - a move which would later inspire the title of his album - West began his music career co-producing songs for artists Mase and the Madd Rapper. This drew the attention of superstar rapper Jay-Z", who signed West up to his Roc-A-Fella record label to produce numerous artists on his roster. West's work gained mainstream recognition when he produced the singles Takeover and Izzo (HOVA) on Jay-Z's own 2001 album Blueprint. Incorporating samples of Five to One by The Doors and the Jackson Five's I Want You Back respectively, the hits were credited with injecting soul back into hip-hop. As their success attracted further production work for Jay-Z ('03 Bonnie & Clyde) and artists such as Ludacris (Stand Up) and Alicia Keys (You Don't Know My Name), West announced plans for a solo album. Driving home from a late-night Los Angeles recording session in October 2002," he was involved in the car crash that left his jaw fractured in three places. ""Anytime I hear about any accident my heart sinks in and I just thank God that I'm still here", he later said. That steering wheel could have been two inches further out," and that would have been it." West's account of the accident sampled Chaka Khan's hit Through the Fire to become the heart of his completed solo album The College Dropout. Released last year", it was by turns smooth, humorous and sharp and largely avoided the cliché hip-hop preoccupation with guns, girls and jewellery. Through the Wire was quickly joined in the UK and US charts by Slow Jamz, on which West collaborated with rapper Twista and Ray actor Jamie Foxx. The College Dropout spawned two further UK hits and a string of award nominations. West was shortlisted for 10 Grammys - including nominations for artist and album of the year - and took the best hip-hop artist, producer and album titles at last year's Music of Black Origin (Mobo) Awards. Now a respected rapper and producer in the influential field of hip-hop, Kanye West is unlikely to regret his decision to leave college early.

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"entertainment 260.txt Singer Christina Aguilera to wed P  
op star Christina Aguilera is to marry music executive Jordan Bratman", the singer's agent has confirmed. Bratman, 26, proposed to Grammy-winning singer Aguilera, 23," on holiday at an undisclosed location. The pair have been together for more than two years. ""No wedding plans have been set yet", said Aguilera's agent Meghan Prophet. Aguilera burst onto the pop scene in 1999, winning a best new artist Grammy in 2000. Her hits include What a Girl Wants, Dirrrty and Beautiful. Bratman presented his fiancee with a diamond ring designed by jeweller Stephen Webster on Friday, said Ms Prophet. New York-born Aguilera reached number one in the UK with her debut hit Genie in a Bottle in October 1999. Her early success was cemented by two further Grammys in subsequent years. In 2002, Aguilera won best pop collaboration for the hit track Lady Marmalade with Lil' Kim, M

aya and Pink, and last year she picked up the award for best female pop vocal performance for Beautiful. Her most recent single, Car Wash, featuring Missy Elliott, reached number four in the UK charts last November.

entertainment 261.txt Brits return Keane to number one Br its success has helped return Keane's award-winning album Hopes and Fears back to the top of the UK album chart. The debut album, which took the best British album title at the Brits on Tuesday, moved up seven places from number eight to number one. Also capitalising on Brits success were the Scissor Sisters whose eponymous album moved three places to number two. U2's latest single Sometimes You Can't Make It On Your Own took the top spot in the singles chart, ahead of Elvis. The track, from their current album How To Dismantle An Atomic Bomb, pushed Eminem's Like Toy Soldiers from number one to number three. Elvis' Wooden Heart, which entered the chart at number two, is the sixth in a series of 18 reissues to mark the 70th anniversary of Presley's birth. There are currently six re-released Elvis' tracks occupying spots in the top 40 singles chart including Are You Lonesome Tonight at number 20, It's Now or Never at number 27 and Jailhouse Rock at number 37. Soldier, by Destiny's Child, Ti and Lil Wayne, debuted at number four, while Almost Here, the duet from former Westlife star Brian McFadden and Delta Goodrem, fell from number three to number five. There was more follow up to Brits success for Franz Ferdinand won best rock act and best British group last week. Their self-titled album moved from 13 to number four. Last week's number one album Tourist, by Athlete, fell to number three.

entertainment 262.txt U2's desire to be number one U2, who have won three prestigious Grammy Awards for their hit Vertigo, are stubbornly clinging to their status as one of the biggest bands in the world. The most popular groups in the history of rock all have several things in common. The music must be inspired and appeal across generations and be distinctive, if not always groundbreaking. But such success is down to more than music. They have to be compelling performers, charismatic and intelligent enough to make good decisions and keep their feet on the ground. They also have to want it. They have to want to be the biggest band ever and not stop wanting it. The Beatles had it, the Rolling Stones still have it, REM hold onto it and Queen were it in a catsuit. And U2 have it in spades, and keep churning it out. Their new album, How To Dismantle An Atomic Bomb, comes 28 years after the schoolfriends got together in Dublin and 17 years after The Joshua Tree cemented their place on the all-time rock A-list. They may have lost some of the edginess and raw, youthful force that propelled them to the top, but they have lost none of the desire or ability to craft songs and albums. Vertigo, the first single from the new album, went straight into the UK singles chart at number one, knocking Eminem off the top spot and giving them their 26th top 10 hit. The challenge is to be bigger and b older and better - to make records the whole world will listen to", Bono recently said. Drummer Larry Mullen Jr echoed those sentiments: We're very competitive - we want to be on the radio," have big singles. We don't want to be thought of as a veteran band. The band have done "everything in their considerable powers" to ensure they remain the biggest band in the world", according to Q magazine editor Paul Rees. "This makes them hugely determined and formidable." He added: "They are equally determined to push themselves to make music that continues to stand up. "As such", they've constantly re-invented and challenged themselves. They are, perhaps, alone as the only rock band that has got better with age." The other key ingredient was the fact they were highly organised", Mr Rees said. "They do everything in the right way." The group were born when Mullen put an appeal for bandmates on a high school notice board", attracting fellow pupils Paul Hewson (Bono, vocals), Adam Clayton (bass), David Evans (The Edge, guitar) and his brother Dick. Dick Evans soon dropped out and t

he four-piece were known as The Feedback and The Hype before settling on U2. By 1978, they had won a talent contest and got noticed by a manager," Paul McGuinness. ""They were brilliant", but very coarse, McGuinness recently said. In a way," they were doing exactly what they do now. Only badly." They struggled to attract record company attention", later being described as ""pretty damn average"" and ""strange and eerie"" by scouts who saw them live. They released two Ireland-only singles", which topped the national charts in 1979 and 1980, leading to a deal with Island and their debut album Boy. The stadium-filling, anthemic sound was U2's aim from the start, and their third album, War, saw them make the breakthrough on both sides of the Atlantic, going to number one in the UK and 12 in the US. Songs like Sunday Bloody Sunday and New Year's Day brought success and an image as a political and spiritual band - which Bono rejected as a cliche. His stage performances - which included flag-waving, speaker-climbing and drum-throwing - earned him a reputation as an electric performer, and their appearance at 1985's Live Aid is widely seen as sealing their global stardom. In 1987, The Joshua Tree broke sales records and saw the band reach the height of their powers with hits including Where the Streets Have No Name, I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For and With Or Without You. Those songs took the band's epic, atmospheric sound to a simple, powerful and popular pinnacle. The end of the decade marked a crucial point for the band - they had reached the top but still yearned for new challenges and achievements. These came in the form of explorations of different branches of rock and forays into electronic dance music, plus wildly extravagant stage shows, while still trying to retain their mass appeal. The Achtung Baby album in 1991 was followed by Zooropa, Pop and their corresponding stadium tours, which featured giant olives, flying cars, live phone calls to the White House and Bono's transformation into alter-egos The Fly and MacPhisto. He was also building a parallel reputation - not always to the pleasure of his bandmates - as a campaigner on issues from global debt to Aids. Before the release of How To Dismantle An Atomic Bomb, they had sold 125 million albums around the world. But they still want more.

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"entertainment 263.txt Lasting influence of legend Charles Ray Charles", who has won a string of posthumous Grammy Awards, belonged to a pioneering generation of artists that had a huge influence on the course of rock and pop music. His sound encompassed so many styles - blues, gospel, jazz, rock 'n' roll, even country - and had a real impact on the nascent UK beat and R&B scenes. Compared in stature to Elvis Presley by some commentators, Charles' songs cast their spell on such 1960s stalwarts as Joe Cocker, Steve Winwood, Eric Burdon and Van Morrison. His influence has extended to contemporary artists such as Norah Jones, with whom he recently recorded a duet. If James Brown was the godfather of soul, then Ray Charles was indisputably one of its founding fathers. Along with Sam Cooke," he was instrumental in bringing together the gospel fervour of the deep south Baptist church with the ""devil's"" music of R&B to pave the way for a new generation of soul artists. Without Charles", it is hard to imagine the tear-stained Atlantic R&B sound of Aretha Franklin, Otis Redding or Wilson Pickett. He was also a talented jazz composer, arranger and band leader," playing at the Newport Jazz Festival and Carnegie Hall and recording with noted jazz musicians such as Milt Jackson and David ""Fathead"" Newman. Unfortunately", he also shared another trait common among many jazz artists of the era - that of heroin addiction, which led to him being arrested in 1965. His string of 1950s Atlantic R&B successes included songs that would be covered by the first-generation rock 'n' roll greats, including I've Got A Woman (Roy Orbison, Elvis Presley) and Hallelujah, I Love Her So (Eddie Cochran). After the exuberanc

e of his 1959 signature song What'd I Say, Charles turned towards a more pop-oriented style, recording Hoagy Carmichael's sentimental string ballad Georgia On My Mind, and the upbeat Hit The Road Jack. He also won acclaim in the country arena with his interpretations of Hank Williams standards such as Your Cheating Heart and You Win Again. More than 40 years after its release, his 1962 ABC album Modern Sounds in Country and Western Music is still regarded as a classic. His version of Don Gibson's I Can't Stop Loving You topped the pop and R&B charts in the US. In 1972, he made a rare foray into protest songs with his album A Message from the People. On it, he took a stand on poverty and civil rights - echoing similar recordings of the era from progeny such as Stevie Wonder, James Brown, Curtis Mayfield and Marvin Gaye. More than 20 years later, he would embrace contemporary production with his 1993 album My World, which featured hip-hop beats - although Charles claimed at the time not to know what hip-hop was. Among the tributes that poured in from all sections of the music world when Charles died aged 73 in June 2004 was one from his friend, the producer Quincy Jones, who described him as a ""brother in every sense of the word""."There will never be another musician who did as much to break down the perceived walls of musical genres as much as Ray Charles did", he said. Former Manfred Mann singer Paul Jones, who sang on 1960s hits such as Come Tomorrow and Sha La La, said Charles was one of his heroes. I'm quite sure my own writing was influenced by him", he told BBC News Online. I would put money on the proposition that Ray Charles will have an influence on music forever.""

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"entertainment 264.txt Grammys honour soul star Charles T  
he memory of soul legend Ray Charles dominated the music world's leading music ceremony on Sunday as he was given eight posthumous Grammy Awards. Charles", who died in 2004, got honours including record and album of the year, while Alicia Keys and actor Jamie Foxx performed a musical tribute to him. R&B star Keys won four awards herself at the Grammy ceremony in Los Angeles. U2, Usher, Norah Jones and Kanye West got three each. West led the race going into the ceremony with 10 nominations. Charles' last album, Genius Loves Company, a collection of duets that has sold more than two million copies, was named album of the year and best pop vocal album. His song Here We Go Again with Norah Jones won record of the year and best pop vocal collaboration," while Heaven Help Us All with Gladys Knight picked up best gospel performance. Jones said: ""I'm glad he's getting recognised", because of who he is and how much I love him."" Actor Jamie Foxx - who is nominated for an Oscar for playing Charles in the hit movie Ray - dedicated a rendition of Georgia on My Mind to ""old friends"" . Keys", looking to replicate her Grammys success of 2002, when she won five, picked up best R&B song for You Don't Know My Name and best R&B album for The Diary of Alicia Keys. She also shared the award for best R&B vocal performance by a duo or group with Usher for My Boo. Usher's other victories were for best contemporary R&B album for Confessions and best rap/sung collaboration for Yeah!, featuring Lil Jon and Ludacris. Kanye West dominated the rap categories, winning best rap song for Jesus Walks and best rap album for The College Dropout. But in one of the night's biggest shocks, he lost out in the battle to be named best new artist to pop rock act Maroon 5. Vertigo by rock giants U2 won three trophies - best rock song, best short video and best rock vocal performance by a duo or group. One of the other main awards, song of the year, went to US singer-songwriter John Mayer for Daughters. Mayer also won best male pop vocal performance. Britney Spears picked up her first ever Grammy for her song Toxic, which was named best dance recording. Rod Stewart also won the first Grammy of his career, getting the best traditional pop album award for Stardust... The Great American Songbook: V

olume III. In 2003," Stewart said he was ""astounded"" he had never won a Grammy - but ""they tend not to give it to the British unless you're Sting"". There were few other high-profile British victors this year. Annie Lennox", metal group Motorhead and dance act Basement Jaxx all took home trophies. But Elvis Costello, who had four nominations, and Joss Stone and Franz Ferdinand, who were both up for three awards," got nothing. Beach Boys veteran Brian Wilson was another first-time winner - for best rock instrumental performance. ""It represents triumph and achievement in music that I feel that I deserved", and I'm really glad I won," he said. A live recording of composer John Adams' 11 September tribute, On the Transmigration of Souls, performed by the New York Philharmonic, won three classical prizes. And former US President Bill Clinton picked up the second Grammy of his career, winning the spoken word award for the audio version of his autobiography My Life.

entertainment 265.txt Abba reunite for musical premiere T  
he original stars of Swedish pop quartet Abba have reunited for the home premiere of hit musical Mamma Mia! which is based on the band's songs. It is the first time in almost 20 years that the four, Bjorn Ulvaeus, Benny Andersson, Agnetha Faltskog and Anni-Frid Lyngstad, have met publicly. Faltskog has been a virtual recluse since the band split up in 1982. The musical, which has become a global phenomenon, will be performed in Swedish for the first time. Fans camped outside Stockholm's Cirkus theatre in the snow for a glimpse of the stars. The premiere marks Abba's first public reunion since the legendary band's acrimonious break-up in the early 1980s. It was thought that Faltskog would appear in London for the musical's fifth anniversary celebrations in April 2004 but she stayed away due to her fear of flying. Original Abba member Bjorn Ulvaeus set about translating the musical into the band's mother tongue for the celebrated home coming, alongside Swedish artist Niklas Stromstedt. Almost all of Abba's original songs, which have sold more than 350 million records worldwide, were written and recorded in English. The musical, set on a small Greek island, tells of the story of a young woman and her fiercely independent single mother. The show will include such classics as Super Trouper, SOS and Dancing Queen. There are currently 14 productions being staged worldwide, including New York and London, with road shows in Toronto, South Korea and Madrid. More than 20 million people around the world have seen the show.

entertainment 266.txt Help for indies in download sales A  
campaign has been launched to help independent labels get their music online and benefit from the growing trend for downloading music. The British Phonographic Industry has identified a lack of independent music available for download. We want to ensure that independent repertoire is as successful in the download world as it is in the physical world", said BPI chief Peter Jamieson. Downloaded singles have now overtaken physical singles in the UK. Mr Jamieson said his organisation was lobbying music service providers, which include iTunes and Napster, to urge them to promote independent releases. Download sales are due to be incorporated into the UK singles chart later this year. With downloads shortly to be eligible for the singles chart", this is a key commercial issue on which the BPI committed to assisting its members," added Mr Jamieson. As part of the campaign the BPI is running a series of seminars entitled Getting Your Music Online, focusing on how independent labels can embrace digital music. The US has already begun incorporating download sales in the Billboard's Hot 100 chart.

entertainment 267.txt T in the Park sells out in days Tic  
kets for Scotland's biggest music festival have sold out in record time, five months before the event is held. The 12th annual T in the Park festival, which takes place at Balado near Kinross in July, sold out just four days after the line-up was announced. Green Day, the Foo Fighters and Keane are among the acts

that had already been lined up to appear at the event. However, the organisers have revealed Scots favourites Travis as well as soulman James Brown will also appear. Last year tickets sold out 10 weeks before the festival but organisers confirmed that all 130,000 for the two-day event had been sold. Geoff Ellis, CEO of festival organisers Big Day Out Ltd, said this year's event promises to be the best yet. After last year's sell-out", we did think this year's event would sell slightly earlier, however this is way beyond our expectations, Mr Ellis said. We are extremely proud that fans are so excited about T in the Park that they have made absolutely sure that their place at Balado is booked for 2005," and we will deliver one of the greatest events yet for them in July." More than 120 acts will play on eight stages over the weekend of 9 and 10 July. Brit Award winners Keane and The Streets are among the main attractions", while The Killers and dance act The Prodigy are also on the bill. Both Green Day and The Foo Fighters last played at the festival in 2002, the same year Oasis and Basement Jaxx were among the headline acts.

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"entertainment 268.txt Black Sabbath top rock album poll  
Black Sabbath have topped a list of the best British rock albums of all time. The band once fronted by Ozzy Osbourne led a poll of Kerrang! magazine readers with their 1970 self-titled debut. The band have three more efforts on the list", including fifth-placed Paranoid. Osbourne appears more than any other act, with two solo records featured. The top five includes Led Zeppelin, Iron Maiden and Sex Pistols. Queen, Muse, Manic Street Preachers and The Clash complete the top 10. A mix of heavy metal, punk, glam rock and even dance music makes up the list. Motorhead," Judas Priest and Prodigy are included along with newer acts like The Darkness and Lostprophets. Kerrang! editor Ashley Bird said: ""It's amazing to see so many incredible homegrown albums in one list", " and without any of the abysmal fashion bands that currently clog up the music scene. ""These are the real opinions of proper rock fans." Formed by four teenage friends in the West Midlands in the late 1960s", Black Sabbath are one of Britain's most successful heavy rock bands. Their debut was a UK top 10 hit in 1970 and sold more than a million copies in the US. Osbourne said the band's success in the Kerrang! poll was a triumph for British rock. He said: ""Back then you'd hear: 'If you go to San Francisco", be sure to wear a flower in your hair'. ""We lived in Aston", Birmingham. The only flowers I ever saw were on a gravestone in our local cemetery." Despite being disliked by many critics", Black Sabbath's subsequent albums included multi-million sellers but internal rows led to Osbourne leaving in 1979. The band continued without Osbourne, who went on to solo success but also had to battle alcoholism and legal action over his music allegedly inciting teenagers to commit suicide. He was eventually cleared of the charges. Osbourne, who bit off the head of a live bat on stage in 1982, rejoined the band to play the Live Aid charity concert in 1985. After many changes in line-up, the original four members reunited to play live dates in 1997. Black Sabbath have reunited regularly in recent years while Osbourne has gone on to wider fame with his family through MTV documentary series The Osbournes.

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"entertainment 269.txt Michael film signals 'retirement'  
Singer George Michael has said that a new film about his life is the start of a retirement from public view. The pop star said it would be a much more ""behind the scenes affair""", and called his own genre of music ""dead"". ""I thought I should explain myself before I disappear", said Michael, who was at the Berlin film festival to launch the documentary. The film, A Different Story, chro

nicles Michael's life and career from the 1980s and his personal struggles. The 41-year-old chart-topper told reporters in the German capital that he wanted to move his career into a different form""," but added that he does not know what it is going to be yet. ""I'm still going to be making music", " he said, but added that he was not going to be around"". He hinted at discontent with the current state of music industry", " and said: ""I don't really think that there is anyone in the modern pop business who I feel I want to spar with." Michael said that the film", directed by Southan Morris," would put his two decades of fame into context. ""It's almost as much for me as for my fans", in terms of trying to make sense of the last 22 years and bring it to a close in a proper way," he said. The documentary chronicles the highs and lows of his life in the public gaze, from his meteoric rise as one half of pop duo Wham! to his arrest for lewd conduct in a Los Angeles toilet in 1998. The film also deals with the loss of Michael's partner Anselmo Feleppa from an Aids-related condition in 1993. A Different Story, which is being shown at the Berlin Film Festival, has been screened by BBC One.

entertainment 270.txt Hendrix guitar fetches £100,000 A much-loved guitar belonging to Jimi Hendrix has been sold for £100,000 at an auction in London. The 1965 Fender Stratocaster was one of a number of guitars included in the sale dedicated to the rock legend. The vast archive of instruments, signed records and posters were collected by a dedicated fan who had become friendly with the star. The auction was billed as the biggest collection of Hendrix memorabilia to go under the hammer. The majority of the items were collected by fan Bob Terry who began collecting at the age of 17. He later sold it on to another collector. Hendrix, widely considered one of the best guitarists of his era, died of a drug overdose in 1970 at the age of 27. The 1965 Fender Stratocaster was used by the musician on tour and in his studio. A poem written by Hendrix two weeks after his infamous appearance at the Monterey Festival where he set light to his guitar went for £10,000. The Jimi Hendrix Experience's first single Hey Joe, signed by all the band, was sold for £2,000. The sale, hosted by auctioneers Cooper Owen, was held at the Hard Rock Cafe in London.

entertainment 271.txt German music in a 'zombie' state The German music business - the third largest in the world - is in the state of a zombie"" because it has failed to respond to the challenge posed by downloading and piracy", a leading industry figure has said. Tim Renner, the head of Universal Music Germany until last year," told BBC World Service's The Music Biz programme that the country's music industry was now struggling to survive. Renner warned that unless the industry accepted ""new realities"" - such as downloading - its decline could become irreversible. ""The problem the music industry has got is that they aren't willing to accept that the classic way of doing business is over and out", " he stated. So the music industry in its current form over here is pretty much in the state of a zombie." The music market in Germany peaked in 1997", with sales of 2.6bn euros (£1.8bn). Since 2000, sales have plummeted to just 1.6bn euros (£1.1bn) in 2003. In the space of one year - between 2002 and 2003 - CD album sales fell by 13.8%. But a study by the Society for Consumer Research found that at the same time, more than twice as many recordable CDs had music recorded on them than CD albums were sold. Mr Renner pointed out that, because profit comes mainly from the longevity of a good-selling record," this was particularly damaging. ""You need time", " he added. However, Peter Zomusic, the managing director of the International Federation of Phonographic Industry in Germany, said he did not feel the situation was as dramatic"" as Mr Renner believed. ""It's quite true that we have severe problems in Germany - but that's true in other parts of the world and in most developed markets too", he argued. We have a severe problem with piracy, especially internet piracy," and w

e also have a severe problem of private copying. ""I don't agree that the music industry lost control over the music market - in fact", especially in regard to Germany talent," the market is quite successful." He did", however," admit that copyright owners have ""partly lost control of their copyright""", due to piracy and copying. But he refuted suggestions that the industry had been too slow to respond to digital downloading. ""We were the first to implement a download service - back in 1997", he argued. At that time it was not successful, because of the advent of piracy - it was the Napster time," when P2P services became popular. ""It still is quite difficult for the music industry to compete with a price that is zero as far as the illegal product is concerned." Mr Zombic also called for a change to the perception in Germany that private copying of music is not a problem. German law does allow people to make copies of CDs for their family and close friends", without fear of breaking copyright. Mr Zombic said that this legal framework was a ""huge problem"". ""There is a widespread attitude that private copying is a hobby", it's nice, it's fun," he added. We try to make clear it's not nice and it's not fun - it's endangering the creativity in our country."

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"entertainment 272.txt Musical treatment for Capra film T  
he classic film It's A Wonderful Life is to be turned into a musical by the producer of the controversial hit show Jerry Springer - The Opera. Frank Capra's 1946 movie starring James Stewart", is being turned into a £7m musical by producer Jon Thoday. He is working with Steve Brown," who wrote the award-winning musical Spend Spend Spend. A spokeswoman said the plans were in the ""very early stages""", with no cast, opening date or theatre announced. A series of workshops have been held in London, and on Wednesday a cast of singers unveiled the musical to a select group of potential investors. Mr Thoday said the idea of turning the film into a musical had been an ambition of his for almost 20 years. It's a Wonderful Life was based on a short story, The Greatest Gift, by Philip van Doren Stern. Mr Thoday managed to buy the rights to the story from Van Doren Stern's family in 1999, following Mr Brown's success with Spend Spend Spend. He later secured the film rights from Paramount, enabling them to use the title It's A Wonderful Life.

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"entertainment 273.txt Famed music director Viotti dies C  
onductor Marcello Viotti", director of Venice's famous La Fenice Theatre, has died in Germany at 50. Viotti, director of La Fenice since 2002, conducted at renowned opera houses worldwide including Milan's La Scala and the Vienna State Opera. His time at La Fenice coincided with its reopening in 2003 after it was destroyed by fire in 1996. He fell into a coma after suffering a stroke during rehearsals for Jules Massenet's Manon last week. He conducted some of the best orchestras in the world including the Berlin Philharmonic and the English Chamber Orchestra. Viotti was born in Switzerland and studied the piano, cello and singing at the Lausanne Conservatory. His career breakthrough came in 1982 when he won first prize at the Gino Marinuzzi conducting competition in Italy. Viotti established himself as chief conductor of the Turin Opera and went on to become chief conductor of Munich's Radio Orchestra. At La Fenice Viotti was widely acclaimed for his production of the French composer Massenet's Thais and some of his other productions included Giuseppe Verdi's La Traviata and Richard Strauss's Ariadne auf Naxos. The last opera he directed at La Fenice was Massenet's Le Roi de Lahore. Viotti's debut at the New York's Metropolitan Opera came in 2000 with Giacomo Puccini's Madame Butterfly, followed by La Boheme, La Traviata

and Fromental Halevy's La Juive. Giampaolo Vianello, superintendent of the Feni ce Theatre Foundation," said: ""I am filled with extreme sadness because", othe r than a great artist, he is missed as a friend - a main character in the lates t joyous times," during the rebirth of our theatre."" Viotti's last public perf ormance was on 5 February when he conducted Vincenzo Bellini's Norma at the Vie nna State Opera.

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"/" entertainment 274.txt TV presenter Deeley drops CD:UK Ca t Deeley has resigned as host of ITV1's Saturday morning children's music show CD:UK after six years. The 28-year-old host who also presents Stars In Their E yes said she wanted to concentrate on new television projects. ""I've had a gre at few years", met some really incredible people and been given some wonderful opportunities, the presenter said. Deeley will host her last show on 5 March an d guest presenters will stand in until a replacement is found. The long-runnin g presenter said: I would like to take this opportunity to thank the CD:UK team and all the viewers that have watched," supported the show and let me gate cras h their Saturday morning. ""Whilst obviously I am really sad to say goodbye", " I'm immensely excited about the future."" Deeley formerly co-hosted SM:tv", the children's show which airs before CD:UK on a Saturday morning, alongside hit pr esenters Ant and Dec. She won a Children's Bafta award for best presenter in De cember 2001 and also fronted BBC One's Fame Academy series.

"/" entertainment 275.txt The Producers scoops stage awards The Producers has beaten Mary Poppins in the battle of the blockbuster West End musicals at the Olivier Awards. The Producers won three prizes at the UK's mos t prestigious annual theatre awards", while Mary Poppins won two. Mel Brooks' h it show triumphed in the battle for best new musical, where it was up against M ary Poppins and Andrew Lloyd Webber's The Woman in White. Alan Bennett's The Hi story Boys was the big winner in the straight theatre categories, picking up th ree trophies. But all eyes were on the musical prizes after The Producers, Mary Poppins and The Woman in White all had high-profile openings in the last six mo nths. The Producers' Nathan Lane, a last-minute replacement for Richard Dreyfu ss, beat his former co-star Lee Evans to win best musical actor. Lane has alrea dy left the production. A smash hit on Broadway before moving to London, the sh ow also won best musical performance in a supporting role for Conleth Hill, who plays director Roger DeBris. Mary Poppins' awards came for best choreography an d best musical actress for its star Laura Michelle Kelly. It led the nomination s going into Sunday's ceremony at London's Hilton hotel, up for nine awards. Bo th shows are stage adaptations of 1960s films. The History Boys, set in a gramm ar school in the early 1980s and partly based on Bennett's experiences as a tea cher, was named best new play. It also won best actor for Richard Griffiths, w ho beat his Harry Potter film co-star Michael Gambon, nominated for Endgame, as well as Jonathan Pryce and Ben Whishaw. The play also won National Theatre arti stic director Nicholas Hytner best director and Bennett got a special award for outstanding contribution to British theatre. Dame Judi Dench, who starred in Al l's Well That Ends Well at the Gielgud, lost out in the best supporting role ca tegory to Amanda Harris, who played Emilia in Othello for the Royal Shakespeare Company. The Olivier Awards have been handed out by the Society of London since 1976. - Best lighting design - His Dark Materials designed by Paule Constable at the Olivier - Best sound design - The Woman in White designed by Mick Pott er at the Palace - Best new opera - Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk at the Royal Oper a House - Outstanding achievement in opera - Thomas Ades and the Royal Opera

House for the world premiere of The Tempest - Best costume design - All's Well That Ends Well designed by Deirdre Clancy at the Gielgud - Best Revival - Hamlet by William Shakespeare at The Old Vic - Best set design - His Dark Materials designed by Giles Cadle at the Olivier - Outstanding musical production - Grand Hotel at the Donmar Warehouse - Best supporting role in a musical - On Your Feet! for The Producers at Theatre Royal, Drury Lane - Best theatre choreographer - Matthew Bourne and Stephen Mear for Mary Poppins at the Prince Edward - Best actor - Richard Griffiths for The History Boys at the Lyttelton - Outstanding achievement or performance in an affiliate theatre - Andrew Scott for A Girl in A Car With A Man at the Jerwood Theatre Upstairs at the Royal Court - Best new dance production - Rambert Dance Company's Swamp at Sadler's Wells - Outstanding achievement in dance - San Francisco Ballet for their season at Sadler's Wells - Best performance in a supporting role - Amanda Harris for Othello at Trafalgar Studios - Best actress - Clare Higgins for Hecuba at the Donmar Warehouse - Best musical actor - Nathan Lane for The Producers at Theatre Royal, Drury Lane - Best musical actress - Laura Michelle Kelly for Mary Poppins at the Prince Edward - Best director - Nicholas Hytner for The History Boys at the Lyttelton - Best new play - The History Boys by Alan Bennett at the Lyttelton - Best new musical - The Producers at Theatre Royal, Drury Lane - Special award - Alan Bennett for his outstanding contribution to British theatre

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"entertainment 276.txt Rocker Doherty in on-stage fight R  
ock singer Pete Doherty has been involved in a fight with his band's guitarist at their biggest gig to date. Babyshambles played for 5",000 fans at London's Brixton Academy on Tuesday. The former Libertines singer traded blows with guitarist Patrick Walden. They were separated and bundled off stage before returning to end the set. The show was earlier held up due to audience overcrowding. On Monday Doherty faced blackmail and robbery charges in court, which he denies. He is out on £50,000 bail and the judge agreed to extend his 2200 GMT curfew deadline by two hours so he could play the Brixton gig. Babyshambles, which he formed after his acrimonious departure from the Libertines, played a warm-up show at The Garage, north London, on Monday. On Tuesday, Doherty and his three bandmates were introduced to the crowd by Mick Jones, the former Clash guitarist who produced the Libertines' second album. Babyshambles took the stage to a frenzied reception at 2200 GMT, launching into their last single, Killamangiro, which reached number eight in December. But the group had to stop during the next song to persuade fans not to push forward and allow security guards to pull people out of the crush. Doherty appealed to fans to calm down," saying: ""There's a few people getting hurt down the front"," you've got to move back." The music resumed minutes later but after several more songs", the singer appeared to accidentally disconnect Walden's guitar, leading the pair to trade kicks and punches. Bouncers stepped in and the band left the stage, but returned after five minutes and finished their 50-minute performance with no further trouble. Doherty, 25, had to be home by midnight to observe the curfew, which is one of the conditions of his bail. On Monday," the judge agreed to allow him to perform on condition that requests for changes to his bail terms were ""not too regular an occurrence"". The singer was arrested with fellow musician Alan Wass on 2 February after an alleged dispute with documentary-maker Max Carlish at a London hotel. They are next due in court on 18 April.

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"entertainment 277.txt The Sound of Music is coming home

The original stage production of The Sound of Music is to be performed for the first time in the Austrian capital", 40 years after the film was released. The first full-scale theatrical production of the musical will make its debut in Vienna on Saturday. Julie Andrews starred in the 1965 film version of the Rogers and Hammerstein classic set in the Alpine country. But despite being one of the most successful musicals of all time, it is barely known inside Austria. The film was never shown in any cinema in Austria and was not broadcast on television until the early 1990s. The musical is based on the true story of the von Trapp family who formed a singing troupe and escaped from Nazi-occupied Austria in 1938. Sensitivities about Nazism during wartime Austria and issues towards the von Trapp family themselves could explain Austria's reluctance to embrace the musical. Another source of irritation for Austrians is the song Edelweiss, which is considered an traditional folk song by many filmgoers. The song was actually an invention by Rodgers and Hammerstein. Many also consider the film to portray a kitsch image of Austria, including yodelling, goat-herds and lederhosen. The production is being staged at a Viennese opera house, the Volksoper, beginning on Saturday. Maria, the novice nun who falls in love with Baron von Trapp, will be played by Austro-Australian actress and singer Sandra Pires.

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"entertainment 278.txt Download chart debut is delayed Th  
e inclusion of downloaded music in the official singles chart has been delayed for a month. The British Phonographic Industry (BPI) had planned to include download formats in the chart from 20 March. But the date has been put back to 17 April to create a ""level playing field"" for independent labels. The BPI is concerned that independent repertoire is not adequately represented online and said they were looking at ways of rectifying it. BPI chairman Peter Jamieson said: ""The inclusion of download formats in the Official UK Singles Chart is the most significant development in the charts for 20 years. ""But for a multitude of reasons the current chart representation of independent repertoire at the major download outlets is poor. ""I am very pleased we have secured this delay on behalf of independents. We have to try and establish a realistic 'level playing field' of opportunity. The Official UK Charts are run by The Official UK Charts Company (OCC) - a joint venture between the BPI and the British Association of Record Dealers (BARD). At an OCC board meeting on Wednesday", the OCC board agreed with BPI members that the 20 March start date be postponed. Download formats will now be included in the Official UK Singles Chart for the first time in the chart published on 17 April - the sales week beginning 10 April. The US has already merged downloaded singles into its Billboard Hot 100 chart.

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/// "entertainment 279.txt Rapper films music video in jail A  
US rapper awaiting trial for murder has filmed part of a music video in jail", angering a sheriff who says he was tricked into letting TV crews in. C-Murder, a former member of rap group Tru," was filmed in his orange prison suit for the video for his Y'all Heard of Me single in a New Orleans jail. He is awaiting a second trial after an original conviction was thrown out. ""I'm not pleased", Jefferson Parish Sheriff Harry Lee said. He will not make another video in my jail." Footage for the video was filmed by two crews who had permission to interview C-Murder - one from Court TV and one from a local cable show. But Mr Lee said he did not know the rapper had filmed the video and made an album behind bars"," and said he was fooled into letting the cameras in. The rapper's lawyer Ron Rakosky said: ""The bottom line is,"" we didn't do anything wrong."" Mr Rak

osky said it was better than C-Murder", real name Corey Miller," ""just sitting there"," wasting away"". ""Here's a guy in jail", making constructive use of his time instead of withering away, he said. He's lost more than three years of his life," locked up for a crime he did not commit."" But local group Victims and Citizens Against Crime said he should not be working behind bars. ""He is a suspect in a murder case. I don't think he should be allowed these privileges", especially earning money, until his name is totally cleared," the group's president Beverly Siemssen said. In 2003, C-Murder was found guilty of killing a 16-year-old in a nightclub, but that decision was thrown out last April. He is now facing a second trial on a charge of second-degree murder. With two brothers in the group Tru, he had two US top 10 albums in the late 1990s before going solo, when he scored another three top 10 albums.

entertainment 280.txt Music man to the Oscars Bill Conti's job of musical director of the Oscars show is not for the faint-hearted since conducting the orchestra is the ultimate plate-spinning assignment. This year marks Conti's 17th turn at the helm of the Academy Awards orchestra. The excitement is a live performance as a musician", he says. All of your colleagues," everyone in the film industry is in the theatre. All the important people. ""I guess it's just a television show but we always think it's a bit more.' The orchestra strikes up more than 110 times during the average Oscars show. As well as playing the presenters and winners on and off stage", it also performs during the commercial breaks to entertain the live audience in the house. ""It's a very busy evening", it takes a certain amount of preparation of music, orchestrating, sketching rehearsing, before the show. But you don't know what the unexpected will be and as the musical director, it's exciting, explains Conti. And much of the preparation goes into mastering scores that will never be performed. We don't know who the winners will be. So when they say, 'the winner is', we have five different pieces of music in front of us, they say the name, we play the appropriate one immediately," adds Conti. The orchestra is often called upon to play when the winners ramble on too long during their acceptance speeches, despite being told to be brief by the show's producers. The decision to drown out or 'kill' the offending star with music is relayed from the director's box to the orchestra via Conti's earpiece. I don't feel good about it at all. It's not my call though", he says. When the director says 'music' the orchestra plays and he takes a long shot of the hall. We don't usually see the person speaking while his microphone is cut off. ""The person that's been cut off", who's 10 feet from me," is glaring at me like it's death time." On occasions", some stars have taken it upon themselves to send a warning shot across the bows of the musical director before they start to speak. ""Julia Roberts", when she came on, she asked me to not get ready to play because she had so much to do, he says. Conti received an Oscar in 1983 for the original score of The Right Stuff. He also received two nominations in the original song category in 1976 for Gonna Fly Now from Rocky and in 1981 for the title song from For Your Eyes Only. It's a moment in the sun, he says. When people get up there, some people, this is hard to believe, people that spend their lives in front of the camera or audiences entertaining," might get a little flustered. ""But there's this moment in time when the biggest award that they could possibly get in their life has been handed to them and they're either not in control or they want to thank everyone that they ever met." The image of the Oscars telecast is one of slick presentation and smooth transitions between performances and the award categories. Behind the scenes", the key players, such as Conti," have a bewildering array of technical props to deal with. ""There's a big script and video monitors you have to watch and there are also audio controls. I can control hearing in my ears", "the left ear or the right ear - different things at different times. ""I have

to communicate with the director. I have a little microphone that's attached to my headset. To open up that microphone", I have a footswitch," he explains. Conti's most nerve-wracking moment came during his first Oscars show as musical director, in 1977, when a member of the orchestra alerted him that they could smell smoke. Conti immediately told the show's director: I start cursing and screaming", "I tell him we're not going to die for this show - you must do something or I'm going to climb out of this pit with 60 musicians and we're going to be home in 10 minutes. ""Oh no Bill don't do anything", came the response. Imagine these elegantly dressed ladies and gentlemen of the orchestra, 60 or so of them in the pit and while we're playing," firemen with their helmets and their hatchets crawling among us trying to find the reason for the smoke." The smell turned out to be new paint smouldering on the music stands. ""No one died", it's not a big story, but it was scary at the time," laughs Conti. When the ceremony is over, the music director attends the annual Governor's Ball with his family. I have a drink and relive the show", "he says. I'm not for too much carousing. I go home and unwind. It takes me about a day." "

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"entertainment 281.txt Church urges Nelly show boycott Ch  
urch ministers are trying to prevent rapper Nelly performing in Arkansas", " saying they do not want his ""vile and filthy lyrics"" in their town. More than 2 0 Jonesboro ministers urged music fans to boycott Nelly's 12 March concert at Arkansas State University in a bid to have it cancelled. ""Jonesboro is a wonderful city because of what does not come here", " said the Reverend Adrian Rodgers. But a venue spokesman said more than 5,500 tickets had been sold so far. Mr Rodgers, of the Fullness of Joy Church, said he was concerned about the rapper's lyrics that include references to drugs, sex and violence, and songs that the minister said were demeaning to women. Ministers were worried that bringing such acts to Jonesboro would lead to problems. Tear the tickets up", " Mr Rodgers said. Do not go and do not allow your children to go." Tim Dean", director of the Arkansas State University venue," said ticket sales had been brisk. ""It would appear that with ticket sales over 5",0, many others have expressed their right to find Nelly's music entertaining and worth spending their time and money on," he said. Nelly has sold more than 30 million singles and albums worldwide, and in September 2004 simultaneously occupied the number one and two positions in the US albums chart. He has had 12 UK hit singles, including Hot in Herre, Dilemma and recent number one Over and Over.

entertainment 282.txt Rap feud in 50 Cent's G-Unit crew U  
S rap star 50 Cent has said he has thrown protege The Game out of his G-Unit gang in a feud that has apparently involved two shootings. In a radio interview on Monday, 50 Cent said the newcomer was disloyal in conflicts with other rappers. A man was shot in the thigh outside New York's Hot 97 studios while 50 Cent was on air. More shots were fired outside his management offices two hours later. 50 Cent appeared on The Game's debut album, which was number one in the US. 50 Cent, whose second album is about to be released after his debut made him one of hip-hop's biggest stars, has been involved in recent rivalries with fellow artists including Fat Joe, Nas and Jadakiss. He has claimed credit for the success of The Game, who has become the hottest new star on the rap scene. Both were drug dealers and were shot before turning to music. In an interview with Hot 97 on Saturday, The Game described some of 50 Cent's rivals as my friends"" and said he would not turn on them. ""Nas is one of my friends", and Jada's really a homie," he said. 50's beef is 50's beef and I really don't know where all this stems from." When 50 Cent appeared on the same station two days later", " he said The Game was no longer a member of G-Unit. ""Every record he's selling

is based on me being on his record with him", " he said. When the shooting took place outside the studio, the interview was ended and the rapper was escorted out of the building by security personnel. An unidentified 24-year-old Los Angeles man is stable with a gunshot wound to the upper thigh. Police say The Game's associates may have heard the interview and gone to the studio, where they confronted 50 Cent's entourage. Officers are also investigating a later shooting in which eight bullets were fired into the door of 50 Cent's management company, Violator. No arrests have been made in relation to either incident. 50 Cent's second album, The Massacre, is released on Thursday, five weeks after The Game's debut, Documentary, went to number one. Elliott Wilson, editor-in-chief of hip-hop magazine XXL, said the feud would boost publicity for 50 Cent's release. It helps him obviously in terms of exposure. You can't ask for better promotion", " he said. But he added: I think he's making more and more enemies. " "You definitely feel like is he doing too much of a Tupac spiral", " like me against the world. You bring more people wanting to see you fail." " Tupac Shakur was shot dead in 1996.

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"entertainment 283.txt Prodigy join V Festival line-up Es sex act Prodigy are to headline the second stage at this year's V Festival", joining main stage headliners Scissor Sisters and Franz Ferdinand. The event, which is in its 10th year, will be held at two venues - Hylands Park in Essex and Weston Park in Staffordshire on 20 and 21 August. Meanwhile, rock veterans New Order have joined the T in the Park line-up alongside Athlete and Green Day. The Manchester band will play on 9 July at Scotland's biggest festival. It will be their debut performance at the music event which is held over the weekend of 9 and 10 July in Balado near Kinross. Other bands at the sold-out festival include Queens of the Stone Age, The Killers, Keane, The Streets and Foo Fighters. A month later at the V Festival," Prodigy will play at Weston Park on Saturday 20 August and Hylands Park on Sunday 21 August and the Chemical Brothers vice versa. It will be the Chemical Brothers' only UK festival performance of the year. V festival director Bob Angus said: " "With the Prodigy and the Chemical Brothers now confirmed to headline the second stage", " we are headed for a really stellar line-up. " "We pride ourselves on putting on an unbeatable live music experience and V Festival 2005 will not disappoint." " Tickets for the V festival go on sale on Friday 11 March.

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"entertainment 284.txt DJ double act revamp chart show DJ duo JK and Joel are taking over BBC Radio 1's flagship chart show on Sunday", adding showbiz news, celebrity interviews and between-song banter. They hope to boost ratings for the long-running show," which has been overtaken in popularity by independent radio's Hit 40 UK rundown. " "Radio 1's chart show is an institution and remains the station's single most popular show", " says JK, also known as Jason King. For years people have been tuning in at four o'clock with their tape recorders ready to record their favourite tunes. Not that I ever did that. " "But things have moved on a lot now so it was time for a change." " That change involved ejecting previous host Wes Butters and relocating King and DJ partner Joel Ross from their weekend afternoon Radio 1 slot. The pair have worked together for a decade - meeting on Viking Radio in Hull before moving to Manchester station Key 103 and winning two Sony Radio awards. They also presented gadget series Playboyz and car show Motor Maniacs for cable TV channel Granada Men and Motors", and Pure Soap on BBC Three. On the revamped chart show their cheeky, laddish banter will punctuate star interviews and competitions, film and DVD ch

arts plus a look at future single releases," in addition to the singles chart itself. ""The chart rundown is no longer the only point of the programme", says Ross. The show used to be the only way to discover who was in the Top 40. Now you can just click on the internet to find that out," so the show has plenty of extra items too." The show's reduced reliance upon the Top 40 also reflects the fact that music fans are now more likely to download songs in digital format rather than buy them on compact disc", vinyl or cassette. ""I personally buy downloads rather than CD singles", says 27-year-old Ross. Even my grandma can download songs now. JK is still struggling with the technology," though." "But it's premature for people to say that the singles chart is dead", Ross adds. While sales of singles on traditional formats are down, interest in songs has been revived by download sales," which will be incorporated into our main chart rundown from April. ""Music fans still want to know what is the most popular song of the week." Ross will be plumping for chart success from rapper Verbalicious and the Stereophonics on Sunday", while King is more of an R&B and dance music fan. ""So listeners will get the advantage of both our music tastes", says King, 30, who describes outgoing host Butters as an extremely professional and competent broadcaster". ""The advantage Joel and I have is that we're a double act", with a rapport between us that makes the show much more interactive, King says. Wes has a great broadcasting career ahead of him. And if not, I could always use a cleaner, he jokes. Ross says the pair have done their best to ignore the weight of expectation placed upon the revamped show. Other people can worry about that, we are going to continue doing what we do well," he says. At the end of the day this is a radio show that is meant to be entertaining. Nobody died."

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"entertainment 285.txt Rapper 50 Cent scores chart first  
Rapper 50 Cent has become the first solo artist to have three singles in the US top five in the same week. His track Candy Shop remained at the top of the charts", while Disco Inferno crept up from six to five. 50 Cent also appears on rap protege The Game's song How We do, number four in the US but now outside the UK top ten. The pair had a recent dispute which saw The Game thrown out of 50 Cent's rap collective G-Unit, accusing him of disloyalty in an ongoing feud. 50 Cent, who burst onto the music scene in 2003, has had less success in the UK charts, with three singles making the top ten. His debut album, Get Rich And Die Tryin', narrowly missed out on becoming a UK chart topper. But in the US, he headed the 2003 end of year charts for the album and R&B and hip hop artists. Newcomer The Game's debut reached the top of the charts five weeks ago, while 50 Cent's second collection The Massacre was released in the US at the end of last week. Last May, R&B star Usher scored a chart first, with three concurrent singles in the US Top 10, a feat which was previously matched only by The Bee Gees and The Beatles. The hit songs were taken from the 24-year-old's Confessions album, which topped the American chart for eight weeks.

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"entertainment 286.txt Goodrem wins top female MTV prize  
Pop singer Delta Goodrem has scooped one of the top individual prizes at the first Australian MTV Music Awards. The 21-year-old singer won the award for best female artist", with Australian Idol runner-up Shannon Noll taking the title of best male at the ceremony. Goodrem, known in both Britain and Australia for her role as Nina Tucker in TV soap Neighbours, also performed a duet with boyfriend Brian McFadden. Other winners included Green Day, voted best group, and the Black Eyed Peas. Goodrem, Green Day and the Black Eyed Peas took home two awards e

ach. As well as best female, Goodrem also took home the Pepsi Viewers Choice Award, whilst Green Day bagged the prize for best rock video for American Idiot. The Black Eyed Peas won awards for best R 'n' B video and sexiest video, both for Hey Mama. Local singer and songwriter Missy Higgins took the title of breakt hrough artist of the year, with Australian Idol winner Guy Sebastian taking the honours for best pop video. The VH1 First Music Award went to Cher honouring her achievements within the music industry. The ceremony was held at the Luna Park fairground in Sydney Harbour and was hosted by the Osbourne family. Artists including Carmen Electra, Missy Higgins, Kelly Osbourne, Green Day, Ja Rule and Natalie Imbruglia gave live performances at the event.

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"entertainment 287.txt REM announce new Glasgow concert U  
S band REM have announced plans to perform for 10",000 Scottish fans in a rescheduled gig. The band will play in what has been dubbed Europe's biggest tent on Glasgow Green on Tuesday, 14 June. They were forced to pull out of a concert at the SECC in Glasgow last month after bassist Mike Mills contracted flu. Fans who bought tickets for the original 22 February show can attend the rescheduled concert. The June gig will act as a warm-up for REM's open air concert at Balloch Castle Country Park, on the banks of Loch Lomond, four days later. Promoter's Regular Music booked Glasgow Green as the SECC was not available on the most suitable date. Mark Mackie, director of Regular Music," said: ""It is fantastic news and it really shows REM's commitment to their Scottish fans that they are coming back to Glasgow for what will be a truly unique gig."" The REM gigs will kick-start what promises to be a memorable summer for Scottish music lovers. Grammy Award winners U2 will play Hampden on 21 June while Oasis will also perform at the national stadium in Glasgow on 29 June. Coldplay have announced a concert at Bellahouston Park in Glasgow on 1 July and T in the Park will be held at Balado", near Kinross, from 9-10 July. Ticketweb and the SECC box office will write to customers who bought tickets for the February gig asking if they want to attend the new show. Those who bought tickets in person are being urged to return to the point of purchase. Anyone who cannot make the concert will be given a refund. The cut-off date for swapping tickets is 1 April, when those remaining will go on sale to the public.

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"entertainment 288.txt Rapper 50 Cent ends protege feud R  
apper 50 Cent has ended his public feud with his protege The Game as the pair said they wanted to be good role models for their communities. The row blew up when 50 Cent threw The Game out of his G-Unit crew and accused him of being disloyal. A member of The Game's entourage was reportedly shot outside a radio station where 50 Cent was being interviewed. But the pair shook hands as they handed over money to music projects for New York's deprived areas on Wednesday. The Game", whose real name is Jayceon Taylor," told a news conference: ""I want to apologise. I'm almost ashamed to have participated in the things that went on over the last few weeks."" Chart-topper 50 Cent", real name Curtis Jackson, said the truce came on the anniversary of the death of the Notorious BIG in 1997," who was part of a volatile feud between the east and west coast rap scenes. ""We're here today to show that people can rise above the most difficult circumstances and together we can put negativity behind us", 50 Cent said. A lot of people don't want to see it happen," but we're responding to the two most important groups - our family and our fans."" The Boys Choir of Harlem got a cheque for \$150",000 (£77,800) from 50 Cent, while The Game handed over \$103,500 (£53,"400). The Game also made a contribution to the Compton schools music programme. 5

50 Cent announced he has launched the G-Unity Foundation ""to help people overcome obstacles and make a chance for the better in their lives""." "I realised that if I'm going to be effective at that", I have to overcome some of my own," he said. Game and I need to set an example in the community." "50 Cent is no stranger to feuds", with rapper Ja Rule among the targets for ridicule in his songs. On his latest album, released earlier this month, he turned his attentions to Fat Joe and Nas, who have both worked with Ja Rule. Both he and The Game have admitted drug dealing in the past and have both been shot.

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"entertainment 289.txt Musicians to tackle US red tape Musicians' groups are to tackle US visa regulations which are blamed for hindering British acts' chances of succeeding across the Atlantic. A singer hoping to perform in the US can expect to pay \$1", "300 (£680) simply for obtaining a visa. Groups including the Musicians' Union are calling for an end to the ""raw deal"" faced by British performers. US acts are not faced with comparable expense and bureaucracy when visiting the UK for promotional purposes. Nigel McCune from the Musicians' Union said British musicians are ""disadvantaged"" compared to their US counterparts. A sponsor has to make a petition on their behalf", which is a form amounting to nearly 30 pages," while musicians face tougher regulations than athletes and journalists. ""If you make a mistake on your form", you risk a five-year ban and thus the ability to further your career, says Mr McCune. The US is the world's biggest music market, which means something has to be done about the creaky bureaucracy, says Mr McCune. The current situation is preventing British acts from maintaining momentum and developing in the US," he added. The Musicians' Union stance is being endorsed by the Music Managers' Forum (MMF), who say British artists face an uphill struggle"" to succeed in the US", thanks to the tough visa requirements," which are also seen as impractical. The MMF's general secretary James Seller said: ""Imagine if you were an orchestra from the Orkneys? Every member would have to travel to London to have their visas processed." "The US market is seen as the holy grail and one of the benchmarks of success", " and we're still going to fight to get in there. ""It's still very important", but there are other markets like Europe, India and China," added Mr Seller. A Department for Media, Culture and Sport spokeswoman said: We're aware that people are experiencing problems", " and are working with the US embassy and record industry to see what we can do about it." "A US Embassy spokesman said: ""We are aware that entertainers require visas for time-specific visas and are doing everything we can to process those applications speedily." "We are aware of the importance of cultural exchange and we will do our best to facilitate that", " he added.

"entertainment 290.txt Angels 'favourite funeral song' Angels by Robbie Williams is the song Britons would most like played at their funeral, a survey has suggested. While the melancholy hit topped the UK poll, Europeans favoured Queen's more upbeat anthem The Show Must Go On as their first choice. Frank Sinatra's My Way was second in the UK vote with Monty Python's Always Look on the Bright Side of Life in third place. More than 45,000 people were surveyed by digital TV station Music Choice. The European chart, which included Denmark, France and Germany, put Led Zeppelin's Stairway to Heaven in second and AC/DC's Highway to Hell in third. Queen's Who Wants to Live Forever was highly favoured by both UK and European voters. Both lists featured only one traditional or classic song each, with Britons requesting the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards' Amazing Grace and their continental counterparts opting for Mozart's Requiem. Wanting to share your most treasured musical gem with those you're leaving behind is the perfect way to sign off and leave a lasting impression", " Music

Choice music and marketing manager Simon George said.

entertainment 291.txt U2 stars enter rock Hall of Fame Si  
nger Bruce Springsteen has inducted Irish rock band U2 into the Rock and Roll H  
all of Fame, in New York. The lavish ceremony, celebrating the 50th anniversar  
y of rock 'n' roll, also saw the induction of the Pretenders, Percy Sledge, the  
O'Jays and Buddy Guy. This was a band that wanted to lay claim to this world an  
d the next one", too," said Springsteen. Bono, The Edge, Adam Clayton and Larry  
Mullen Jr, who formed U2 at school in 1977, begin a world tour on 28 March. Int  
roducing the band, Springsteen mocked Bono as the man who single-handedly pione  
ered the Irish mullet""", poking fun at ""one of the best and most endearingly  
messianic complexes in rock 'n' roll"". But he also spoke of the group's enduri  
ng stature", adding that it was the only band of the last 20 years where he kne  
w all four members' names. U2's contemporaries, the Pretenders," led by Chriss  
ie Hynde - took to the stage to perform My City Was Gone with inductee Neil You  
ng. ""We are a tribute band", said Hynde, 53. We're paying tribute to James Ho  
neyman-Scott and Pete Farndon", without whom we would not have been here," she  
said, referring to the premature deaths of two of the band's guitarists from dr  
ug overdoses. Britain's Rod Stewart introduced Percy Sledge, citing his best-k  
nown hit When a Man loves a Woman as one of the best performances I've ever hea  
rd"". Justin Timberlake introduced soul group the O'Jays", a gospel-style quart  
et from Ohio, who performed a medley of their best-known songs including Back S  
tabbers," Love Train and For the Love of Money. ""Anyone who's ever written", p  
roduced or performed something soulful stands in the shadows of these giants,"  
said Timberlake. Joining the ceremony at New York's Waldorf Astoria were legen  
dary R&B star Bo Diddley, who performed with Eric Clapton and Robbie Robertson.  
Clapton, alongside BB King, also introduced fellow guitarist Buddy Guy and reca  
lled seeing him play as a teenager in England. He was for me what Elvis was pro  
bably like for other people", he said. My course was set and he was my pilot,"  
said Clapton who joined Guy and King in a performance of Let Me Love You Baby.  
Also performing at the ceremony was veteran musician Jerry Lee Lewis who contin  
ued his reputation as a rowdy piano-pounder despite his 69 years, kicking over  
his stool and sitting on the piano during a rendition of Whole Lotta Shakin' Go  
in' On.

entertainment 292.txt Tough schedule delays Elliot show P  
review performances of the £3m musical Billy Elliot have been delayed to give t  
he child actors a less arduous rehearsal schedule. Director Stephen Daldry mad  
e the decision to re-schedule the previews to protect the young stars. Three bo  
ys will rotate the demanding role of ballet dancer Billy, which requires them t  
o sing, dance and act. The show's opening night on 12 May at the Victoria Palac  
e Theatre in London remains unaffected by the changes. Preview performances wil  
l now be held on 14, 20 and 27 April. This is one of the most ambitious project  
s I have been involved with", said Daldry. The decision has been made to push b  
ack our preview performances in order to give our company, with a cast includin  
g 45 children," a little extra time so they are as fully prepared as possibl  
e." He added: ""The young Billy Elliots in particular", making their professi  
onal stage debuts in the West End," will benefit from a little extra time to fa  
miliarise themselves with all aspects of the production." The three boys play  
ing Billy are James Lomas", 15, George Maguire, 14, and Liam Mower, 12. The other  
major child parts will also be rotated between young actors. Such are the deman  
ds of the show that producers set up a stage school in Newcastle to train poten  
tial stars for the show. Child labour laws also mean the young actors can only  
work for a limited period each week. Adult actors in the show include Tim Healy  
as Billy's father and Haydn Gwynne as his dance teacher Mrs Wilkinson. Sir Elton  
John has composed the music. Daldry directed the successful film version of Bil

ly Elliot, adapted from Lee Hall's script. Both were nominated for Oscars, alongside Julie Walters, who played Billy's teacher.

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"entertainment 293.txt Singer Ian Brown 'in gig arrest' F  
ormer Stone Roses singer Ian Brown was arrested after a fight during a concert in San Francisco on Tuesday", his spokesman has said. A fan jumped on stage and attacked the singer, who then became involved in a fracas with a security guard," Fiction Records spokesman Paul Smernicki said. He said Brown was arrested at his hotel after the show at the Great American Music Hall but released without charge. San Francisco police said they could find no record of his arrest. Mr Smernicki said he had been told a fan ""rugby-tackled"" the singer during the gig"," which resulted in ""pushing and shoving"". Brown then got into a brawl with another man who tried to restrain him - without realising he was a security guard", Mr Smernicki added. The star went off for 15 minutes before returning to finish his set. Police took witness statements and apprehended Brown at his hotel," Mr Smernicki said. But he was released without charge and ""as far as we're aware"," that's the end of it""", Mr Smernicki added. A spokesperson for the San Francisco Police Department said he may have been detained but they could find no record of the incident. Brown,42, was lead singer with The Stone Roses, one of the most seminal bands in British rock, until they split in 1996. He has since forged a successful solo career, scoring nine UK top 30 singles since 1998. In 1998, he was sentenced to four months in jail for using threatening behaviour towards an aeroplane captain and stewardess.

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"entertainment 294.txt No UK premiere for Rings musical T  
he producers behind the Lord of the Rings musical have abandoned plans to premiere the show in London because no suitable theatre was available. The £11.5m show will make its debut in Toronto in March 2006",, after it was found that all three West End theatres with sufficient capacity were booked. The musical is not expected in London before December 2006. Producer Kevin Wallace said it would be ""worth waiting for"". ""It will be like nothing they have ever seen before." "I know there will be a lot of disappointed British Tolkien fans who hoped to see the show in London", but we couldn't get a London theatre in time," added the British producer. The world premiere of the stage musical, co-produced by Canadian theatrical impresarios David and Ed Mirvish, will take place at Toronto's Princess of Wales Theatre next year. Toronto really wanted this premiere. The Tolkien books and films are hugely popular in Canada",, said Mr Wallace, shortly after signing the deal in Canada. We hope the anticipation and excitement over here will create an even bigger buzz by the time we open in London." Auditions begin in Canada on Thursday", but up to five British actors may join the cast, under a deal struck with Canadian Actors' Equity. The music for the show is being written by Bollywood composer AR Rahman, who was behind Andrew Lloyd Webber's West End musical *Bollywood Dreams*, and in conjunction with the Finnish group Varttina. ""There will be no singing and dancing Hobbits. The music will be in a very traditional mould and draw on ethnic traditions",, assured Mr Wallace. The musical's British director is Matthew Warchus, best known for staging the worldwide stage hit *Art*. The production will be a hybrid of text", physical theatre, music and spectacle never previously seen on this scale," he said. Only in the theatre are we actually plunged into the events as they happen. The environment surrounds us and we are in Middle Earth." New Zealander Peter Jackson took 10 years to bring JRR Tolkien's fantasy trilogy to the big screen", winning Academy Awards for best film and best director for the final film T

he Return of the King in 2004.

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"entertainment 295.txt Dame Julie pops in to see Poppins  
Mary Poppins star Dame Julie Andrews watched the hit stage version of her classic film at a charity performance in London's West End. It was the first time Dame Julie", who shot to fame as the nanny in the 1964 Disney movie, had seen the musical, staged at the Prince Edward Theatre. She watched Laura Michelle Kelly, 23, reprise the role on stage. The show has been one of the West End's hottest tickets since opening in December," winning two Olivier Awards. Kelly was named best musical actress at last month's ceremony and the musical also won best choreography. But Kelly said she was ""very nervous"" about meeting Dame Julie because she was ""my absolute hero"". The gala performance saw Dame Julie", 69, return to the theatre where she had her first starring role in a performance of Humpty Dumpty in 1948. The Mary Poppins musical has been masterminded by theatre impresario Sir Cameron Mackintosh and directed by Richard Eyre with choreography by Matthew Bourne. Sir Cameron said he hoped the production, which cost £9m to bring to the stage, was a blend of the sweet-natured film and the original book by PL Travers. Proceeds from Thursday's show will go to charities including Absolute Return for Kids (Ark), international relief agency Operation USA and drama school Lamda.

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"entertainment 296.txt Snow Patrol bassist exits group Sn  
ow Patrol had ""no other course of action"" but to ask their co-founder and bassist to leave the band", lead singer Gary Lightbody has said. Mark McClelland had been in the band for more than 10 years since its formation at Dundee University. Lightbody said ""over the last 18 months touring has taken its toll on the rest of the band's relationship with him"". He said: ""This is the hardest decision we have ever had to make and believe us when we say we didn't make it lightly."" The group", originally from Northern Ireland, has only achieved mainstream success in the last year with the single Run and award-winning album Final Straw. In a statement on the band's website," Lightbody said: ""I started the group with Mark 10 years ago and he was a massive part of Snow Patrol and my life throughout that decade."" He added: ""It got to the stage that things couldn't go on as they were", so we felt there was no other course of action but this. ""I know you will all be distressed and may not understand this news but we had to do what was best for the band."" Snow Patrol are currently working on the follow-up to their breakthrough third album. The band is set to play support to U2 on a number of summer stadium gigs. Last month", they were the big winners in Ireland's top music honours, the Meteor Awards, picking up accolades for best band and album. It followed nominations for the Brit Awards and the Mercury Music Prize. The band formed in 1994 when Lightbody and McClelland met as students at Dundee University.

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"entertainment 297.txt Fockers keeps US box office lead F  
ilm comedy Meet The Fockers", sequel to Meet The Parents, has topped the US box office for a third week. The movie, which stars Ben Stiller, Robert De Niro, Dustin Hoffman and Barbra Streisand, took \$28.5m (£15.2m), making a total of 204.3m (£109m). Michael Keaton thriller White Noise was second with \$24m (£12.8m) despite negative reviews. Martin Scorsese's Howard Hughes biopic The Aviator came third with \$7.6m (£4m) and a total of \$42.9m (£22.8m). Children's adventure Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events, starring Jim Carrey and Meryl

Streep, fell two places to fourth position with \$7.4m (£3.9m). It is also the ninth Jim Carrey film to hit the \$100m (£53.2m) mark, according to Exhibitor Relations. And Fat Albert, a live-action adaptation of Bill Cosby's TV cartoon, fell one place to number five, with takings over the three days beginning on Friday of \$5m (£2.6m). Ocean's Twelve took sixth place in the US chart with \$5.4m (£2.8m), but it led the non-US chart at the weekend, according to Hollywood Reporter, with an estimated \$17.7m (£9.4m) and total takings of \$137m (£73m). The Incredibles took \$300m (£160m) outside the US, while Meet the Fockers topped box office charts in Australia and Mexico with non-US takings of \$19.35m (£10.2m).

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"entertainment 298.txt Spider-Man creator wins profits Sp  
ider-Man creator Stan Lee is to get a multi-million dollar windfall after winning a court battle with comic book company Marvel. A judge has upheld Lee's demand for 10% of Marvel's profits from the hugely successful Spider-Man films. Spider-Man and its sequel made \$1.6bn (£857m) at box offices worldwide. Of the cut now due to Lee", 82, who created Spider-Man in 1962," his lawyer said: ""It could be tens of millions of dollars", "that's no exaggeration." US District Court Judge Robert W Sweet ruled Lee should get a tenth of profits generated since November 1998 by Marvel TV and movie productions involving the company's characters. Lee took legal action in 2002", "saying Marvel shut him out of ""jackpot"" profits from the first blockbuster film. He said the company - where he worked for more than 60 years - had gone back on agreement to give him the 10%. As well as Spider-Man", Lee co-created the Incredible Hulk, X-Men, "Daredevil and Fantastic Four characters. He said: ""I am gratified by the judge's decision although", since I am deeply fond of Marvel and the people there," I sincerely regret that the situation had to come to this." The ruling also means he is entitled to a slice of profits from DVD sales and certain merchandise. Marvel said it would appeal and did not expect the decision to impact on financial forecasts for 2004 and beyond. The New York court did not rule on Lee's claims to a share of profits from some Spider-Man and Hulk movie merchandise", which will be decided at a future trial, Marvel said.

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"entertainment 299.txt Fry set for role in Hitchhiker's A  
ctor Stephen Fry is joining the cast of the forthcoming film adaptation of The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy. Fry will provide the voice of The Guide", an electronic book which accompanies the story's hero Arthur Dent on his travels around the galaxy. Martin Freeman, John Malkovich, Bill Nighy and Alan Rickman are co-starring in the film," due for release in May. The late Douglas Adams' original 1977 scripts have also been turned into a series of successful books. ""Being asked to do the voice of The Guide is like having your birthday on Christmas Day", discovering a winning lottery ticket in your stocking and having chocolate poured all over you," said Fry, a self-confessed fan of the book. The film's executive producer Robbie Stamp said that Adams, who died in 2001, would have been delighted" with the choice of Fry for the role. ""His humour and intelligence are perfect for the voice of The Guide", "added Mr Stamp. Adams wrote the screenplay based on his book before his premature death, while a new radio series was aired 26 years after the first broadcast and included many of the original cast members. Hollywood star Malkovich will play religious cult leader Humma Kavula, which was especially created by Adams for the new film. Freeman, who starred in hit BBC comedy The Office, will play the role of Arthur Dent, who begins his intergalactic voyage following the destruction of the Earth.

entertainment 300.txt Bollywood draws global stars Britis h actress Antonia Bernath is making her debut in Kisna - the Warrior Poet, mark ing a growing trend for non-Indian stars to appear in Bollywood films. Directe d by Bollywood veteran Subhash Ghai, the film is set in the British Raj and Ber nath plays an army general's daughter who falls in love with a rural boy, Kisn a. I liked the fluid nature of film-making. We improvised quite a lot", " says B ernath. At times it felt very chaotic but Mr Ghai was quite clear about what he wanted." " Picked from more than 200 girls in an audition in London", " Bernath c ut short her education at Bristol's Old Vic Theatre School to take up the oppor tunity. It is not often that somebody gets to play the lead role straight out o f a drama school. She spent three weeks learning Hindi and taking dance lesson s. " "Initially", I was a bit sceptical about how people would respond to me," B ernath says. But I found the Hindi film industry very warm and encouraging. I e ven had a few offers before the work on Kisna was completed." " Films are one o f India's biggest exports and those like Lagaan and Monsoon Wedding have broken the traditional boundaries of colour and culture. Spurred by this", Bollywood p roducers are trying to go global in all aspects of film-making, be it technical or artistic. From young heart-throbs like Nick Moran of Lock, Stock and Two Sm oking Barrels to model Sophie Dahl," many non-Indian stars want to make the mos t of this opportunity. " "Bollywood has truly gone global", " says Taran Adarsh, editor of Indian film journal Trade Guide. Directors are now attempting to woo non-Asian audience to increase their share in the overseas film market." " Kisna has been shot simultaneously in Hindi and English", with the English print shor tened by an hour to accommodate the Western audience. The film even has a song composed in English by AR Rahman, the director of the popular West End musica l, "Bombay Dreams. " "Identification is a popular cinematic device. Use of Europ ean or American actors can be viewed as a step in that direction", " says Adars h. The cast of Kisna also includes British actors Michael Maloney, Caroline La ngrishe and Polly Adams. Another actress, Annabelle Wallace, plays the lead ro le in a bilingual romantic comedy Dil Jo Bhi Kahey (Whatever the Heart Says), w hich also stars Indian screen legend Amitabh Bachchan. Actor and Producer Aamir Khan's forthcoming venture The Rising is set against the backdrop of the Indian mutiny of 1857, with British actor Toby Stephens in a key role. But it isn't on ly the Western actors looking eastwards. Bollywood sweetheart Aishwarya Rai, re cently seen in Bride and Prejudice alongside New Zealand actor Martin Henderso n, is building her international career. And, many other Bollywood stars have t heir eyes set on Hollywood. Hollywood or Bollywood", it's the box office that d etermines whether something is a passing phase or a trend," says Adarsh. Kisna - the Warrior Poet opens in the UK on 21 January.

entertainment 301.txt Hollywood hunts hits at Sundance Th e Sundance Film Festival, the movie industry's top destination for uncovering t he next independent hits and new talent, opens on Thursday. The event will see screen executives decamp from Hollywood to Park City, Utah, for 11 days to sear ch for low-key movies that could make it big in 2005. Open Water, Napoleon Dyna mite, Garden State and Super-Size Me were all snapped up at last year's festiva l. But stars like Keanu Reeves and Pierce Brosnan also have films showing ther e. The festival is being opened by a screening of quirky comedy Happy Endings, starring former Friends actress Lisa Kudrow and Maggie Gyllenhaal, on Thursday. Kudrow's Friends co-star, David Schwimmer, plays a divorced drunkard in Duane H opwood, while Brosnan stars as a hit man in comedy The Matador. Keanu Reeves ap pears in coming-of-age tale Thumbsucker while Kevin Costner and Michael Keaton are among the other big names whose films are involved. Robert Redford founded Sundance in 1981 and it has gone on to showcase future successes such as Reserv oir Dogs, The Blair Witch Project and The Full Monty. But it has received criti

cism that it has become more commercial and mainstream over the years. As much as the press argues that Sundance has completely changed", it hasn't changed that much," festival director Geoffrey Gilmore said. It's still a place for diversity. It's a place for common ground among film-makers and audiences more than it is the celebrity stuff."" Other films generating interest before this year's festival include *Hustle & Flow*", about an aspiring rapper, *The Squid and the Whale*, an autobiographical film by writer-director Noah Baumbach, and comedy/drama *Pretty Persuasion*. It also has two new international cinema competitions.

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"entertainment 302.txt Actress Roberts takes spider role  
Actress Julia Roberts will play the part of a spider in a new film version of children's classic *Charlotte's Web*. She will voice *Charlotte*", who teams up with a girl to save their friend Wilbur the pig, in the story by EB White. The film - a mix of live action and animation - will be Roberts' first project since the birth of her twins, Hazel and Phinnaeus, two months ago. Oprah Winfrey will voice a goose, John Cleese will voice a sheep and Steve Buscemi a rat in the 2006 film. Ten-year-old Dakota Fanning will play Fern, the girl at the centre of the story, in the film to be directed by *13 Going on 30* film-maker Gary Winick. Filming is due to begin in Melbourne, Australia, later this month. *Charlotte's Web* has sold 45 million copies since it was published in 1952. An animated version was made in 1973 but this will be the first live action film. The actor who will voice Wilbur the pig has yet to be revealed.

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"entertainment 303.txt Film production 'falls' 40% in UK  
The number of British films produced in the UK fell 40% in 2004", with movies starring Johnny Depp and Jude Law among those affected, Screen Daily has said. Twenty-seven British films were made in the UK last year following a drop in funding, compared with 45 in 2003, according to the trade weekly. It attributed the drop to tighter tax laws and reduced funding from sources such as the National Lottery. UK and US co-productions in Britain fell from 102 in 2003 to 81 last year. Last year the government closed tax loopholes that many film investors had taken advantage of to fund films in the UK. Several projects were shelved as they faced the implications of this clampdown, coupled with the reduction in movie funding from traditional sources including the lottery and Miramax Films. Shooting on period drama *Tulip Fever*, which was to star Jude Law and Keira Knightley," was postponed indefinitely while shooting of *The Libertine* starring Johnny Depp was moved to the Isle of Man. ""There isn't anything coming in to replace (the funds)"," said *The Libertine*'s executive producer Marc Samuelson. We are in a hiatus."" Films with ""medium"" budgets of up to £9m", a similar level to box office hits *Vera Drake*, *Calendar Girls* and *Enduring Love*, are expected to be worst hit by the tax clampdown. The strength of the pound against the dollar is expected to have resulted in a fall in the number of US films shot in the UK during 2004, Screen International added. Big budget co-productions, such as the Harry Potter series, continued to be shot in the UK, however. The UK Film Council said the drop was partly due to 2003 being an especially good year for British film production, when *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*," *Wimbledon* and *Thunderbirds* were all filmed in the UK. ""The drop was expected as there was no way 2003's record level of production could be bettered", the council's spokesperson said. The reduction in indigenous film production in 2004 was due to a variety of factors," including the continuing long-term trend towards co-production of films in more than one country and changes to financing arrangements." It was ""too early"" to predict whether the downward trend in UK production would

ld continue throughout 2005", the UK Film Council said. In September the government introduced subsidies worth up to £4m per film for medium budget films, under new Treasury measures. It is also due to announce a replacement for UK film tax relief scheme Section 48 in July.

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"entertainment 304.txt Fantasy book wins Hollywood deal A British author has had the film rights to her children's bestseller snapped up for a seven-figure sum", with Ridley Scott set to direct. Michelle Paver's Wolf Brother, a fantasy set 6,000 years ago," is the first in a planned series of six books. Film studio Fox has bought the rights for around \$4m (£2.13m) for Scott's company Scott Free to develop. The director said he was ""thrilled"" with the project. ""Wolf Brother is an enchanting book", he said. Paver, who lives in London and previously worked as a lawyer, began writing the book in 1982 while studying biochemistry at Oxford University. She was an established author of love stories when she turned the work-in-progress into a children's novel. It was published in 2004, with Paver earning an advance of \$5m (£2.8m) - the highest sum ever paid for a debut children's book. Wolf Brother tells the story of Torak, a 12-year-old hunter who lives in the forest. After his father is killed he teams up with a wolf cub and sets out to rid the forest of an evil force. Paver is currently writing the second book in the series. Michelle Paver lives and breathes the worlds she writes about", said a spokesman for the author. I've told her about the film deal but at the moment she is writing the second book and her mind is 6000 years away deep in the primeval forest."

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"entertainment 305.txt The comic book genius of Stan Lee Stan Lee", the man responsible for a string of comic superheroes that have become household names, has won a court battle for a slice of the profits from the hit Spider-Man movies. Many marvel at the man who gave his characters extraordinary powers and everyday headaches - a formula which revolutionised comics. Born in 1922 to poor working-class Jewish immigrants from Romania, Stan Lieberman, got a job in Timely Publications, a company owned by a relative. He was assigned to the comics division and - thanks to a fertile imagination - rose to editor by the age of 18. For more than 20 years," he was ""the ultimate hack"" - knocking out crime stories", horrors, westerns, anything to sate the appetite of his juvenile readership. Words of more than two syllables were discouraged. Characters were either all good or bad," with no shades of grey. So embarrassed was Lieberman by much of what he was writing that he refused to put his real name on the byline. He assumed the ""dumb name""", Stan Lee, now legally adopted. By the time he was 40, Lee had decided he was too old for the comic game. His British-born wife, Joan, suggested he had nothing to lose and, for his swansong, should write the kind of characters he really wanted to create. After a rival comic had come up with a superteam consisting of Batman, Superman and Wonder Woman, Timely needed to respond. Lee's answer, in 1961, was the Fantastic Four - a team of astronauts who gained super powers after being bombarded with cosmic rays. They were to change Lee's life, and the comics industry, forever. Lee gave each character individual, everyday teenage problems such as dandruff, ingrown toenails and acne. They would frequently fall out with their parents and each other. The fan letters poured in. Without immediately knowing it, Stan Lee had ushered in the golden age of comics, and his imagination was rekindled. His Marvel universe spawned the new title of Marvel Comics. Soon after, nerdy Peter Parker was transformed - after a bite from an irradiated spider - into someone who could crawl up the sides of New York's skyscrapers. Spider-Man was born. He w

as to become an icon of modern popular culture. Spidey, as he is affectionately known, had quite extraordinary powers - yet he had problems at work, at home and with his girlfriends. At last, the teenager was no longer just the sidekick, but the main hero. And the hero was no longer just brawn," he had brains too.

"Just because he's a hero and has super powers doesn't mean he doesn't have problems", Stan Lee told the BBC. The Incredible Hulk, The Mighty Thor, Iron Man and the rest all grappled with problems like drug abuse, bigotry and social inequality. Radically, Lee gave the artists responsible for the comic designs credits for their work. Jack Kirby, Frank Miller, John Romita and others achieved cult status in their own right. Other superheroes broke new ground in other ways. Daredevil was blind, Black Panther was black and Silver Surfer pondered the state of humanity. Lee's influence remains. Some years ago the Marvel hero, Northstar, came out of the closet. In its heyday, Marvel was selling 50 million copies a year. Until he retired from editing in 1971, Stan Lee wrote all the copy for Marvel's covers. In 1999, his Stan Lee Media venture, aimed at marrying comic-strips with the internet, went spectacularly wrong. Lee went bankrupt and his business partner landed in prison for fraud. In 2001 though, he started a new company entitled POW! (Purveyors of Wonder) Entertainment, which is currently developing films and television programmes. His latest project is a superhero based on a real person - Jay J Armes, who has metal claws after losing both hands aged 12 and fights crime with a tiger. But his 40-year-old creations are still as enduring as ever - with X-Men, The Hulk and Daredevil have all been turned into Hollywood action movies in the last five years. But Spider-Man has been the biggest box office hit, with the 2002 original and its 2004 sequel taking almost \$1.6bn (£857m) in ticket sales around the world - before DVD and merchandise sales are counted. It seems Stan Lee is as indestructible as his heroes.

entertainment 306.txt Bangkok film festival battles on Or ganisers of the third Bangkok International Film Festival have been determined to carry on with this year's event despite the ravages of the Asian tsunami disaster. The festivities have been scaled down, red carpets have been mothballed and profits from ticket sales are being donated to the tsunami relief fund. Apart from this, however, the festival has continued as originally planned. When the disaster happened", we naturally asked ourselves if we should cancel," said the festival's executive director, Craig Prater. The decision was made that we would continue", but that the focus would change. "Our premieres became fund raisers", the opening night was visibly toned down and 10% of every ticket sold goes to the disaster fund, he continued. But we feel like we've turned a page. We've acknowledged our position," and now it's business as usual." Mr Prater's sentiments were echoed by Christine Rush", director of the festival's sister event," the Bangkok Film Market. "We have been careful to be respectful of the Thai nation's recovery from this terrible disaster", she said. However," the nation's recovery very much depends upon it continuing its economic life. "We are encouraging attendees to keep the victims in mind and aggressively support the aid organisations helping out", she added. Given the conspicuously low audience figures, that support may be more symbolic than significant. However, poor ticket sales have less to do with any fallout from the disaster and more to do with administrative and promotional difficulties. The eclectic programme contains a wide range of titles, including such Oscar hopefuls as Ray Charles biopic Ray and Mike Leigh's abortion drama Vera Drake. That said, the absence of Thai subtitles on most film prints might have proved offputting to local cinemagoers. On a more positive note, the celebrity guests attending the event have generated huge media interest in this busy capital city. Problems securing air transport, the clash with last Sunday's Golden Globes ceremony in Los Angeles and other factors have forced some big names to cancel. But the festival has sti

ll attracted such Hollywood directors as Oliver Stone and Joel Schumacher, along side such screen stars as Michael Douglas, Jeremy Irons and Jean-Claude Van Damme. Irons, whose film *Being Julia* is in competition for the festival's Golden Kinnaree awards, said he had wondered whether he should attend after December's catastrophe. I questioned whether I should come when such a tragedy had happened", the British actor said. I thought it might be in rather bad taste. But then I spoke to the organisers and I was encouraged to let life go on. "Now I've come here I'm very glad. What impresses me about Thai culture is they get over these things far quicker than we do in the West", he continued. Basically I was invited here by Thailand. If they still want you to come," you should." Now in its third year", Bangkok is a relatively recent addition to the hectic film festival calendar. And while it has yet to attain the stature of more established events held in Hong Kong, Tokyo and Pusan in South Korea," Mr Prater predicts it will soon become their equal. "It's grown awfully fast in three years - maybe too fast", he concedes. We've had some bumps in the road," but that's only because the festival is still a baby. "I have no doubt in my mind that in five years", this will be the top Asian film festival in the world." The Golden Kinnarees will be awarded on Friday. The festival itself runs until 24 January.

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"entertainment 307.txt Carry On star Patsy Rowlands dies  
Actress Patsy Rowlands", known to millions for her roles in the Carry On films, has died at the age of 71. Rowlands starred in nine of the popular Carry On films, alongside fellow regulars Sid James, Kenneth Williams and Barbara Windsor. She also carved out a successful television career, appearing for many years in ITV's well-loved comedy *Bless This House*. Rowlands died in Hove on Saturday morning, her agent said. Born in January 1934, Rowlands won a scholarship to the Guildhall School of Speech and Drama scholarship when she was just 15. After spending several years at the Players Theatre in London, she made her film debut in 1963 in *Tom Jones*, directed by Tony Richardson. She made her first Carry On film in 1969 where she appeared in *Carry On Again Doctor*. Rowlands played the hard-done-by wife or the put-upon employee as a regular Carry On star. She also appeared in *Carry On at your Convenience*, *Carry On Matron* and *Carry On Loving*," as well as others. In recent years she appeared in BBC mini-series *The Cazalets* and played Mrs Potts in the London stage version of *Beauty and the Beast*. Agent Simon Beresford said: "She was just an absolutely favourite client. She never complained about anything", particularly when she was ill," she was an old trooper. "She was of the old school - she had skills from musical theatre and high drama", that is why she worked with the great and the good of directors. "She didn't mind always being recognised for the Carry On films because she thoroughly enjoyed making them. She was a really lovely person and she will be much missed." Her last appearance on stage was as Mrs Pearce in the award-winning production of *My Fair Lady* at the National Theatre. Previously married", she leaves one son, Alan. Her funeral will be a private, family occasion, with a memorial service at a later date.

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"entertainment 308.txt Tautou 'to star in Da Vinci film'  
French actress Audrey Tautou", star of hit film *Amelie*, will play the female lead in the film adaptation of *The Da Vinci Code*, it has been reported. The movie version of Dan Brown's best-selling novel is being directed by Ron Howard and also stars Tom Hanks. Tautou will play Hanks' code-cracking partner, according to various newspapers. She is currently starring in *A Very Long Engagement*, directed by Jean-Pierre Jeunet. Jeunet was also responsible for directing Tautou i

n Amelie in 2001, which launched the actress into the mainstream. She also starred as the lead role in critically-acclaimed film Dirty Pretty Things in 2002. Oscar-winning director Ron Howard chose Tautou for the part, preferring a French actress to a big name Hollywood star. UK actress Kate Beckinsale had been widely tipped as a possibility for the role alongside Vanessa Paradis and Juliette Binoche. The thriller upon which the movie is based has sold more than 17 million copies and is centred on a global conspiracy surrounding the Holy Grail mythology. The Louvre Museum, scene of the gruesome murder at the beginning of the novel, recently gave permission for filming to take place there, showbusiness newspaper Variety reported. The \$100m movie will be produced by Columbia/Sony Pictures and is due for release on May 19, 2006 in the United States and France.

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"entertainment 309.txt Double win for Sea Inside Spanish movie The Sea Inside has been named best picture and star Javier Bardem best actor at the Bangkok International Film Festival. Based on the true story of a paralysed man's battle to end his life," The Sea Inside was best foreign language film at the 2005 Golden Globe Awards. Annette Bening and Ana Geislerova shared the best actress award at the Bangkok festival. This year's event was scaled down following the Asian tsunami disaster. Falling Down and The Phantom of the Opera director Joel Schumacher won a lifetime achievement award while Hong Kong director Wong Kar-Wai was honoured for promoting Asian cinema. "It's a great honour", I want to share this honour with my Thai colleagues," Wong said. French writer Christophe Barratier and Korean writer Park Chan-Chook shared the best screenplay award for Les Choristes and Old Boy respectively. Now in its third year, the Bangkok International Film Festival is donating profits from ticket sales to the tsunami relief fund.

entertainment 310.txt BBC denies Blackadder TV comeback T he BBC has said there are no plans in the pipeline for a new series of hit comedy Blackadder, which ended in 1989. Tony Robinson, who played the servant Bald rick, told ITV1's This Morning the show's star, Rowan Atkinson, was more keen than he has been in the past". Robinson added he would ""love"" to do another series", each of which was set in a different era, ranging from the 15th century to World War I. But the BBC said on Thursday there were no plans for a comeback. In the final series all the main characters were killed off charging towards German lines after being ordered out of their trench. The poignant finale was later voted the best farewell episode of a TV series. A host of other UK actors, including Hugh Laurie, Stephen Fry and Miranda Richardson, also appeared in the show. Blackadder returned for a one-off special filmed to celebrate the arrival of the millennium in 1999. It was shown at the Millennium Dome in Greenwich before being screened on BSkyB.

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"entertainment 311.txt Corbett attacks 'dumbed-down TV' R onnie Corbett has joined fellow comedy stars Victoria Wood and David Jason in attacking the declining standards of British television programmes. Speaking to the Radio Times", "the Two Ronnies star said there is too much bad language and reality TV. "You get fed up watching shows with not much care and love", he complained. Corbett, soon to reunite with Ronnie Barker for a new Two Ronnies series, also criticised quiz shows like the BBC's They Think It's All Over. It's just laughing at each other and thinking", "Aren't we clever?"" said the 74-year-old comedian. Corbett is the latest comedy star to bemoan the ""dumbing down"" of modern TV programmes. In an interview published in the Radio Times in January", Victoria Wood slated comedian Sacha Baron Cohen for his character Ali

G's ""horrible"" brand of ""victim"" humour. ""With so many good writers and good performers", it's a shame people can't just write a script and have other people learn it," she said. And last week Only Fools and Horses star David Jason criticised British TV for being too safe and too cheap"". ""We've got to be careful not to dumb down for the audience"," he said. They shouldn't be sitting at home on the sofa vegetating." Corbett said he and Barker were always mindful of their family audience while making The Two Ronnies. ""Our material was good-natured", he said. We knew what would upset the average man in the street. ""There's a lot of swearing on TV today. They even have documentaries with the f-word." Corbett goes on to criticise ""reality programmes where they put people in a house for a fortnight and film them doing everything"". The Two Ronnies ran from 1971 to 1987 and attracted 17 million viewers at its peak. Its bespectacled stars will return later this year in The Two Ronnies Sketchbook", which will combine classic sketches with newly recorded material. Corbett claims he and Barker differ from today's celebrities in that they did not allow their success to go to their heads. ""We were never temperamental", fractious or walked out slamming doors, he said. We were fussy though," he added. We wanted everything done properly."

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"entertainment 312.txt Smith loses US box office crown Ne  
w comedy Diary of a Mad Black Woman has ended Will Smith's reign at the top of the North American box office. Based on a play by Tyler Perry", who also stars as a gun-toting grandmother, the film took \$22.7m (£11.8m) in its first three days of release. After topping the chart for two consecutive weeks, Smith's romantic comedy Hitch dropped to second place with takings of \$21m (£10.9m). Keanu Reeves' supernatural thriller Constantine dropped a place to three. Based on the Hellblazer comics, the film took \$11.8m (£6.1m) on its second week of release. Two new entries came next in the chart, with Wes Craven's horror movie Curse d, about a werewolf loose in Los Angeles, in fourth position with \$9.5m (£4.9 m). Action comedy Man of the House, starring Tommy Lee Jones as a Texas ranger assigned to protect a cheerleader squad, came in at fifth with \$9m (£4.6m). Clint Eastwood's boxing drama Million Dollar Baby - recipient of four Academy Awards, including best picture - continued to perform well in sixth place with takings of \$7.2m (£3.74m). Martin Scorsese's Hollywood biopic The Aviator - which won five Oscars, all in minor categories - held on in ninth place. The low-budget feature Diary of a Mad Black Woman stars Kimberly Elise as a woman thrown out on the streets by her philandering husband. With the help of her grandmother Ma dea (one of three roles played by Perry), she plots revenge. Perry, 34, is one of America's best-known black playwrights but is a newcomer to film. Once made homeless after investing his own money in unsuccessful productions of his work, he now lives in the mansion in which Diary of a Mad Black Woman was filmed.

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"entertainment 313.txt BBC to pour £9m into new comedy Th  
e BBC is to invest £9m in developing new comedy and entertainment programmes outside London. The changes come as part of a shake-up of several departments to create shows that appeal to a wider range of people. Changes are also being made to teams in the factual and daytime departments outside London. Director of television Jana Bennett said the changes were about ""getting the best ideas on screen as efficiently and effectively as we can"". ""The new structure in each genre is designed to ensure that happens", she said. A number of new roles are being created in each department, including a head of comedy commissioning based in Glasgow. The new person will be in charge of the £9m budget and their ro

le will be to develop shows outside the capital, both within the BBC and with independent production companies. Jane Lush, controller of entertainment commissioning, said, Entertainment and comedy are incredibly important to our audience s; I'm confident these changes will help us get the very best programmes on screen." "Similar positions will also be created in the other departments", "with the new commissioning editor for documentaries based in Bristol and the daytime commissioning editor in Birmingham. Ms Bennett said the new roles would benefit those making programmes within the BBC as well as those making shows for the channel independently. ""A strong independent sector and a flourishing in-house production base are not mutually exclusive and will stimulate the competition that will deliver the best ideas to the audience", "she said.

entertainment 314.txt How the Academy Awards flourished T  
he 77th annual Academy Awards are taking place on 27 February with the stars of the movie-making world once again holding their breath to discover who will be showered with the honours this year. But from humble beginnings, how did the modern day extravaganza become the behemoth it is today? HOW IT ALL STARTED The first Academy Awards were handed out in 1929 at a comparatively low-key dinner held at the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel - just over the road from their modern day home. Just 250 guests attended with ticket prices at \$5. The first film to win was *Wings*, which starred Clara Bow in the only silent movie to win the big award. For the first 10 years or so, the winners list was handed to the newspapers so they could publish them at 11pm, but in 1940 the winners were published in the Los Angeles Times at 8.45pm meaning guests entering the ceremony knew already knew the results. As a result the sealed envelope system was introduced, leading to the secrecy and suspense-filled night that happens today. WHEN AND WHERE The tradition of holding the awards at a banquet continued until 1942 but with increasing interest came a growing guest list and it became impractical to host it as a dinner. The ceremonies were then transferred to theatres with the famous Grauman's Chinese Theatre the first to host the expanded event. Other venues included the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion and the Shrine Auditorium. They are now held at the Kodak Theatre, which opened in 2002 just across the road from its original home and holds 6,000 people. Until 1954 they were held on a Thursday, then swapped around from Monday to Wednesday before Sunday night was settled on, although the month swapped from May to April to March and now its current month of February. The first televised ceremony was in 1953, with Bob Hope as the MC. WHO WAS OSCAR? There is no solid evidence as to how the trophy became to be known as Oscar. One popular story is that Academy librarian Margaret Herrick said the statue looked like her uncle Oscar. A journalist apparently overheard this conversation and used the phrase in an article. The first time it is thought to have been used in print was when columnist Sidney Skolsky used it to describe Katherine Hepburn's first best actress win in 1934. The Academy officially adopted the nickname in 1939. The trophy was designed by MGM art director Cedric Gibbons. Since its inception 2,530 Oscars have been handed out. In support of the war effort, the Academy handed out plaster Oscar statuettes during WWII. After the war, winners exchanged the plaster awards for the real thing. Fifty-five statues were stolen en route to the awards in 2000, 52 were recovered nine days later. Winners were unaffected as a new batch was rushed out. WHO SITS IN JUDGEMENT? The Academy was set up in 1927 as a non-profit organisation with 36 members from different film disciplines. Douglas Fairbanks Sr was the first president and oversaw the first awards. There are now 5,700 members of the Academy - with membership by invitation only to those who are seen to have achieved distinction in the movies and are therefore seen as fit to judge their peers. Some of the criteria for admittance includes: film credits that reflect the high standards of the Academy, receipt of an Academy Award nomination, achievem

ent of unique distinction, earning of special merit, or making an outstanding contribution to film. THE STARS WHO LEFT EMPTY-HANDED While many of the biggest films and movie-makers have been honoured by the Academy, there is still surprise at those that did not receive any nominations that later went on to become classics. Among the overlooked films were Hobson's Choice, Dirty Harry, The 39 Steps, The Searchers and King Kong. Actors that failed to win for their iconic roles included Al Jolson in the Jazz Singer (1927), Humphrey Bogart in Casablanca (1944), Gene Kelly in Singing in the Rain (1952) and Henry Fonda in 12 Angry Men (1957). Alfred Hitchcock also failed to win an award despite five nominations. His enduring influence on the horror genre was finally recognised with an honorary gong in 1968. THE SHOW ALWAYS GOES ON Not even war has halted the glittering Hollywood event. There were calls for it to be cancelled in 2003 during the war in Iraq, but as it didn't stop during World War II or the Vietnam war. Documentary winner Michael Moore ensured nobody forgot about the Iraq war though and used his acceptance speech to criticise the American invasion. The ceremony was muted with the glitz turned down and many female stars opting for demure dark dresses. The ceremony has been postponed on three occasions. Los Angeles floods in 1938 saw it put back a week. The death of Martin Luther King saw it postponed for two days in 1968 as a mark of respect and there was a 24-hour delay following the assassination attempt on President Ronald Reagan. CONTROVERSIES AND OTHER GAFFES Three people have refused Oscars, including actor George C Scott who said the whole thing was demeaning"". Writer Dudley Nichols refused his Academy Award in 1935 for his screenplay for The Insider because the Writers' Guild was striking at the time. Marlon Brando turned down his best actor Oscar for The Godfather in 1973 in protest at Hollywood's apparent discrimination against Native American people. He sent along a woman called Sacheen Littlefeather to collect his award. She was later revealed to be Native American actress Maria Cruz. The following year Robert Opal interrupted proceedings when he streaked," flashing a peace sign as well as everything else. The TV network managed to pan away and avoid too much nudity. Opal was murdered in 1979. Frank Capra was the butt of one major gaffe in 1934 when the host opened out best picture envelope and declared ""come on up and get it"" Frank"" to which Frank Capra bounded up to the stage before realising that he had meant Frank Lloyd had won for Cavalcade. Capra vowed he would never to go the awards again but went the following year to collect his award for It Happened One Night.

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"entertainment 315.txt Hoffman hits out over modern film Hollywood legend Dustin Hoffman has hit out at the quality of current films and theatre productions. The star of Rain Man and Tootsie said the film culture was ""in the craphouse"" at a press conference on Tuesday. The 67-year-old also said he stopped working a few years ago because he lost his ""spark"" for acting. Hoffman is in the UK to publicise his new comedy", Meet the Fockers, which also stars Robert De Niro," Barbra Streisand and Ben Stiller. He said: ""You go to the cinema and you realise you're watching the third act. There is no first or second act. ""There is this massive film-making where you spend this incredible amount of money and play right to the demographic. ""You can tell how much money the film is going to make by how it does on the first weekend. ""The whole culture is in the craphouse. It's not just true in the movies"" it's also true in the theatre. ""Broadway", and now London is the same," special effects are in great demand. It's not a good time culturally."" Hoffman also said he stopped working a few years ago and moved into directing and writing. He said: ""I just lost that spark I always had. ""A couple of years ago I didn't like the pa

rts I was getting. ""Studios weren't interested in the kind of films that people of my generation wanted to see. ""I thought I would stop and just try writing and directing. I wasn't aware of the depression that set in." Recently", Hoffman has returned to film, with roles in *I Heart Huckabees*, *Finding Neverland* and now *Meet the Fockers*, which is the sequel to *Meet the Parents*. *Meet The Fockers* opens in the UK on Friday.

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"entertainment 316.txt Johnny Depp: The acting outlaw Johnny Depp", whose latest role was Peter Pan creator JM Barrie in *Finding Neverland*, is celebrated as one of Hollywood's most maverick talents. Depp has become an unlikely major star, given his preference for taking dark and idiosyncratic roles instead of surefire box office hits. He has had a long-running working relationship with the equally unconventional director Tim Burton. Depp was born in Kentucky in 1963 and at first wanted to be a rock star, playing in a number of bands and supporting acts such as Iggy Pop and The B-52s in Florida. On a visit to Los Angeles, his former wife introduced him to actor Nicolas Cage. In 1984 he started his film career playing a doomed teenager in horror film *Nightmare On Elm Street*. Two years later he played a soldier in Oliver Stone's Vietnam epic *Platoon*. But it was TV that first made Depp a star. He played undercover cop Tommy Hanson in the US series *21 Jump Street* for three years from 1987. In 1990 he began his partnership with Burton in the dark fairy tale *Edward Scissorhands*, about a young man with blades for hands. He won plaudits in 1993 for the downbeat film *What's Eating Gilbert Grape*, where he played a sensitive youth looking after an overweight mother and a retarded younger brother, played by Leonardo DiCaprio. Another role under Burton, *Ed Wood*, starred Depp as the crazed cult film-maker Wood, in 1994. He played a much more serious, sensitive role in his next major film, *Donnie Brasco*, where he portrayed an undercover cop infiltrating a mafia ring. In 1997 he directed his only film to date - *The Brave*, the story of an Indian man offered money to appear in a snuff film. Two years later he played Hunter S Thompson in Terry Gilliam's ambitious but poorly-received big screen adaptation of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. He worked again with Tim Burton in the 1999 horror film *Sleepy Hollow*, and appeared opposite Dame Judi Dench and Juliette Binoche in *Chocolat*. His performance in *Pirates of the Caribbean*, which earned him Golden Globe and Bafta nominations, had many critics thinking he based it upon the mannerisms of his friend, Rolling Stones guitarist Keith Richards. His latest role in *Finding Neverland* explored JM Barrie's relationship with Sylvia (Kate Winslet) and her children. Depp's charismatic performance drew an audience of adults and children alike into Barrie's vivid imagination," and he was called the ""fifth child of the group"" by the film's director Marc Forster. He has two children of his own with French singer Vanessa Paradis", having previously been in a long-term relationship with British model Kate Moss. The theme of children's literature in Depp's career - and his long association with Tim Burton - are set to continue in his next role, playing Willy Wonka in a remake of Roald Dahl's classic *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. British TV comedy fans might also remember Depp's guest role in the final episode of BBC sketch programme *The Fast Show*, cited as his favourite show. It was another surprise move in Depp's varied and intriguing career.

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"entertainment 317.txt Patti Smith to host arts festival Rock star Patti Smith has been made artistic director of this year's Meltdown festival", to be held at London's South Bank Centre in June. The punk pioneer follows Morrissey, David Bowie and Nick Cave in directing 15 days of concerts an

d events. Smith has yet to decide the line-up for Meltdown," which begins on 11 June. ""I want to touch on all aspects of our culture", perhaps with readings from Genet, and I have an idea for Jeremy Irons to read Proust, she said. The 58-year-old US singer of Because the Night told The Observer newspaper that the festival would be her response to these material," exploitative and greedy times". ""It is important we explore the new", but we should also salute the best art there is, aesthetically and spiritually," she said. Last year's Meltdown festival, directed by the ex-Smiths star Morrissey, included appearances by singer Jane Birkin, Nancy Sinatra and playwright Alan Bennett. He also persuaded punk band The New York Dolls to reform for a reunion show.

entertainment 318.txt Roxy Music on Isle of Wight bill Roxy Music will appear at June's Isle of Wight music festival, along with Morrissey, Supergrass and Idlewild. REM have already been confirmed as headliners for the three-day event, which takes place from 10-12 June. Original band members Bryan Ferry, Phil Manzerana, Andy Mackay and Paul Thompson will take to the stage on the Saturday night of the festival. The band are also working in the studio on new material, their first since the 1982 album Avalon. Roxy Music were formed in 1971 by Ferry, Mackay and Brian Eno, with Manzanera joining the following year. Their first hit was 1972's Virginia Plain, with other hits including Street Life, Love Is The Drug and the 1981 John Lennon cover, Jealous Guy. Roxy Music's back catalogue was re-released in 2000, leading to the band undertaking a world tour in 2001. Morrissey will also play on Saturday at the festival, while Supergrass and Idlewild have been confirmed for the Friday.

entertainment 319.txt Music mogul Fuller sells company Pop Idol supremo Simon Fuller has sold his 19 Entertainment company to an US entrepreneur in a \$156m (£81.5m) deal. Robert Sillerman's Sports Entertainment Enterprises, which is to be renamed CFX, recently also bought an 85% share in the estate of Elvis Presley. Mr Fuller has been appointed to the CFX board and will plan and implement the company's creative strategy. The 19 firm handles a roster of music artists, TV shows and PR strategies for stars including the Beckhams. The deal sees Mr Fuller receive £64.5m in cash and about 1.9 million shares in Sports Entertainment. There will also be a further £19.2m in either cash or stocks by the end of the financial year in June. Mr Fuller has signed a long-term agreement with the company which will see him continue to expand and develop entertainment brands. He said: This is a hugely exciting new partnership for myself and 19 Entertainment. ""CKX will provide 19 with a powerful platform for global growth and allow us to fully take advantage of all the amazing opportunities that lie ahead. I cannot wait to get started."". Mr Fuller was the creative drive behind Pop Idol and its US offspring American Idol. 19 Management runs the careers of many of its successful contestants including Will Young", Gareth Gates and Kelly Clarkson. The company was set up 15 years ago by Mr Fuller, taking the name from his first successful single - 19 by Paul Hardcastle. Fuller was the driving force behind the Spice Girls phenomenon, using canny marketing and catchy pop songs to secure their place as the most lucrative girl group in history. He then put together S Club 7, who had their own TV show as well as a music career. Mr Sillerman's deal to buy the Presley estate sees him control the operation of Graceland," as well as money from the late star's music and films. Presley's daughter Lisa Marie retains possession of Graceland and many of her father's ""personal effects"".

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"entertainment 320.txt Johnny Cash manager Holiff dies The former manager of Johnny Cash", Saul Israel Holiff, has died at the age of 79, his family said. Mr Holiff, who was also a concert promoter, managed Cash's

career between 1960 and 1973," quitting when he thought the singer's career had peaked. ""I was guilty for underestimating him repeatedly"," he once said. The Canadian music manager, who also managed Tommy Hunter and the Statler Brothers, had been in declining health, according to his family. An entrepreneur from an early age, Mr Holiff served as a rear air gunner in the Royal Canadian Air Force during World War II, afterwards setting up a drive-in restaurant. He briefly dabbled in acting, before setting up offices in Nashville and Los Angeles for his concert and artist promotion business. In 1970, RPM weekly magazine presented Holiff with a special award as the Canadian music industry's man of the year. Mr Holiff retired when he was in his late 40s, returning to education as a mature student at the University of Victoria, where he graduated with a degree in history. He passed away on 17 March. According to his wishes, there will be no funeral service.

entertainment 321.txt UK 'world's biggest music buyer' UK consumers are the biggest music buyers in the world, according to new figures released on Tuesday by the British Phonographic Industry (BPI). But global sales of recorded music were flat in 2004, with growing sales in DVD music videos offset by online and physical piracy in major markets. The UK music industry recorded an overall 3% increase in volume sales, mostly due to its robust albums market. However, world music sales declined by 1.3% to \$33.6 billion (£17.7 billion). The UK CD albums market grew by 4.5% in 2004 with a record 174.6 million units sold. On average every Briton buys 3.2 CDs per person per year. Around 26,000 albums are released in the UK each year, making Britain second only to the US in terms of the number of releases. Overall sales were driven by new UK-signed artists such as Keane, Katie Melua and Scissor Sisters, whose debut album sold almost 1.6 million copies in the UK. A slew of great new British artists have met UK music fans' demand for great music", said BPI chairman Peter Jameson. The best-selling album globally was Usher's Confessions - one of eight albums to sell more than five million copies in 2004. The growth in the DVD market and a sharp increase in sales of digital music ensured a strong market in the US. The total number of tracks downloaded last year were up more than tenfold on 2003. Digital sales in the US in the first two months of 2005 are already more than double that of the same period in 2004. However, some markets in Continental Europe and Asia - notably Sweden, Finland, France, Spain and South Korea - have been drastically hit by internet piracy. Australia, Italy and the Netherlands also saw a decline. On the positive side digital sales are booming", said John Kennedy, chief executive of the International Federation of Phonographic Industries (IFPI). However", commercial piracy and illegal file-sharing are continuing to depress our markets. ""The priority in the coming year is to step up the advance of legitimate digital sales and sustain our anti-piracy efforts." "The main choice today's music fan now has to make is whether to get music legally or illegally", added Mr Jameson.

entertainment 322.txt Pixies take on Reading and Leeds Pixies, Foo Fighters and Iron Maiden will headline this summer's Leeds and Reading festivals. The trio of rock heavyweights will top the bill for the three-day events at Bramham Park, near Wetherby, and at Richfield Avenue, Reading. They are the Pixies' and Iron Maiden's only UK festival gigs, while Foo Fighters are also at T In The Park. The Killers, Razorlight and Queens of the Stone Age are also playing the twin festivals, to be held on 26-28 August. Other acts in this year's line-up include The Charlatans, Marilyn Manson and Kings of Leon. Pete Doherty's band Babyshambles will appear on the NME/Radio One stage along with Kasabian, Black Rebel Motorcycle Club and Bloc Party. Organiser Mean Fiddler said more acts were still to be confirmed for the summer event. We are all very excited to be going back to Reading and intend to have a fantastic time", said

Iron Maiden's Bruce Dickinson. We're sure fans will too." " It will be the first time the veteran British metal band have played Reading in 23 years. At Leeds", Iron Maiden will headline the first day of the festival on the Friday, Pixies will follow on Saturday and the Foo Fighters will close the event on Sunday. The Pixies will headline the first day of Reading, while Foo Fighters will play on Sunday and Iron Maiden will close the event. Weekend tickets are now on sale priced at £125 each.

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"entertainment 323.txt Vera Drake leads UK Oscar hopes Mike Leigh's film Vera Drake will lead British hopes at this year's Academy Awards after getting three nominations. Imelda Staunton was nominated for best actress for her role in the abortion drama", while Leigh received nods for best director and original screenplay. Kate Winslet was also nominated in the best actress category for her role in Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind. And Clive Owen and Sophie Okonedo both got nominated for supporting roles in Closer and Hotel Rwanda respectively. Owen has already been made bookmakers' favourite for best supporting actor for the role in Closer that has already clinched him a Golden Globe award. And it is the first nomination for actress Okonedo, chosen for her performance in Hotel Rwanda, about the 1994 Rwandan genocide. It is also a debut nomination for Staunton, 49, who told BBC News 24 she had not thought the film would appeal to Academy voters. " "It was an extraordinary time making the film and I can't believe what has happened this morning", " she said. I hope it just shows Mike up to be the extraordinary filmmaker he is. " "We are also dealing with a very difficult subject matter and it is amazing to have it accepted in this way." " Leigh", who had previously received three Oscar nominations for Secrets and Lies and Topsy Turvy," told BBC News 24 the latest success was " "amazing" ". He said: " "We hoped that Imelda Staunton would get a nomination but I never expected to get director and screenplay. It's just absolutely wonderful. " "I think people are aware that it's about life - and I hope it is the warmth and compassion that really talks to people." " Winslet said she was " "ecstatic" " about the fourth nomination of her career. " "Being nominated means so much to me. To be nominated for a film that was released a while ago", I feel so honoured and overwhelmed," she said. John Woodward, chief executive of the UK Film Council, said it was extremely heartening" " to see British filmmaking talent recognised on the global stage. " "Britain has a hugely talented industry and these nominations show why National Lottery investment in film pays major dividends for our culture and economy." " Among a total of 24 British nominees", composer Andrew Lloyd Webber and lyricist Charles Hart are up for best original song for Learn To Be Lonely, from The Phantom of the Opera movie. Cinematographer John Mathieson, who was nominated for Gladiator in 2001, is also up for The Phantom of the Opera. And Finding Neverland has garnered two more nominations for Best. Gemma Jackson, who has also worked on Bridget Jones's Diary and Iris, is up for art direction while costume designer Alexandra Byrne, whose previous films have included Captain Corelli's Mandolin and Elizabeth, is in the running. The UK has two contenders in the best live action short film category. Wasp was made by ex-children's TV presenter Andrea Arnold while Little Terrorist is the work of Ashvin Kumar. This year's awards will be handed out in Hollywood on 27 February.

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"entertainment 324.txt Moreno debut makes Oscar mark Catalina Sandino Moreno has joined a rare group of actresses who have been nominated for an Oscar for starring in a foreign language film. The Colombian-born act

ress was the final hope for director Joshua Marston", who scoured the US and Colombia for a lead for Maria Full of Grace. The film sees the 23-year-old play a teenage drug mule who smuggles heroin by swallowing pellets in condoms. Plaudits have been raining down on her for her gritty performance, making it all the more surprising that this is her first film. Her previous acting experience was in amateur productions in her home city of Bogota at the Ruben Di Pietro theatre academy. She has already received a nomination for the Independent Spirit Awards leading actress category but these rarely overlap with Academy Awards, instead recognising quirkier, low-budget films. And at the 2004 Berlin Film Festival the jury could not choose between her and Charlize Theron's Oscar winning performance in Monster so gave them a tied award. Sandino Moreno is now being regarded as one of the most promising actresses around at the moment. But she is taking her time committing to her next project, hoping to land a strong Spanish script and would love to be able to work with directors Pedro Almodovar or Alejandro Amenabar.

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"entertainment 325.txt Bening makes awards breakthrough F  
ilm actress Annette Bening is up for an Oscar for her starring role in the award-winning film *Being Julia*. Bening", who was born in Texas in 1958, has gained prominence for a string of key roles. Although an Oscar has so far eluded her, her status as one of Hollywood's favourite actresses remains solid. One of the biggest Oscars buzzes in recent years was for Bening's role as troubled Carolyn Burnham in 1999's *American Beauty*. But her deliciously neurotic portrayal of suburban life turning sour was overlooked in favour of Hilary Swank's leading role in *Boys Don't Cry*. After opening her career in the theatre - and gaining a Tony Award nomination in 1986 - Bening had a low-key spell in television. She then made her film debut as a sex-starved wife in 1988's *The Great Outdoors*, opposite comics Dan Akroyd and John Candy. Following a cameo in *Postcards From The Edge*, Bening's breakthrough role came in 1990, playing seductive con artist Myra Langtry in *The Grifters* - a role that won her an Oscar nomination. Despite some rave reviews, Bening did not win the best supporting actress Academy Award. However the high-profile performance enabled Bening to capture roles in a number of big budget Hollywood productions, co-starring with some of Hollywood's greatest players, including Robert De Niro and Harrison Ford. But it was her role opposite Warren Beatty in 1991 gangster flick *Bugsy* which had the greatest impact. Bening played Virginia Hill, another role which won her high critical acclaim, but the film only picked up two of a staggering 12 Oscar nominations. *Bugsy* was the start of a very significant liaison for Bening - she married Beatty, with whom she had a child as the couple promoted the film in Europe. The couple now have four children together. A pair of contrasting yet successful performances peppered Bening's career in the mid-1990s. She played Michael Douglas' opposite number in romantic comedy *The American President*," and as a ""fiery"" Queen Elizabeth I in a contemporary adaptation of Shakespeare's *Richard III*. Bening was the first choice to play the female lead in *American Beauty*", director Sam Mendes' film debut which was a critical and commercial success - but the actress had to be content with a Bafta award for her strong performance. But current film *Being Julia* has made Bening an award-winning actress rather than the perennial nominee, with success at the Golden Globes. The witty tale of revenge and love set in 1930s London sees the eponymous theatrical diva - played by Bening - grow tired of her success and fall for a young American - and could be the role which finally wins her the coveted Academy Award.

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"entertainment 326.txt Oscars steer clear of controversy

The Oscars nominations list has left out some of the most controversial films of the past year in favour of safer", less contentious cinema. If best film nominees were drawn on the basis of column inches, two of the front-runners would have had to be Michael Moore's Bush-baiting documentary Fahrenheit 9/11 and Mel Gibson's The Passion of the Christ. Both films polarised opinion but had critics talking, and the public turning up to see them - Fahrenheit 9/11 breaking US box office records for a documentary, and The Passion of the Christ making more than US\$370m (£196m) in the US alone. But this year's Academy Awards have shied away from the big name controversies, with The Passion of the Christ - a film accused of being anti-Semitic - receiving nominations only in the 'minor' categories of cinematography, makeup and musical score. Fahrenheit 9/11 has also been overlooked, despite winning the Palme d'Or at the Cannes International Film Festival in 2004. Moore's caustic documentary may have been affected by its distributors' decision to enter it in the best picture category, rather than best documentary, says Tim Dams," the news editor of trade magazine Screen International. But he also believes the strong political viewpoint of Moore's film does not sit well with the Academy. ""If you look at past Oscar winners and nominees", the very conservative Oscar voters tend to go for very conservative," epic-style pictures. Fahrenheit 9/11 didn't really fit in to that category. ""They tend to go for films like Titanic", Gladiator, and the Lord of the Rings, films with scale that often aren't too contentious," he said. While he said the Oscar voting panel were not snubbing"" Moore's film", he thought it was unlikely a documentary could ever seriously compete in a best film category. ""I think it's more a misjudgement by the people putting it out rather than a deliberate snub", he said. The problem with Mel Gibson's film, he believed, was that the voting panel may have been cautious in nominating a film with dialogue in Aramaic, an ancient Middle Eastern language. Hollywood doesn't tend to like foreign-language films - no-one's ever tried doing a film in a dead language", he said. But aside from these two films, some potentially contentious pictures have won nominations. The German film The Downfall, a biopic tracing the final days of Nazi leader Adolf Hitler in his Berlin bunker, has been recognised in the best foreign film category. The film has caused some controversy in showing Hitler as a fallible but human man, rather than a semi-mythical, historical monster. But Mr Dams said: It's not an inflammatory film. It has done very well in Germany", and it's a film that portrays Hitler as a human rather than some kind of devil or monster." Another 'contentious' film", Mr Dams said," has gained a nomination in the best documentary section through the force of its charm. Independent film-maker Morgan Spurlock may have forced fast-food giant McDonalds to withdraw its 'super size' portions in the US after he went on a month-long diet eating nothing but McDonalds meals - and filmed his progress. The film has been a hit around the world. Mr Dams said: ""It's a political film", but it's quite fun and punky and well-paced. ""Morgan Spurlock is a really likeable guy. It's a very accessible film", and it doesn't beat you over the head with its views. ""While in Fahrenheit 9/11 there are moments of comedy", I think the way that Super Size Me is put together - the fact it's a very likeable film - means it's won through on charm." Dam's pick at this year's Oscars? The Aviator", Martin Scorsese's biopic of aviation pioneer and Hollywood player Howard Hughes. Tinseltown, it seems, likes nothing more than a picture about one of its own.

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"entertainment 327.txt Kidman wins photographer battle Ac  
tress Nicole Kidman has won a restraining order against two paparazzi photograp  
hers who she claims left her fearful of leaving her Sydney mansion. The Oscar-

winning star took action against Jamie Fawcett and Ben McDonald after a bugging device was found outside her home earlier this week. Lawyers for the pair denied allegations they had planted the device. The Australian actress is currently in Sydney to film her latest movie", Eucalyptus, with Russell Crowe. Kidman was prompted to take action following a reported high-speed car chase with members of the paparazzi in Sydney last weekend. According to local newspaper the Daily Telegraph," the incident involved paparazzi driving through red lights and on the wrong side of the road in pursuit of Kidman's vehicle. Lawyers for Mr Fawcett and Mr McDonald denied that the pair were involved in the chase. Kidman sought the ""apprehended violence"" orders - normally used in Australia in cases of domestic violence and similar incidents - after being advised to do so by local police. ""Nicole would like to make it clear that she acknowledges she is a public figure and that reporters and photographers have a job to do and she respects that", said Kidman's publicist Wendy Day. However, these are specific actions against two individuals who, over a period of time, have caused her to feel threatened," intimidated and unable to leave her home without fearing for her safety." Magistrate Lee Gilmore", who issued the restraining order at Waverley Local Court in Sydney," said she understood the photographers were entitled to earn a living but there had to be limits to their behaviour. ""Miss Kidman says she's willing to put up with some of it", but it's gone beyond that," she said. I do believe the allegation in relation to the driving is a serious issue.""

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"entertainment 328.txt Bookmakers back Aviator for Oscar  
The Aviator has been tipped by UK bookmakers as the favourite to win the best film award at this year's Oscars. Ray star Jamie Foxx is clear favourite in the best actor category while Million Dollar Baby's Hilary Swank is tipped to win the best actress prize. Bookmakers predict Cate Blanchett will be named best supporting actress. William Hill and Ladbrokes have given The Aviator 4/9 and 8/13 odds of winning best film", with Million Dollar Baby in second place at 9/4. Bet Direct and Bet 365 also tip The Aviator, with the majority of bookmakers regarding Finding Neverland as the outsider. The Aviator is also widely tipped to win the best director prize for Martin Scorsese. British star Clive Owen is second favourite at William Hill to take the best supporting actor award, for his performance in Closer. The favourite in that category is Sideways star Thomas Haden Church. Vera Drake star Imelda Staunton has 5/1 odds of winning the best actress Oscar at Bet 365 and William Hill, ahead of fellow UK star Kate Winslet who has odds of 25/1 at William Hill. Mike Leigh is the outsider in the best director category for Vera Drake, a position he holds jointly with Ray's Taylor Hackford at bookmakers VC Bet. This year's Academy Awards will be handed out in Hollywood on 27 February. X Factor judge Sharon Osbourne will present Sky television's live coverage of the event. Meanwhile, Clive Owen's best supporting actor nomination has led a bookmaker to shorten his odds of becoming the next James Bond. He has moved from 4/1 to 5/2 favourite to play 007," with Hugh Jackman and Ewan McGregor joint second favourite. ""Clive Owen's nomination has sparked a betting frenzy from James Bond fans", who feel that his heightened global recognition will have done his chances of becoming the next Bond a world of good," said William Hill spokesman Rupert Adams.

entertainment 329.txt Van Gogh festival film withdrawn Mu  
rdered director Theo van Gogh's controversial film Submission has been pulled from the Rotterdam Film Festival because of security fears. It was one of three of his works to be shown as part of a freedom of expression event in tribute to the late film-maker's life. The film is critical of the treatment of women under Islam. Its TV screening is thought to have led to his murder. The 10-day Dutch

h festival begins on Wednesday. Submission was made with liberal Somali-Dutch politician Ayaan Hirsi Ali and was due to be shown on 30 January. Van Gogh was shot and stabbed to death in November 2004 several months after receiving death threats following Submission's first broadcast on Dutch television. Two of Van Gogh's other films will be shown as planned, including the theatrical world premiere of his last feature 06/05. Festival director Sandra den Hamer said: The festival reflects what happens around us and within cinema itself." The festival opens with the French film "The 10th District Court", Moments of Trials made by Raymond Depardon. The event sees 14 films competing to win three Top Tiger Awards which aim to introduce promising new talent. New sections added to this year's festival include Cinema of the Future and Cinema of the World, with special focus on Russian and south-east Asian productions. There is also an Iraqi-German offering entitled Underexposure, which looks at life in Iraq after Saddam Hussein.

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"entertainment 330.txt Douglas set for Indian adventure A ctor Michael Douglas is to co-produce and star in an adventure film about a diamond robbery set in India. The new picture is expected to be similar to Douglas's action films of the 1980s", Romancing The Stone and The Jewel Of The Nile. Another Hollywood star is being lined up to co-star, while the rest of the cast will be Indian. Aishwarya Rai, star of Bride and Prejudice," is the ""preferred choice"" of the Indian studio involved in the film. On a visit to India", the 60-year-old actor said he hoped to start shooting Racing The Monsoon next year. Douglas added that it had been inspired by a Wall Street Journal article about India's 'angadias', who courier money and diamonds around India. The actor's own production company, Further Films, is working in partnership with two Indian film-making concerns to bring the picture to the screen. Shailendra Singh, the founder of India's Percept Films," said there would be ""a lot of India"" in the movie - and that an Indian train would play a big role. ""The train will be a crucial part of the film. The chase and most of the stunts will be on the train," said Mr Singh. Swashbuckling adventure film Romancing The Stone saw Douglas's female co-star Kathleen Turner win a Golden Globe award for her performance in 1985.

entertainment 331.txt Russian film wins BBC world prize R ussian drama The Return (Vozvrashchenie) has been named winner of the BBC Four World Cinema Award. The film tells the story of two adolescent boys who are subjected to a harsh regime when their strict father returns after a 10-year absence. Directed by Andrey Zvyagintsev, The Return previously won the 2003 Golden Lion award at the Venice Film Festival. The prize was presented at an awards ceremony held in London on Thursday and hosted by Jonathan Ross. The winner was chosen by a panel which included X Files actress Gillian Anderson, critic Roger Clarke and Touching the Void director Kevin McDonald. Ross, who is the presenter of BBC One's Film 2005, was also involved in the deliberations. A shortlist of six films from around the world had been drawn up from which the panel chose. Other nominees included the Motorcycle Diaries, Zatoichi and Hero. A viewer poll saw director Zhang Yimou's martial arts epic Hero emerge as the favourite with 32% of votes cast. Tragedy struck the production of The Return when one of the young stars, 15-year-old Vladimir Girin, drowned in a lake. The winner of the World Cinema Award last year was the French animated feature Belleville Rendezvous

entertainment 332.txt Incredibles win animation awards Th e Incredibles movie has beaten Shrek 2 to the main prizes at Hollywood's animation awards, the Annies. The superhero film was named best animated feature whi

le Brad Bird won best director, writer and voice actor for his role as designer Edna Mode. The Incredibles won a total of 10 awards - but Shrek 2, which had seven nominations, went home empty-handed. The two movies will compete with Shark Tale in the best animated film category of the Oscars at the end of February. The Incredibles' awards came despite Shrek 2's greater box office success. Shrek 2 took \$881m (£468m) around the world, compared with \$576m (£306m) for The Incredibles. SpongeBob SquarePants was named best animated TV show while TV comedy King of the Hill picked up two prizes including one for actress Brittany Murphy's voice work. Tom Kenny, who provides the voice for SpongeBob SquarePants, hosted Sunday's ceremony at the Alex Theater, Los Angeles. The awards are handed out by the International Animated Film Society. Finding Nemo won nine Annies last year.

entertainment 333.txt Actor Scott is new Bond favourite B  
ookmaker William Hill has stopped taking bets on who will be the next James Bond, following a succession of large wagers on actor Dougray Scott. The firm closed the book on Friday, saying insider information"" could have contributed to the number of bets. ""In the past gambles like this have often been right"," William Hill spokesman Rupert Adams said. The closing list gave Scott odds of 6-9, followed by Oscar nominee Clive Owen at 5-2. Scott first found fame in the TV series Soldier Soldier and has since then starred in such films as Mission Impossible II and the wartime drama Enigma. Mr Adams said one punter had placed a bet of £870 on the 39-year-old actor at odds of 8-1. She told us she had some inside information", perhaps she knew he had been to a casting, but she wouldn't say," he said. Others thought to be in the running include Star Wars actor Ewan McGregor and Australian star Hugh Jackman, both of whom have odds of 4-1. Colin Farrell, Jude Law and Troy star Eric Bana have also been tipped for the role in the past. A large number of bets on actor Colin Salmon to become the first black James Bond were dismissed as a publicity stunt a month ago. The next Bond film, originally due for release in 2005, has been delayed until 2006 due to Sony's takeover of the MGM studio. The most recent, Die Another Day, was released in late 2002 and saw Pierce Brosnan make his final appearance as the secret agent. The actor was originally due to make a fifth appearance as Bond, but was released from his contract in 2004.

entertainment 334.txt Singer's film to show at festival A  
documentary which takes a candid look at the life of chart-topping singer George Michael will be shown at this year's Berlin Film Festival. A Different Story will screen in the Panorama section of the festival, which runs from 10-20 February. It features the singer talking about both his career and his personal life, from his days in Wham! through to more recent events. Michael will attend the festival to introduce the screening on 16 February. Director Southan Morris and executive producer Andy Stephens will also attend the festival. The 93 minute film will see Michael discussing his early days in Wham! along with his later career, including his legal battles with record label Sony and his stance against the Iraq war and American politics. It will also touch upon his turbulent personal life, including his arrest in a Beverly Hills park toilet in 1998 for lewd behaviour""", and the death of his boyfriend Anselmo Feleppa from Aids. The film, which includes previously unseen footage of the singer also features contributions from Michael's former Wham! partner Andrew Ridgeley, as well as ex-Wham! backing singers Pepsi and Shirlie. Other contributors include Sting, Mariah Carey, Elton John, Noel Gallagher, Geri Halliwell and Simon Cowell. This year's festival will open with Man To Man, a historical epic starring Joseph Fiennes and Kristin Scott-Thomas. It will be one of 21 films competing for the festival's top prize, the Golden Bear. Other films in competition will include The Life Aquatic, a quirky comedy starring Bill Murray, and the biopic Kinsey, which

features Liam Neeson. The full programme will be announced on 1 February.

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"entertainment 335.txt De Niro film leads US box office F  
ilm star Robert De Niro has returned to the top of the North American box office with his film *Hide and Seek*. The thriller shot straight to the number one spot after taking \$22m (£11.7m) at the box office. De Niro recently spent three weeks at the top with comedy *Meet The Fockers*", which was at number five this week. Oscar hopefuls *The Aviator*, *Million Dollar Baby* and *Sideways* all cashed in on their multiple nominations with stronger ticket sales. In *Hide and Seek*, De Niro plays a widower whose daughter has a creepy imaginary friend. Despite lukewarm reviews from critics," the film took more than the expected \$18m (£9.5m).  
"The element of a real actor in a psychological thriller certainly elevated it", said Bruce Snyder, president of domestic distribution at 20th Century Fox. Clint Eastwood's *Million Dollar Baby* led the Oscar hopefuls with \$11.8m (£6.3m), coming in at number three during its first weekend of wide release. The *Aviator*, a film biography of Howard Hughes that leads the Oscar field with 11 nominations, was at number six for the weekend with \$7.5m (£4m). Oscar best-picture nominee *Sideways* entered the top ten for the first time in its 15th week of release. It came in seventh \$6.3 (£3.35m). Last week's top film, *Ice Cube's road-trip comedy Are We There Yet?*, slipped to second place with \$17m (£9m), while *Coach Carter* fell two places to number four, taking \$8m (£4.25m) in its third week. Rounding out the top ten were *In Good Company* - starring Dennis Quaid and Scarlett Johansson - *Racing Stripes* and *Assault on Precinct 13*.

"entertainment 336.txt Films on war triumph at Sundance A  
study of the United States at war in the past 50 years has picked up one of the main awards at the 2005 Sundance Film Festival in Utah, in the US. *Why We Fight* scooped the grand jury prize for documentaries at the world's leading independent film festival. British director Sean McAllister's *The Liberace of Baghdad* - about a pianist in war-torn Iraq - won a special prize in the world documentary category. Both *Why We Fight* and *The Liberace of Baghdad* were made for the BBC. *Why We Fight* is due to be screened on BBC Four in March. The Sundance festival was founded by actor Robert Redford in 1981. This year's festival - which ended on Sunday after a 11-day run - has been dominated by the themes of war and politics. In the new world cinema drama category, the Angolan film *The Hero* triumphed to win the grand jury prize. The film - an Angolan/French/Portuguese production - tells the story of a veteran of the country's civil war who returns home to face a new battle of survival. Twelve films competing in the new world cinema documentary category focused on countries and people under siege. Finnish film *The Three Rooms of Melancholia* looks at the war in Chechnya and *Shake Hands With The Devil: The Journey of Romeo Dallaire* tells the story of a UN mission to Rwanda during the 1994 genocide. But it was Dutch documentary *Shape of the Moon* - a study of an extended family in Indonesia - which took the top prize. Meanwhile, French-Israeli production *Wall*, which looks at Israel's controversial security wall separating it from the Palestinian territories, picked up a world cinema special jury prize for documentaries. In the main drama category, *Forty Shades of Blue* was named winner of the grand jury prize. The film tells the tale of a forbidden tug-of-love between a father, his Russian immigrant girlfriend and his son. During its 24-year history, the Sundance Film Festival has showcased successes such as *Reservoir Dogs*, *The Blair Witch Project* and *The Full Monty*. Last year's festival provided a platform for hits such as *Open Water*, *Napoleon Dynamite*, *Garden State* and *Super-Size Me*. The festival is held in the mountain resort of Park City, east of Salt Lake City, which sees its population rise from 7,500 to 45,000 during the festival.

entertainment 337.txt Career honour for actor DiCaprio Actor Leonardo DiCaprio's exceptional career"" has been honoured at the Santa Barbara International Film Festival. The star was presented with the award by Martin Scorsese"," who directed him in Oscar-nominated movie The Aviator. ""It's a lifetime achievement award", which is completely and utterly surreal, given I'm only 30 years old," DiCaprio said. But what has it been? Almost 17 years now. I've done quite a few films."" A retrospective of his movies was shown. ""What's really exciting", for me, is that this is what I really love doing," he added. It's what I want to do for the rest of my life." DiCaprio began his movie career in horror film Critters 3", before moving onto roles in The Basketball Diaries, Romeo and Juliet, Titanic and Gangs of New York. The achievement award was created to commemorate the California festival's 20th anniversary and coincided with DiCaprio's portrayal of millionaire Howard Hughes in The Aviator. Veteran actress Jane Russell, who starred in Hughes' 1943 film The Outlaw," said was impressed by DiCaprio's quest for authenticity when he previously discussed the role with her. ""I was very happy that (DiCaprio) came and cared to come up and find out what (Hughes) was really like"," she said. The Aviator has taken pole position in this year's Oscars race with 11 nominations, including nominations for best film, best actor for DiCaprio and best director for Scorsese.

entertainment 338.txt Howl helps boost Japan's cinemas Japan's box office received a 3.8% boost last year, with ticket sales worth 211bn yen (£1.08bn). The surge was led by animated movie Howl's Moving Castle, which took 20bn yen (£102m) to become the biggest film in Japan in 2004. It is expected to match the 30.7bn yen (£157m) record of Hayao Miyazaki's previous film Spirited Away. Japan Motion Picture Producers figures showed that 170 million cinema admissions were made in Japan in 2004. The Last Samurai, starring Tom Cruise, was the biggest foreign movie hit in Japan last year, taking 13.8bn yen (£7 0.7m). It was followed by Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban, Finding Nemo and The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King. The second highest-grossing Japanese film was romantic drama Crying Out Love in the Centre of the World, followed by Be With You and Pocket Monsters Advanced Generation. Japanese films accounted for 37.5% of Japan's box office total last year, with foreign films taking the remaining 62.5%. This represented a 4.5% gain for the proportion of Japanese films in 2004 compared to 2003. The number of Japanese films released rose to 310 in 2004 from 287 the previous year. Sales of movies on DVD and video amounted to 497bn yen (£2.54bn) for the year.

entertainment 339.txt Keanu Reeves given Hollywood star Actor Keanu Reeves, best known for his role in the Matrix movies, has been awarded a star on the prestigious Hollywood Walk of Fame. The 40-year-old attended the unveiling of the star with his mother, Patricia, and thanked her for inspiring him to become an actor. When I was 15 years old I asked my mom if it was OK to be an actor"," Reeves said. She said: 'Whatever you want'." His star is the 2",277th to be embedded in the pavement on Hollywood Boulevard. The actor, who was born in the Lebanese capital Beirut," also spoke of how he dropped out of school to pursue an acting career. ""Hollywood was calling"," he said, So I got in my car"," a 1969 British racing green Volvo with holes in the floor and bricks holding up the seats. I was a young man full of hopes and dreams." Reeves first found fame in the teen comedy Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure", and went on to combine such blockbusters as Speed, The Devil's Advocate and the Matrix series, with smaller films including My Own Private Idaho. More recently he was seen in Something's Gotta Give alongside Jack Nicholson and Diane Keaton. His next film, the supernatural thriller Constantine, is released in the US later this month and opens in the UK in March.

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"/" entertainment 340.txt De Niro completes box office coup  
Robert De Niro has completed a transatlantic box office double by topping the UK and US film charts with two different films at the same time. Comedy sequel "Meet the Fockers", in which he stars with Ben Stiller, Dustin Hoffman and Barbra Streisand, shot to the top of the UK chart at the weekend. It took £7.2m in three days - eight times more than the number two, "Closer". "Assault on Precinct 13" was in third. At the same time, US audiences were won over by his new thriller "Hide and Seek". In "Meet the Fockers", he picks up the role of an uptight father and ex-CIA agent from 2000 hit comedy, "Meet the Parents". It is a big leap to his role in "Hide and Seek", a supernatural horror in which he plays a widower whose daughter's imaginary friend turns nasty. In the UK box office chart, "Meet the Fockers" pushed "Closer" off the top spot while police action movie "Assault On Precinct 13", starring rapper Ja Rule, made £750,000 in its first weekend. London Underground thriller "Creep" was another new entry at six while quirky comedy "Sideways", which got five Oscar nominations last week, entered in eighth place. The Oscar nominations do not seem to have had an impact on fans' choices at cinema s. Leading contenders "The Aviator", "Million Dollar Baby" and "Ray" all suffered substantial drops in takings compared with the previous weekend.

"/" entertainment 341.txt Day-Lewis set for Berlin honour Actor Daniel Day-Lewis is to be presented with an award for his career in film at the Berlin Film Festival. The 47-year-old", whose credits include his Oscar-winning performance in "My Left Foot", will be presented with the Berlinale Camera award on 15 February. The honour, awarded since 1986," honours figures in cinema that the festival feels ""particularly indebted to"". "Man to Man", a historical epic starring Kristin Scott Thomas, opens the German festival on 10 February. A candid documentary about the life and career of singer George Michael, "A Different Story" will also be screened at the 10-day event. Day-Lewis has competed four times at the Berlin Film Festival, with films "In The Name Of The Father" (1994), "The Crucible" (1997)," "The Boxer" (1998) and Martin Scorsese's "Gangs Of New York" (2003). The festival praises him for his ""sensational start"" with roles in "My Beautiful Launderette" and costume classic "A Room With A View",," and a ""great number of celebrated roles"" in subsequent productions. Japan's oldest film studio will also be honoured along with Day-Lewis. Shochiku film studio s", which was founded 110 years ago, will become the first cinematic institution to receive the Berlinale Camera award. Famous Japanese directors including Akira Kurosawa have had films produced at the studio.

"/" entertainment 342.txt US composer recreates Bach score A US musicologist has recreated a lost musical score by German composer Johann Sebastian Bach. The 1728 composition", called "Wedding Cantata BWV 216", was found among the papers of Japanese pianist Chieko Hara, who died in Japan in 2001 aged 86. The work, written for the wedding of a daughter of a German customs official," was missing for 80 years. Joshua Rifkin - a composer and leading interpreter of Bach - has recreated the missing instrumental parts. He said he originally wanted to let the lost cantata lie in rest. ""Maybe a fragment should stay a fragment", said Rifkin. Then I thought of palaeontologists," from one bone they figure the entire dinosaur. This is my dinosaur." The eight rediscovered pages consist of vocal pieces in German for soprano and alto", with the seven movements lasting for a total of between 20 and 25 minutes. The instrumental parts were entirely lost except for two recycled movements," a duet and an aria which

had been used elsewhere in Bach's work. Rifkin likened the challenge to a ""musical Rubik's cube""." "I could not reconstruct what Bach wrote but I could give the people of today an idea of what his music was like", he said. It sounds like Bach's music," but the listener should not know which part is Bach's and which part is mine.""

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"entertainment 343.txt Applegate's Charity show closes US  
musical Sweet Charity has cancelled its run on Broadway after poor ticket sales for its early shows. Star Christina Applegate had to pull out of pre-Broadway performances earlier this month with a broken foot. Producer Barry Weissler said he was ""deeply proud"" of the show", but said the decision to close it was ""painful but fiscally responsible""". Applegate", who starred in TV comedy Married With Children, had been hoping to make her Broadway debut in the show. The 33-year-old injured herself while performing in Chicago, and had been hoping to recover in time for its official New York opening on 21 April. She had received mixed reviews for performances in Minneapolis and Chicago. Previews of the \$7.5m (£4m) show were due to begin on 4 April. Sweet Charity tells the story of Charity Hope Valentine, a dancer who always falls in love with the wrong man. It was first performed on Broadway in 1966 with Gwen Verdon in the title role, while Shirley MacLaine starred in the 1969 film version.

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"entertainment 344.txt Ray Charles studio becomes museum  
A museum dedicated to the career of the late legendary singer Ray Charles is to open in his former recording studio in Los Angeles. His longtime publicist Jerry Digney said the museum would house ""archive materials from recordings", to awards, to ephemera," to wardrobe""". A tour bus used by Charles and his entourage over the years will also be on permanent display. It is hoped the museum will be ready for visitors in late 2007. Mr Digney said the recording studio and offices had been used by Charles for many years", and was where he recorded much of his last album, Genius Loves Company. It is hoped the museum will also house an education centre. The building had been declared a historic landmark by the city of Los Angeles just before Charles' death in June 2004 at the age of 73. Following his death, Charles won eight Grammy Awards, including album of the year for Genius Loves Company, a collection of duets.

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"entertainment 345.txt Britney attacks 'false tabloids' P  
op star Britney Spears has attacked ""false"" and ""desperate"" US tabloid magazines", questioning their honesty after they reported she was pregnant. In a letter on her website, the singer named celebrity tabloids Us Weekly," In Touch and Star as the worst offenders. ""Until you face what is going on in your life", I guess you'll remain a false tabloid," the 23-year-old wrote. Stories about the state of her marriage to Kevin Federline and rumours about a pregnancy have recently appeared. But the chart-topping singer's letter did not shed any further light on those stories. In February, Spears clashed with Us Weekly for publishing pictures of her honeymoon in Fiji without permission. The couple, who married in Los Angeles last September, claimed staff took photographs of them which were later sold. They said they allowed the pictures to be taken after they were assured they would only be used for a private scrapbook, which they later received as a souvenir. Us magazine was unrepentant about their decision to publish, saying: Britney should start her own magazine if she'd like to dictate her own coverage." "Coming from a celebrity who sold pictures of both her wed

ding and her stepdaughter", it's unlikely the issue here is privacy," they added. Spears claimed that other magazines were approached with the pictures but chose to contact her instead.

entertainment 346.txt Abba queen enters music rich list T  
he woman behind the Abba musical *Mamma Mia!* has joined a list of British-based music millionaires. Producer Judy Craymer is the highest new entry in the Sunday Times' music rich list, with a £67m fortune. Ms Craymer remortgaged her home to finance her idea of a musical based around Abba's hits, which has since become a global triumph. Teenage soul singer Joss Stone is a new entry on a list of Britain's young music millionaires with £5m. Ms Craymer, who developed *Mamma Mia!* with playwright Catherine Johnson and members of Abba, is at number 31 on the music rich list. But taking the top spot for a second year is former record label boss Clive Calder, whose wealth has risen to £1.3bn. Mr Calder is the man behind acts including Britney Spears. He made his fortune by selling his independent label Zomba to record giant BMG. Former Beatle Sir Paul McCartney is second on the list with £800m - up £40m on last year. Andrew Lloyd-Webber's wealth rose an estimated £300m on last year, to £700m, while theatre impresario Sir Cameron Mackintosh's fortune rose from £340m to £400m. His recent hits have included the West End show *Mary Poppins*. But Pop Idol mogul Simon Fuller has seen his wealth plummet from £220m last year to £75m after selling his entertainment company 19 for less than expected, according to the Sunday Times. Joss Stone, the 17-year-old soul singer from Devon, was a new entry in the young music millionaires list. The list also features Charlotte Church, Coldplay, Daniel Bedingfield, Will Young and David and Victoria Beckham. At number one is Dhani Harrison, son of the late Beatle George Harrison, who has inherited £140m. The Beckhams - who qualify thanks to Victoria's former singing career - are in second place with £75 million between them - up £10m on last year.

entertainment 347.txt Casino Royale is next Bond movie Ca  
sino Royale, author Ian Fleming's first James Bond book, is to be the next Bond film, with Goldeneye director Martin Campbell behind the camera. It will be the 21st James Bond film to hit the big screen, and speculation has been rife over who will play the lead. *Casino Royale* was turned into a spoof spy movie by John Huston in 1967, with David Niven in the lead role. Pierce Brosnan led the past four Bond films but said producers axed him after offering him the chance to return. Among the favourites to take over the coveted role are Scottish actor Dougray Scott, Oscar nominee Clive Owen and Australian star Hugh Jackman. Producers say no decision has yet been made on who will become the seventh actor, including Niven, to play Bond on film. Kill Bill director Quentin Tarantino had talked of wanting to take on the *Casino Royale* project, and said he had spoken to Brosnan about it. Shooting on *Casino Royale* is expected to begin once Campbell has finished work on *The Legend of Zorro*, a sequel to *The Mask of Zorro*, starring Catherine Zeta Jones and Antonio Banderas. Producers Barbara Broccoli and Michael G Wilson expect the film to be released in 2006. The script will once again be developed by Neal Purvis and Robert Wade who have both worked on two previous Bond movies. Fleming's book saw the introduction of Bond pitted against a Russian spy in a game of baccarat. Simultaneously, a woman arrives on the scene to take his eye off the game. The novel is one of Fleming's most violent and sadistic stories, with 007 suffering a savage beating from his nemesis Le Chiffre. In addition to the 1967 film, it was also adapted for television in 1954 with actor Barry Nelson as an Americanised Jimmy Bond. MGM Vice Chairman Chris McCorkindale said: "'Martin (Campbell) is an incredibly exciting film-maker. *Goldeneye* was a wonderful movie and helped reinvigorate the Bond franchise. We're thrilled to have him back to direct the newest Bond.'" New Zealand-born Campbell moved to the UK in 1966 and directed TV series such as *The Professionals*, *Minder* and

Bergerac. His film credits include Edge of Darkness, Vertical Limit and Beyond Borders, which starred Angelina Jolie and Clive Owen.

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"entertainment 348.txt Berlin celebrates European cinema  
Organisers say this year's Berlin Film Festival", which opens on Thursday with period epic Man to Man, will celebrate a revitalised European cinema. Of the 21 films in competition for the Golden and Silver Bear awards," more than half are from Europe with France particularly well represented. Festival director Dieter Kosslick says this strong showing signals ""a new consciousness for European films"". ""They're on an incredible winning streak", he told the Reuters agency. This isn't to say there aren't any good American films," he continued. It's just that there are more good European films."" However", Mr Kosslick refused to accept that widespread opposition to the Iraq war had turned audiences against Hollywood imports. ""There is no anti-American mood", he said. Some 350 films will be screened at this year's festival, with a further 300 shown at the European Film Market that runs alongside it. More than a dozen celebrities are scheduled to attend, among them Will Smith, Kevin Spacey and Keanu Reeves. But Mr Kosslick says more would be coming had the Academy Awards not been brought forward to 27 February. I'm not worried that we won't be able to fill the red carpet with stars", he said, though he admitted the festival may be moved to January next year to avoid a similar clash. The 10-day Berlinale runs until 20 February.

entertainment 349.txt India to deport Bollywood actress I  
ndia has ordered the deportation of Iranian-born model and actress Negar Khan to Norway after saying she was working illegally on her visa. Khan has had raunchy roles in music videos and Bollywood films over the past two years. The distressed actress told media she was being driven straight to the airport after a routine appointment at the Bombay immigration office. Immigration officials said she had been warned about her visa last year. Khan told an Indian news channel on her mobile phone: They are not even letting me go home to get my bags. I have no clothes or money on me. ""They did not give me any notice. I don't know why they are taking me away like this. There is nothing wrong with my visa. It says I work here... They are not allowing me to even call a lawyer." Bipin Bihari", deputy police chief in Bombay, said Khan was being sent back to Norway, from which she holds a passport," on the first available flight. ""She was on a visitor's visa but she has engaged in several commercial ventures", he said. We issued notices last year, in view of which she had gone back to Norway," but she has returned again this year to work." One of Khan's biggest successes was the steamy Hindi song Chadti Jawani (Rising Youth). Khan was involved in controversy when topless photos alleged to be of her appeared in a Norwegian magazine.  
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"entertainment 350.txt Ray DVD beats box office takings O  
scar-nominated film biopic Ray has surpassed its US box office takings with a combined tally of \$80m (£43m) from DVD and video sales and rentals. Ray's success on DVD outstripped its \$74m (£40m) US box office total", earning more than \$40m (£22m) on the first day of the DVD's release alone. Ray has been nominated in six Oscar categories including best film and best actor for Jamie Foxx. The film recounts the life of blues singer Ray Charles, who died in 2004. In its first week on home entertainment release the film was the number one selling DVD, with the limited edition version coming in at number 11. Sony horror film The Grudge, starring Michelle Gellar, was the US' second best-selling DVD, with Jennifer Lopez and Richard Gere's romantic comedy Shall We Dance? at number three.

Foxx's critically acclaimed performance as Ray has already earned him a Screen Actors Guild Award for best actor, as well as a prestigious Golden Globe. Ray director Taylor Hackford, responsible for the classic 1982 film An Officer and a Gentleman, has also received an Oscar nomination in the best director category. The film's three other Oscar nominations are for costume, film editing and sound mixing.

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"entertainment 351.txt Women in film 'are earning less' W omen in the UK film industry earn less than their male counterparts despite being better qualified", according to a study released on Wednesday. Only 16% of women earn more than £50,000, compared with 30% of men. Women make up a third of the workforce. The research was carried out jointly by the UK Film Council and industry training body Skillset. It also found that women in the industry were less likely than men to be married or have dependant children. The study, which claims to be the most in-depth so far conducted, found 60% of women in the film industry hold degrees, compared with 39% of men. Whilst 17% of men in the industry had no qualifications, this was true for only five per cent of women. In the lower salary bracket, 35% of women earn less than £20,000 a year, compared to only 18% of men. The research found very few women worked in the camera, sound, electrical and construction departments," but they made up a majority of those working in make-up and hairdressing. UK Film Council chief executive John Woodward said: ""Whilst the UK has benefited hugely from its highly-qualified film production workforce there are still many barriers facing people who want to get in and stay in the industry." "Developing the film production workforce must be underpinned with a commitment to diversity as well as training." "The workforce is largely focused around London", with 78% in the industry based in the capital and the south east of England. The industry depends heavily on word of mouth, with 81% being recruited in that way. In total, only five percent of the workforce is made up of ethnic minorities, although in London the figure rises to 24%. The necessity of completing unpaid work experience to get into the workforce has also shot up, from 5% before the 1980s, to 45% after 2000.

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"entertainment 352.txt Vera Drake's Bafta triumph hope At the Bafta film awards on Saturday night", there is the prospect that a home-grown movie could walk off with a clutch of trophies. Vera Drake, Mike Leigh's tale about a 1950s backstreet abortionist, is nominated in 11 categories. These include best film, best director and best actress shortlist for Imelda Staunton who plays the eponymous character. The film has spent months being lauded with prizes, from the Venice Film Festival to five awards from the London Critics' Circle on Wednesday night. The Baftas has a tradition of honouring British cinema," and this year Vera Drake is the obvious candidate to be heaped with praise. Empire magazine's reviews editor Dan Jolin said the film had ""a very good chance"" of doing well on Saturday", predicting that it would collect five or six awards. ""I don't think it's going to do a Lord of the Rings-style sweep", but Imelda Staunton is a shoo-in for best actress," he said. A best director prize for Mike Leigh and best British film are also likely and it could steal some awards from heavily-nominated competitors The Aviator and Finding Neverland." "Mr Jolin tipped another contender - most likely The Aviator - to walk away with the Bafta for best film", and added that Finding Neverland had been lavished with nominations but not trophies. Strong Oscar contenders Million Dollar Baby and Sideways did not figure in the Bafta nominations," giving Vera Drake greater potential to walk away with the big prizes. ""There is a sense that this

film is ours and we should slap our own guys on the back. Out of all the films in the running for the Baftas", "Vera Drake is the true blue British one." "If Mike Leigh is going to win awards for anything", "it should be Vera Drake at this year's Baftas""", said Mr Jolin," adding that the film was probably his most technically accomplished and lavish work yet. Mr Jolin also tipped Phil Davis for a best supporting actor prize for his role in Vera Drake but felt that Heather Craney could be outdone by Kate Winslet or Natalie Portman in the supporting actress category. "If there is anywhere where this film is going to win", it will be at the Baftas," he said. The Guardian's film critic Peter Bradshaw felt that there might well be"" a sweep of awards for Vera Drake on Saturday night. "I hope that Bafta voters will respond to the extremely high standard of acting from the whole cast of the film. If Bafta can't do so", "what hope is there?" he said. Mr Bradshaw felt that Mike Leigh's ""masterpiece"" was entitled to the best film award - leaving Dead Man's Shoes", Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban," My Summer of Love and Shaun of the Dead to slug it out for the best British film trophy. "I will be cheering if Vera Drake wins a whole host of awards", "he added.

entertainment 353.txt Roundabout continues nostalgia trip

The new big-screen version of The Magic Roundabout, released in the UK on Friday, is the latest attempt to turn children's television into box-office gold. Recent years have seen a less-than-successful adaptation of the 1960s puppet show Thunderbirds and a moderately successful version of E Nesbit's Five Children and It, previously filmed by the BBC in 1991. He-Man and Transformers, which were cartoon favourites in the 1980s, will soon receive their own costly makeovers. With screen versions of The A-Team, The Dukes of Hazzard and even Blake's Seven on the cards, nostalgia is clearly big business. But some critics complain that these expensive takes on iconic series of yesteryear do not match up to our fond memories of the originals. The new version of The Magic Roundabout, which will be released as Sprung! in the US, replaces the stop-motion models of the 1960s TV show with polished, computer-generated animation. In a similar fashion, the 2004 Thunderbirds used human actors and special effects in place of the original's puppets and models. The films are squarely pitched at younger audiences. Pop stars Robbie Williams and Kylie Minogue provide voices in The Magic Roundabout, while the now-defunct boy band Busted performed the Thunderbirds theme song. But while some reviewers have been won over, there has nonetheless been a significant backlash. This CG-animated adventure airbrushes the sly charm and trippy otherworldliness which made the 60s stop-motion Roundabout a cult hit", writes Stella Papamichael on the BBC Movies site. And the recent puppet comedy Team America: World Police was in part provoked by its directors' outrage that Gerry Anderson's Thunderbirds was remade without its signature mannequins. Dan Jolin, reviews editor of Empire magazine, says classic children's TV shows have a built-in audience that make them ideal for reinvention. I can understand why people are taking these intellectual properties and repackaging them for the kids of today. "But I think it's backfiring. What's next - The Clangers on some distant planet", with some giant CGI Soup Dragons chasing after them?" Despite Thunderbirds' disappointing global box-office performance - the film cost \$42m (£22m) but only recouped \$21m (£11m) - the nostalgia craze shows no signs of abating. It can therefore be only a matter of time before some other TV favourites receive the Hollywood treatment. After the success of Garfield: The Movie", Britain's shabby tabby surely deserves his own film vehicle. With only 13 episodes made of the 1974 series, there is plenty of room to explore the lives of the pink cat, Professor Yaffle and the Mice of the Marvellous Mechanical Mouse Organ. Furry recyclers have already had one big-screen outing - 1977's Wombling Free. But with environmental issues still occupying our thoughts it is hi

gh time they made a comeback. Advances in special effects technology could do wonders for the BBC's supernatural comedy . And the success of Pirates of the Caribbean must surely herald a comeback for TV's most popular cartoon buccaneer, . It might also remind viewers the lewd character names often associated with the show never actually existed. The Magic Roundabout is out in the UK on 11 February. How about bringing Catweazle to the big screen? He could give Gandalf a run for his money! Thundercats!! I loved it. Should be fun to see on the big screen, if some effort is put in! it will bring my youth back! Get your hands off the Clangers! Is nothing sacred? Make a movie version of the Banana splits! What about Keanu Reeves and Richard Gere in a remake of The Wooden Tops? Or perhaps Robbie Williams could get his much mooted acting career off the ground by taking on the role of Andy Pandy. You forgot to mention the greatest of them all, Danger Mouse! But then again, it couldn't be better than the original series, could it? It's always nice to see these old toons re-released," but after the abysmal Thunderbirds movie (and the song!) I think I've been completely put off. Just leave these classics alone as good memories. I think remakes are a good idea. As the world moves on people tend to look more and more into the past to things that make them feel safe. I believe this is the whole reason ""retro"" has become so popular. As long as a remake does justice to the original then all it can do is create a wider audience and possibly entice a new generation of persons to enjoy and revive and old series. Personally i'd like to see cartoons such as Transformers", Thundercats and M.A.S.K. get full Hollywood remakes. Leave them alone, why ruin something that we all have very fond memories of in the first place? The thunderbirds film was appalling, not a patch on the puppet series I grew up with and the Magic Roundabout will never be the same without the voice of Eric Thompson. Love to see Transformers with real actors and CGI. And make it at least a 15 rating. Part of the reason for the success of such classics as the Magic Roundabout was that the characters were not the sweet and cuddly creatures that you would expect. They were moody, sarcastic, and rather human. Just looking at the pictures of the animations for the new film show that these characteristics have not been preserved. Dougal never smiled like that! Films of this sort have an unfortunate habit of Disneyfying everthing, and they just lose the real magic that made the show special in the first place. I have fond memories of Bod (not least of which because I look like him) and would like to see someone attempt to make it into a film. It's got all the right material for an american blockbuster - no plot and no story. Bod would likely be played by Tom Cruise and would undoubtedly have a girlfriend or two. It's all very well and good remaking these classic TV shows and films with all the latest technology for a 'new' audience, but for me a lot of the original charm is lost when they do this, and seems more like a money making exercise to cash in on the original success of the programme than reinventing or improving it. It maybe that to an audience who have never seen the originals they can watch them without prejudice, but to people who have grown up with all these shows such as Thunderbirds and Magic Roundabout which are part of our childhood, they are never going to live up to expectation. It does pose the question though that with all the long line of remakes being made, are film-makers running out of original ideas? All I can say is bring back Danger Mouse, probably the greatest kids' show ever. I recently re-watched some episodes and realised that there was a level of humour shown in Danger Mouse that was completely lost on me when I was a child. There WAS a new Captain Pugwash cartoon made a couple of years back. Again, like so many of these nostalgia programmes, the animation - this time computer created flat-cell like animation - failed to match the original's cut out paper technique for inventiveness, and was woefully inadequate. We live in a sampling world - the music industry has been plundering past decades for inspiration

n, clipping sounds from 20 years ago is much cheaper and easier than doing something new. Seems that the film and TV is doing the same now - it's just cheaper to take ideas from the past and rework them, rather than being daring and trying something new. It got to be Mr.Benn. The story line about a man who changes in a fancy dress shop, steps into a door way and appears in another time and place would be amazing! If they got a decent producer and writer the story line could be great. And who to play the lead role? Well if it was a comedy then it would have to be someone like Steve Martin. If its going to be an adventure then Johnny Depp playing a role similar to the Pirates Of The Caribbean Character. Muffin the Mule perhaps ? After all, grannies and grandpas go to the cinema as well you know! Why can't the British film industry try making Gerry Anderson's UFO or Captain Scarlet, or Saphire and Steel, or The Tomorrow People. In today's media, it seems the past is the future. TV shows such as Battlestar Galactica have new remakes, DJ's are sampling or re-working 70's and 80's music. Even computer games from 10-15 years ago are getting modern re-workings. Personally, I think it shows that no one has any originality any more! Why not just leave our misty-eyed nostalgia alone. Mary, Mungo and Midge. But of course for most of the episodes the lift would be out of order and they would have to use the stairs. Plus would Mary be more of a Vicky Pollard character as she lives in a high rise council block? Yeah but no but I wasn't even there! I'd like to see Mr. Benn, with Brad Pitt in the title role. Sean Connery could play the mysterious costume shop owner. It demonstrates a profound lack of imagination in today's film-makers that they continually try to remake and remodel the past in an effort to cash in on nostalgia. There are plany of modern children's book that would make excellent films or TV programmes, why not use them instead of rehashing the past? Mr. Benn with Rowan Atkinson as the lead. Would have loved to see Dungeons & Dragons made, but unfortunately the film that it was made into didn't come up to scratch. The only one that isn't to be remade as yet is Thundercats, which I'd like to see. I'm an expat living in Norway, and I recently went through a period of buying the DVDs of many of my favourite children's programs for my 2 daughters. My dearest wish, however, is to see a feature length version of Noggin the Nog appear on The Big Screen!! Very Scandinavian... Rainbow! I believe that Childrens classics should be left well alone, and I will not be surprised if the Magic Roundabout does not do well at the Box Office, especially since it will be going up against The Spongebob Squarepants movie, popular among children because it's original, witty, and modern. The Magic Roundabout will never appeal to the children of today as it did all those many years ago. How about classics like Chorlton and the Wheelies, Rentaghost, Terrahawks, Bod.....oh the list could go on and on!!! If a Transformers movie is indeed on the cards then I'll be the first one on Amazon buying a copy, eagerly waiting at the front door with a frothy mouth and a nervous twitch. Repackage my childhood and sell it to me at an extortionate price! I don't care! Till then I'll have to make do with the Citreon C4 advert. I'd luv to see Willow the Wisp on the big screen but sadly without the late Kenneth Williams doing the voices it wouldn't be the same. And who remembers Trap Door voiced by the late Willie Rushden, superb children's programme. Could Morph hold his own in a big screen movie??? Or even Jamie and the Magic Torch....hmmmmm, I could go on and on. Danger Mouse? At 34 I'm showing my age. :-) Noggin the Nog was one of the best children's programs. The problem with bringing it to the big screen is that no-one could approach Oliver Postgate's wonderful voices. So in general leave well alone. The originals are good because they are of their time and the methods used are an integral part of the story. Just imagine what could be achieved by using CGI in a remake of Fingerbobs... the already disturbing hand antics of the bearded hippy, Yoffi could take on a whole new level with a more life-like Fingermouse Bo

b the Builder, Postman Pat and Fireman Sam together in an epic adventure of fire, post and bricks. In the ultimate struggle to save the women they love from the evil clowns, Krusty and Gobo. Will they triumph or will they fail miserably? Find out this Fall. One puppet show that I personally would love to see made into a live action movie is Joe 90. It would be worth the price of admission alone to see the large screen version of Joe's car. Of course, Gerry Anderson's Supermarionation is a rich seam of material worthy of big-screen, big-budget action. It was only that Thunderbirds The Movie was targetted as a children's movie that really let it down. After all, the children that remember those shows with such affection are now the parents of children themselves. It's only because the people who were children when these programmes were first shown have grown up and are plundering their childhoods, isn't it? I'd hate to see Bagpuss with perfect animation - I love that 'done in a shed' clunkiness and you couldn't recreate the magic. Perhaps if the remakes were done in a 'Look Around You' mock-authentic style I might be interested ... Chorton And The Wheelies or Jamie And His Magic Torch; that would be mega! This re-gurgitation of old films and TV shows makes me angry - it is corporate laziness resting on the safety of other people's ideas, because it guarantees to bring in the \$\$. The same can be said of modern day pop bands who release other peoples material, Will Young etc. The sad fact is nostalgia sells big bucks in the short-term. The fact that they will be forgotten in 6 months time is irrelevant (e.g. Starsky & Hutch) Hence, the market is saturated with this mindless drivel, but it can only be stopped if people stop buying it! I pray they never do a remake of Chorlton And The Wheelies. I'm only 27 and don't remember the series from when it was on TV, but have the set on DVD and it's a classic. The fact it's so great comes from the fact that there were very few special effects involved and compared to today's stuff it looks amateurish. Thats the appeal though, it's so innocent (like Chorlton himself) and it would be a real shame if they did remake it.

"/" entertainment 354.txt Stars shine on Bafta red carpet Hollywood stars brought a touch of glamour to London on Saturday for the biggest night in the British film calendar. Cate Blanchett", Leonardo DiCaprio and Richard Gere were just some of the actors who attended the 2005 Bafta film awards. They emerged from limos at Leicester Square to an uncertain British climate that threatened rain one moment and promised late winter sunshine the next. But the gods were certainly shining on the thousands of film fans who lined the red carpet to meet their idols. Screaming built up into a crescendo as more and more big name stars appeared. The biggest cheer of the night was reserved for The Aviator star Leonardo DiCaprio," who paused in the chilly February air to sign autographs for the throngs. He said the ear-piercing welcome was ""unlike anything I've ever encountered. It's very intense and very loud." Best actress winner Imelda Staunton", who wore a green chiffon dress that sparkled with sequins and beads," told the BBC News website that Vera Drake was the highlight of her career. Her role as a backstreet abortionist in the gritty low-budget film has already led to a clutch of awards and an Oscar nomination. She said: ""Never in a million years did I think this was going to happen. ""Being here and just being nominated is great"," but I hope it means more people will go and see the film as well." Rooting for Staunton in the best actress category was Cate Blanchett", herself nominated for her supporting role as Hollywood icon Katherine Hepburn in The Aviator. Shivering in a floor-length shimmering Armani dress," the Australian-born actress stopped to sign autographs and joked: ""It's tight but I love it."" Glamour was also brought to the evening by actress Sienna Miller", supermodel Claudia Schiffer - who was supporting her director husband Matthew Vaughn - Troy actress Diane Kruger and star of the TV programme The OC, Michael Ba

rton. Wearing a caramel-coloured floaty frock by the designer Alexander McQueen," Miller told reporters the red carpet experience was ""intense", "nervous-wracking and cold"". The younger stars of British film were also represented in the shape of Emma Watson", who plays Hermione in the Harry Potter films. The 14-year-old said she was hoping to meet DiCaprio and Keanu Reeves but joked that ""they are probably a little too old for me"". Actor Christian Slater", who is currently starring in One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest in London's West End," was greeted by cries of ""Christian", "Christian"" by the ever vocal crowd. Keanu Reeves", who presented the best actress award," said being on the red carpet was an ""exciting"" part of his job. ""It is always surreal and when it is nice", it is nice," he said. Martin Scorsese, whose movie The Aviator went on to win best film, said being honoured in the UK meant a lot to him. He said: I am a great admirer of British cinema since the 1930s and 40s", up until now. ""They give me a new energy when I see the best coming out of England and every two or three years is a whole new cycle of tough and young film-makers", and even the older ones are making good films. ""To recognise me in this way is a great honour." British actor Clive Owen", who has won a Golden Globe and a Bafta for his supporting role in Closer," said it ""meant a lot"" to be at the ceremony. He said: ""Just to be here really", at the Baftas. The bottom line is it is a celebration of British films."

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"entertainment 355.txt Bafta to hand out movie honours Mo  
vie stars from across the globe are attending this year's Bafta film award ceremony. British stars Imelda Staunton and Clive Owen are hoping for awards at the Odeon in London's Leicester Square. Hollywood stars Leonardo DiCaprio", Pierce Brosnan, Christian Slater and Richard Gere are also in the audience for the biggest night in UK film. Hollywood blockbuster The Aviator, starring DiCaprio, leads the field with 14 nominations, including best movie. It is up against Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind, Finding Neverland, The Motorcycle Diaries and British film Vera Drake," which has 11 nominations. Staunton is one of the favourites to land the best actress award for her gritty role as a backstreet abortionist in the small-budget film. She arrived at the ceremony wearing a green silk and chiffon low cut evening dress decorated with beads. ""It's lovely to be here at home", to be on British soil. It's very nice indeed, she told reporters. Asked whether she was nervous about her best actress nomination she said: It's out of my hands," there's nothing I can do. I'm here with a lot of mates and we're going to have a very nice evening." Other nominees in the best actress category include Charlize Theron for Monster", Ziyi Zhang for House of Flying Daggers and UK star Kate Winslet, who has two nods for her roles in Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind and Finding Neverland. DiCaprio faces competition from Bernal, Jamie Foxx," Jim Carrey and Johnny Depp in the best actor category. The crowd screamed when he arrived on the red carpet." "It's unlike anything I've ever encountered. It's very intense and very loud", he told the BBC. I t's the first time I've come to the Baftas because it's the first time I've been nominated...I've appreciated British cinema for a long time and to be recognised like this is a special honour." Gere", who is presenting the best film award," said: ""It's a big party", I had no idea it was going to be this big. It's crazy," I think it's bigger than the Academy Awards." British actor Owen is hoping to repeat his Golden Globe success with a best supporting actor award for his role in Closer. He raised one of the biggest cheers of the night when he walked down the red carpet. ""I was always a huge fan of Closer as a play", so when I got the call to appear in the film, it was a huge thrill for me," he said. The whole experience has been a treat and I'm very fortunate to have been given

the role." His co-star Natalie Portman is up against Blanchett", Heather Crane y, Julie Cristie and Meryl Streep in the best supporting actress category. Mike Leigh is up for the best director award for Vera Drake, alongside Martin Scorse se for The Aviator, Michael Mann for Collateral, Michel Gondry for Eternal Suns hine of the Spotless Mind and Marc Forster for Finding Neverland. The Orange B ritish Academy Film Awards will be shown on BBC One at 2010 GMT.

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"entertainment 356.txt Stars pay tribute to actor Davis H  
ollywood stars including Spike Lee", Burt Reynolds and Oscar nominee Alan Alda have paid tribute to actor Ossie Davis at a funeral in New York. Veteran star Ossie Davis, a well-known civil rights activist, died in Miami at the age of 87 on 4 February 2005. Friends and family, including actress Ruby Dee his wife of 56 years, gathered at the Riverside Church on Saturday. Also present at the ser vice was former US president Bill Clinton and singer Harry Belafonte," who gave the eulogy. ""He would have been a very good president of the United States", s aid Mr Clinton. Like most of you here," he gave more to me than I gave to hi m." The 87-year-old was found dead last weekend in his hotel room in Florid a", where he was making a film. Police said that he appeared to have died of na tural causes. Davis made his acting debut in 1950 in No Way Out starring Sidney Poiter. He frequently collaborated with director Spike Lee, starring in seven L ee films including Jungle Fever, Do The Right Thing and Malcolm X. Attallah Sha bazz, the daughter of activist Malcolm X," recalled the famous eulogy delivered by Davis at her father's funeral. ""Harlem has come to bid farewell to one of i ts finest hopes", she said, quoting the man she knew as Uncle Ossie. Ditto." "  
"Ossie was my hero", and he still is," said Aviator star Alan Alda, a family f riend for over forty years. Ossie was a thing of beauty." "I want so badly s omeday to have his dignity - a little of it anyway", added Burt Reynolds, Davi s's co-star in the 90s TV comedy Evening Shade. Before the midday funeral, scor es of Harlem residents formed a queue outside the church to pay their respects to Davis. It is hard to fathom that we will no longer be able to call on his wi sdom", his humour, his loyalty and his moral strength to guide us in the choice s that are yet to be made and the battles that are yet to be fought," said Bela fonte, himself an ardent civil rights activist who had been friends with Davis for over 60 years. But how fortunate we were to have him as long as we did."  
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"entertainment 357.txt Aviator and Vera take Bafta glory  
Hollywood blockbuster The Aviator and low-budget British movie Vera Drake have shared the main honours at the 2005 Bafta film awards. The Aviator was declared best film", and its star Cate Blanchett won best supporting actress. But Vera D rake scored best director for Mike Leigh while Imelda Staunton took the hotly c ontested best actress award. Jamie Foxx won best actor for Ray, while British a ctor Clive Owen took best supporting actor for Closer. The two actors have repe ated their success at the Golden Globes in January. But big British hope Kate W inslet walked away empty-handed on Saturday despite two nominations for best ac tress. Celebrating his win," the Oscar-nominated Owen told reporters: ""The who le award season is new to me because I haven't won anything before. All of that is a bit overwhelming." Blanchett", who won a Bafta in 1999 for her leading ro le in Elizabeth," said: ""Winning a Bafta means an enormous amount to me." She thanked the woman she played", Katharine Hepburn," for paving the way for women to work in film. ""Thank you very much", I'm sure you're pleased, although yo u're not able to see this," she said. The Aviator took four awards in all, als o collecting best make-up and hair and production design, while Vera Drake also

scooped best costume design. Staunton, who is up for an Oscar for her role in Vera Drake, arrived wearing a green silk and chiffon beaded evening dress. Thank you very much. I'm so thrilled and so grateful and I'm delighted that the success of Vera Drake has boosted sales of hair nets and pinnies", which is very good," she said on accepting her award. Her director Leigh, who beat Martin Scorsese to the best director award, told the audience: We always say it was a surprise and sometimes I've said it and not meant it. On this occasion", given the omission of her names," it's a real surprise and an extraordinary honour. ""It's an immense privilege to have been allowed the freedom to make as uncompromising a film as I think Vera Drake is and an epic with such a small budget." Best actor Foxx could not make the ceremony", but actress Helen Mirren read out his acceptance speech. ""I'm honoured and proud to receive this Bafta. I'd like to thank the late Ray Charles himself." He apologised for not being in London", joking: ""Unfortunately I'm stuck driving a car in LA at gunpoint and I can't get away." DiCaprio", who lost out on the best actor Bafta to Foxx," will face him again at the Academy Awards in two weeks' time. ""It's the first time I've come to the Baftas because it's the first time I've been nominated", he told reporters on the red carpet. I've appreciated British cinema for a long time and to be recognised like this is a special honour." Other winners included The Motorcycle Diaries which took best foreign film and best music", while Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind won best original screenplay and best editing. Best British film was My Summer of Love, the story of two young women and their developing relationship, while Foxx's movie Ray, a bio-pic of late singer Ray Charles, also took best sound. Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban won the Orange Film Of The Year, voted for by the public. The Orange British Academy Film Awards are being shown on BBC One from 2010 GMT.

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"entertainment 358.txt Film star Fox behind theatre bid L  
Leading actor Edward Fox is one of the men behind plans to reopen a Swansea theatre thought to be Wales' oldest. The star of film and TV hits Day of the Jackal and Edward and Mrs Simpson has joined forces with Swansea-born actor-director Terry Palmer. They will set up a charity to raise money to buy the Palace Theatre", and hope to reopen it to audiences in summer 2006. It is estimated that £500,000 is needed to buy the Grade II listed building. The Palace Theatre, which will be known as The Pavilion Repertory Theatre, was sold to an undisclosed bidder at auction 13 months ago for £340,000. Before that it had been used as a nightclub for 10 years. Oscar-winner Sir Anthony Hopkins, who was born in nearby Port Talbot, made his professional debut there," and Charlie Chaplin and Lily Langtry have also trodden its boards. Fox told the South Wales Evening Post that after visiting the theatre he was surprised by its beauty. ""A lot of money needs to be spent on it", but all the bones are there - it just needs a beautiful skin," he said. To call it a jewel is not an over-estimation. There are not many theatres left like this. ""The hope for the immediate future is that we can attract enough people to come forward to allow it to prosper," he told the newspaper. Fox first found fame in the 1960s. One of his most memorable roles was as an assassin in the Day of the Jackal in 1973, and he won a TV Bafta as the Prince of Wales in 1980 for Edward and Mrs Simpson. He was brought on board to save the theatre by Mr Palmer, a long-standing friend of 40 years. Two years ago I decided to return to Swansea and do something for the city", said Mr Palmer. He said he was excited by the idea of running the Palace as a charity where young actors could develop, and with an annual Shakespeare festival in the summer. If in five years' time the theatre can function in all areas without me", I shall be well satisfied having helped to create a vital living theatre for the city.

y," he added. Keith Poulton, a business adviser from Swansea, has already committed an undisclosed amount of money to the project. We need at least £75",000 to secure a deposit on the building and we've only got two months to do that, said Mr Poulton. A few benefactors have expressed their interest and Mr Fox is going to give it an awful lot of time," he added. Last year, roads around the theatre were cordoned off when masonry from its roof fell onto a car, but engineers said they were happy that it was safe.

entertainment 359.txt Shark Tale DVD is US best-seller 0s  
car-nominated animation Shark Tale has raked in \$80m (£42.4m) in the first week of its US DVD release becoming the year's best-selling home video so far. The tally for its DVD and video sales soared past the film's opening week US box office takings of \$56m (£29.7m). Shark Tale is now the sixth-highest earning DVD for first week sales. The all-time first-week record is held by 1995's Lion King followed by Shrek 2, Finding Nemo, the original Shrek, and Monster's Inc. Shark Tale, whose voice cast includes Will Smith, Robert De Niro, Renee Zellweger and Martin Scorsese, sold more than 6 million DVDs and videos across the United States and Canada. It becomes the highest first-week earner for February, outshining My Big Fat Greek Wedding which sold four million units in 2003. Films which are expected to earn strong home video returns are usually timed for release in the busiest retail season which falls before Christmas. The best-selling home video of last year was the Dreamworks hit Shrek 2, which took an estimated \$458m (£242.7m) in North America alone.

entertainment 360.txt Lopez misses UK charity premiere Je  
nnifer Lopez cancelled an appearance at the UK charity premiere of her new movie saying she was too ill to fly. The actress and singer dropped out at the last minute and has now cancelled all European promotion of the film Shall We Dance? and her new album. She said: I very much wanted to be in London but unfortunately I'm not well. At the advice of my doctors I'm unable to travel." Co-star Richard Gere attended the event held in aid of the tsunami appeal. Thousands braved the cold weather to see the stars in London's Leicester Square. The red carpet boasted waltzing dancers in honour of the film's ballroom dancing theme. The film's director Peter Chelsom said he was disappointed that Lopez did not attend. "It's a shame. I know it's true that she's not well because she has also cancelled her promotional tour. I've heard she has swollen glands." Gere, 55, greeted the crowd and signed autographs, accompanied by his wife Carey Lowell. Other stars who turned out on the night included Honor Blackman, Strictly Come Dancing presenter Tess Daly and actress Anita Dobson. Lopez issues a statement apologising for her absence. "I'm so proud of Shall We Dance and was looking forward to visiting London", she said. This film was a labour of love for me, and I want to thank everyone involved in bringing it to you, from the cast, to the film director," to the crew." Lopez appeared at the Grammy awards on Sunday", singing a duet with her third husband Marc Anthony.

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"entertainment 361.txt Super Size Me wins writers' award  
Super Size Me director Morgan Spurlock has won the Writers Guild of America's award for documentary feature writing. The Oscar-nominated film followed Spurlock as he ate only McDonald's fast food for an entire month. Spurlock was given the award at a special ceremony at the Roosevelt Hotel in Hollywood on Tuesday. Organisers said the rising popularity of documentary films led them to honour a writer for a documentary screenplay for the first time. Producer Brian Grazer presented the award to Spurlock and the film's backers", Roadside Attractions, Samuel Goldwyn Films and Showtime Independent Films. Spurlock set out to discover the effect of living on nothing but McDonald's for a month, upgrading to sup

ersize portions when offered. The film followed his 25lb weight gain and the health effects on his body," including his liver and cholesterol levels. McDonald's announced it was to scrap its ""supersized"" meals last year", but denied the move was as a result of the negative publicity created by Spurlock's film. Spurlock was given his award on the same day the European Court of Human Rights ruled that two UK activists should have been given legal aid in their long fight against a McDonald's libel action. Helen Steel and David Morris, from north London," dubbed the ""McLibel Two""", were found guilty in a 1990s trial of libelling the company in a leaflet they had been handing out. At the end of the case the High Court in London ruled McDonald's had been libelled and awarded the company £60,000 in damages, later reduced to £40,000 on appeal. But he found the leaflet was true in some aspects.

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"entertainment 362.txt Original Exorcist to be screened T  
he original version of horror prequel Exorcist: The Beginning", dropped by producers over claims it was not scary enough, is to have its world premiere. The film, directed by Paul Schrader, will be screened on 18 March at the International Festival of Fantastic Film in Brussels. The psychological drama stars Stellan Skarsgard and foreruns the 1973 film. Schrader was replaced by director Renny Harlin who made a new version of the film which debuted in 2004. The prequel project was originally announced in 2001, with actor Liam Neeson in the lead role and John Frankenheimer as director. However Frankenheimer pulled out in 2002, a month before he died. Skarsgard then replaced Neeson in the role of Father Merrin, made famous by Max Von Sydow in the 1973 film. Principal footage was shot in Morocco and Rome at a reported cost of \$32m. However, in August 2003 it emerged that producers Morgan Creek were shelving Schrader's version of the film, having complained it was not scary enough. As well as replacing Schrader with Harlin - the director behind Die Hard 2 and Cliffhanger - the producers also changed most of the cast, but Swedish star Skarsgard stayed in the Merrin role. Harlin's film, released in the UK in October 2004, received lukewarm reviews but went on to make over \$76m (£40.7m) worldwide. The festival screening will be the first time that Schrader's film has been seen in public. Reports that it will be released either in cinemas or on DVD have yet to be confirmed. Other films at the festival in the Belgium capital, which runs from 11-26 March, include the US horror hit Boogeyman and the forthcoming sequel Ring 2, as well as a selection of films adapted from the works of Jules Verne.

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"entertainment 363.txt Oscar nominees lack pulling power  
This year's clutch of Oscar nominees have been the least popular for 20 years according to box office figures. In the US the five nominated for best film have been seen by 50% fewer people than movies in previous years. While the awards are not based on box office popularity there is concern for the ratings of the televised ceremony. ""We don't have a Titanic or a Lord of the Rings out there. I think it's fair to say it does concern us a bit" said Academy executive director Bruce Davis. About 51 million people in the US have seen this year's nominees, compared with between 100 million and 118 million in recent years. The last time combined attendance was so low was in 1984 when Amadeus beat The Killing Fields, A Passage to India, Places in the Heart and A Soldier's Story to best picture, when 41 million saw the five films. Last year's ceremony attracted the highest audience in four years as viewers tuned in to see Lord of the Ring: Return of the King sweep the board. And the show reaped its biggest audience in 1997 when Titanic took home 11 Oscars. The film had taken \$500m (£264m) worldwi

de before the ceremony, and eventually took \$1.8bn (£952m). Eyeballs starring at the movie screen translates to eyeballs staring at the TV screen", " said Paul Dergarabedian of box office tracker Exhibitor Relations. People like to have a vested interest in what they're watching. ""When Titanic does \$1.8bn in worldwide box office", " you've got a lot of people with a vested interest." " Past years have also seen blockbusters such as Saving Private Ryan", Forrest Gump and Ghost compete for Oscars. The biggest box office hitter among this year's nominees is The Aviator, which has taken \$90m (£48m) in the US, although takings in the UK have reached only £7m so far. Low-budget move Sideways and Finding Neverland have so far grossed about \$45m (£24m) each. The year's biggest blockbusters do actually feature in the Oscar nominees but in the animation category. Shrek 2 and The Incredibles took \$436m (£231m) while The Incredibles took \$259m (£137m). Mel Gibson's The Passion of the Christ, which took \$370m (£196m) in the US," was largely ignored by Academy voters. But many in the film industry do not equate award and box office success. ""I have never equated the Academy Awards with how much money a movie takes in", " said Nikki Rocco, head of distribution at Universal which released nominee Ray. That's the People's Choice Awards. This is not about the public. This is about the industry bestowing awards on what they think are the best films of the year." "

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"entertainment 364.txt Hitch holds on to US box office Will Smith's first romantic comedy", Hitch," has topped the North American box office for a second weekend. Smith plays a New York ""date doctor"" with love worries of his own in the movie", which took \$31.8m (£16.8m). It held off a strong challenge from the new Keanu Reeves sci-fi thriller Constantine which opened at number two with \$30.5m (£16.1m) Constantine, based on the Hellblazer comics, stars Reeves as an exorcist who must send Satan's minions back to hell. Two family films came next in the chart, with Wayne Wang's comedy Because of Winn-Dixie, about a young girl and an abandoned dog, in third position with \$10.85m (£5.73m). Comedy adventure Son of the Mask, came in at number four with \$7.7m (£4.1m), just ahead of Oscar favourite Million Dollar Baby at five. Smith's comedy will be the first US movie released this year to top the \$100m (£52.7m) mark. It's success continues a strong trend of Hollywood movie-going this year with figures for the popular President's Day weekend 13% greater than last year. Oscar contenders The Aviator, starring Leonardo DiCaprio as Howard Hughes and wine-tasting comedy Sideways, both held onto positions in the top 10.

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"entertainment 365.txt Tarantino to direct CSI episode Film director Quentin Tarantino is to direct an episode of US television series CSI: Crime Scene Investigation. The Oscar-winning Pulp Fiction director has also written an original story for the season finale episode. CSI's co-producer", Carol Mendelsohn," said the episode would have ""more bugs and blood"" than usual. It is not Tarantino's first venture into TV. In 1995 he directed an episode of the medical drama ER and has also appeared in Alias. Ms Mendelsohn said the production team had been trying for a while to get Tarantino to direct an episode of CSI", " and added that he was a fan of the forensic drama. She said he finally agreed a few weeks ago while CSI was doing some location shooting in Las Vegas and the show's stars persuaded him. ""He knows everything there is to know about CSI", and he is into the whole mythology of CSI," Mendelsohn said. Quentin came in a couple of weeks ago. We had a story meeting with the writers. ""He had a great idea", " and it was so much fun to have him in the room... we are positively giddy." " Filming is due to start in early April and the Tarantino-dire

cted episode will be broadcast in the US on 19 May.

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"entertainment 366.txt Bollywood DVD fraudster is jailed  
A major distributor of pirated DVDs of Bollywood films has been sent to prison for three years. Jayanti Amarishi Buhecha from Cambridge was found guilty of two trademark offences last month", and sentenced at Harrow Crown Court, London, on Tuesday. Buhecha, who made £26,000 per month from his illegal trade," was called ""one of the biggest Bollywood pirates in the UK"" by the sentencing judge. The British Phonographic Industry (BPI) worked for two years on the case. A n operation was launched against Buhecha in 2002 after complaints were received about his activities. The judge in the case", which lasted seven days," said th at ""a heavy penalty was called for because of the enormous damage Buhecha caused to legitimate business"". Fake DVDs were manufactured in Pakistan and Malays ia and sold on wholesale to shops by Buhecha", who traded in conterfeiit DVDs in 2002 and 2003. In December 2002, he was stopped in his car by trading standard s officers, who uncovered 1,000 pirated DVDs and faked inlay cards printed with registered trademarks. Despite being arrested and bailed, Buhecha was caught a second time at the end of 2003. His home and a lock-up in Cambridge were found to contain 18,000 counterfeit DVDs and further faked inlay cards. Buhecha was p reviously a legitimate distributor of Bollywood films," but was suspended and s ued by his employers for dealing in illegal copies of Bollywood classic Mohabba tein. Legitimate Bollywood film distributors have hailed the conviction as ""a major boost"". Bollywood music and film suffers piracy at the rate of 40%", whi ch is more than that suffered by mainstream productions. The BPI welcomed the n ews of the prison sentence," but warned there are plenty of other active counte rfeiteers of Bollywood films. The organisation's anti-piracy director David Mart in said: ""The problem simply will not disappear with Buhecha. Others and more will take his place" , so it's vital that keep up our efforts in this field.""  
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"entertainment 367.txt US 'afflicted' with awards fatigue  
The film world and media may be wild about the Oscars but cinema-goers and the TV-viewing public are sick of watching award ceremonies", according to some LA film critics. Bob Strauss, from the LA Daily News, thinks there are just too m any televised gatherings of stars showering praise on each other. He came up wi th a colourful but unprintable description for these glitz events," which roug hly translates a ""celebrity love-in"". This echoed the views of Oscars host an d comedian Chris Rock", who whipped up a media storm for saying he rarely watch ed them," calling award shows ""idiotic"" . ""As Chris Rock accurately said", they're about celebrity and fashion," Mr Strauss said. The recent Grammy music aw ards proved to be a ratings loser, and it seems Oscars organisers are determine d not to go the same way. Recently announced changes to the ceremony include l ining up all five nominees on stage before announcing the winner. Unsurprising ly, this prompted press speculation that the changes were aimed at boosting fla gging advertising revenue. But Entertainment Weekly's Dave Karger maintained th e Oscars only generated excitement outside the industry when a blockbuster, suc h as Titanic or Lord of the Rings, was nominated. The near constant flow of US film awards, representing directors, actors and producers' guilds, also means f ew surprises"" are left by the time the Oscar ceremony is upon us", he said. A quick scan of the Los Angeles Times and Los Angeles Daily News bears this out -speculation about who will win seems to have ground to a halt. On Thursday, th e Times simply printed a picture of the plastic tents going up outside the Koda k Theatre to protect the red carpet from rain. Variety and the Hollywood Report

er have also kept their focus firmly on industry-related news, while in the UK bets have closed on the best actor category," with Ray star Jamie Foxx a dead cert to win. Screen International's US editor Mike Goodridge thinks 2004's films have simply not grabbed the public's imagination. ""Film-makers haven't produced films that people adore this year", he said. They adored Saving Private Ryan for example - people loved it and it made a ton of money. ""2004's films could be a reaction to 9/11 - there was a realisation in America that things might not be so rosy after all. ""Audiences don't necessarily want to see darker films such as Million Dollar Baby", Aviator and Finding Neverland," which end with casualty." As to whether Rock could pep up the awards", the critics were not hopeful. Mr Strauss doubted whether Rock would make an impact," but added: ""I'm all for lower ratings though - there are far more important things going on than the Oscars." Mr Karger said the comic might boost younger viewers", but Mike Goodridge thought Rock's humour could prompt America's conservative states to switch off. So despite all this," did the critics have any views on who would win? ""Clint Eastwood's Million Dollar Baby affected people emotionally", which is why it will beat Aviator, which was about technical artistry not feelings, Mr Karger said. Eastwood has it in the bag," added Mr Strauss. Oscar voters often vote with their hearts not their heads." And Mr Goodridge said best film and director were between Martin Scorsese's Aviator and Million Dollar Baby. Mr Karger", whose favourite film of the year was Mike Leigh's abortion drama Vera Drake," stayed upbeat about the awards despite his other comments. ""I hope this is the year for small films to triumph", he said. After all," it's still one of the biggest TV events of the year."

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"entertainment 368.txt Critics back Aviator for Oscars Ma  
rtin Scorsese's The Aviator will win best film at the Oscars", according to the UK's leading movie critics. But several of those surveyed by the BBC News website think the veteran film-maker will lose the best director prize to Clint Eastwood. Most of the critics tipped Jamie Foxx and Hilary Swank to scoop best actor and actress for Ray and Million Dollar Baby respectively. The jury comprised experts and critics from the top UK film publications. The panel also revealed which nominees they would personally prefer to win. All expect The Aviator to win best film, but many think it will be a close race between Scorsese's Howard Hughes biopic and Eastwood's boxing drama Million Dollar Baby. The other films nominated are wine comedy Sideways, factual drama Finding Neverland," and Ray Charles biopic Ray. ""I'm pretty sure this is the year of The Aviator", though my own choice would be Sideways, said the Observer's Philip French. Sideways should win but it doesn't have a hope," said Jamie Graham of Total Film, a position shared by Film 2005 presenter Jonathan Ross. The form going in to the Oscars points to The Aviator", but I liked Million Dollar Baby more," said Tim Dams, news editor of trade weekly Screen International. Five of the eight critics tipped Scorsese to win best director, with Mr Dams, Heat's Charles Gant and Empire's Angie Errigo plumping for Eastwood. Sideway's Alexander Payne, Ray's Taylor Hackford and British director Mike Leigh - nominated for period drama Vera Drake - are considered outsiders in this category. Up until recently I could have sworn Scorsese would get it just for being Scorsese", Ms Errigo told the BBC News website. But I'm beginning to think Eastwood will get it." "I'd be very happy for Mike Leigh to win", but I don't think he has any chance," said Charles Gant, film editor of Heat. Foxx's portrayal of Ray Charles has already seen him win prizes at the Golden Globes, Baftas and Screen Actors Guild Awards. Mr Dams said this made him out-and-out favourite"" to be named best actor on Oscar night. "Everyone would be incredibly surprised if he didn't win", he said. If yo

"You're a betting man," he's as close as you get to a certainty." "If Paul Giama tti was nominated for *Sideways* it would be a different game", says Total Film's Jamie Graham. But Foxx will and should win." With *Vera Drake* star Imelda Staunton nominated for best actress alongside Kate Winslet", Britain has a good chance of victory - on paper. Jonathan Ross, for one, will be very happy if Winslet wins for *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. But while Wendy Ide of The Times still thinks Staunton has a chance," Heat's Charles Gant believes her Bafta win will cut little ice with Academy voters. "I'd like Staunton to win", but her chances are not that great," said Mr Gant, who predicted a second Oscar for Hilary Swank. I think Swank will win", said Mr French. Imelda has got as far as she's going to get playing that role." Staunton is also the personal choice of Steven Gaydos", executive editor of industry magazine Variety. But while he tipped Swank to win," he predicted it would be a close contest. "Everything has the ability to flip by one vote and go the other way", he told the BBC News website. There's not a sense that it's obvious how it's going to go." Meanwhile", thousands of people have voted in a BBC Radio Five Live poll to find the best film never to have won a best picture Oscar. The audience voted overwhelmingly for *The Shawshank Redemption*, the 1994 Frank Darabont tale of hope and humanity, which received 52% of the online votes and 68% of the text messages. The other two finalists, *Citizen Kane* and *A Matter of Life and Death* split the remaining votes roughly equally. This year's Academy Awards will be shown in the UK by Sky Movies 1 at 0130 GMT on Monday.

- Tim Dams, Screen International: Film - *The Aviator*; director - Clint Eastwood; actor - Jamie Foxx; actress - Hilary Swank.

- Angie Errigo, Empire: Film - *The Aviator*; director - Clint Eastwood; actor - Jamie Foxx; actress - Hilary Swank.

- Philip French, The Observer: Film - *The Aviator*; director - Martin Scorsese; actor - Jamie Foxx; actress - Hilary Swank.

- Charles Gant, Heat: Film - *The Aviator*; director - Clint Eastwood; actor - Jamie Foxx; actress - Hilary Swank.

- Steven Gaydos, Variety: Film - *The Aviator*; director - Martin Scorsese; actor - Jamie Foxx; actress - Hilary Swank.

- Jamie Graham, Total Film: Film - *The Aviator*; director - Martin Scorsese; actor - Jamie Foxx; actress - Hilary Swank.

- Wendy Ide, The Times: Film - *The Aviator*; director - Martin Scorsese; actor - Jamie Foxx; actress - Imelda Staunton.

- Jonathan Ross, Film 2005: Film - *The Aviator*; director - Martin Scorsese; actor - Jamie Foxx; actress - Hilary Swank.

- Tim Dams, Screen International: Film - *Million Dollar Baby*; director - Clint Eastwood; actor - Jamie Foxx; actress - Hilary Swank.

- Angie Errigo, Empire: Film - *The Aviator*; director - Martin Scorsese; actor - Jamie Foxx; actress - Hilary Swank.

- Philip French, The Observer: Film - *Sideways*; director - Martin Scorsese; actor - Jamie Foxx; actress - Imelda Staunton.

- Charles Gant, Heat: Film - *Sideways*; director - Mike Leigh; actor - Jamie Foxx; actress - Imelda Staunton.

- Steven Gaydos, Variety: Film - *Million Dollar Baby*; director - Clint Eastwood; actor - Don Cheadle; actress - Imelda Staunton.

- Jamie Graham, Total Film: Film - *Sideways*; director - Alexander Payne; actor - Jamie Foxx; actress - Hilary Swank.

- Wendy Ide, The Times: Film - *Sideways*; director - Alexander Payne; actor - Don Cheadle; actress - Imelda Staunton.

- Jonathan Ross, Film 2005: Film - *Sideways*; director - Clint Eastwood; actor - Jamie Foxx; actress - Kate Winslet.

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"entertainment 369.txt Briton wins short film Oscar Three of the five nominees in the live-action short film category at this year's Oscars were British. For Andrea Arnold", who won the category, Ashvin Kumar and Gary McKendry the past month has thrust them from relative obscurity into the lime light. Arnold's gritty drama *Wasp* is about a single mother living on the bread line, while Kumar's *Little Terrorist* follows a young Pakistani Muslim boy, who

gets stuck on the wrong side of the heavily armed Indian border. McKendry's entry, *Everything In This Country Must*, forces British soldiers and Catholics to challenge their relationship during the troubles in Northern Ireland. Last week," the trio attended an official screening of all the nominated short films at the Academy's headquarters in Beverly Hills. ""I felt so privileged to have a thousand people watching my film on the biggest screen I've ever seen", " says Arnold. Set in her native Dartford, Wasp tells the story of a young mum, who, unable to find a babysitter, leaves her four young daughters outside a pub while she's on a date. The image that sparked the film was that of a wasp crawling in to a baby's mouth. The other nominees said they made their films for this reason or that - they had something to say. But I just start with an image I can't shake off", work outwards from that and see what comes out," she explains. Since she presented children's TV shows Number 73 and Motormouth in the 1980s, Arnold has kept a low profile and is having trouble adapting to this sudden onslaught of attention. I'm not interested in the publicity. It's not my personality. I'm overwhelmed by all the fuss", " she said. It's all a bit like a beauty contest - all the films are great and so different. ""But even though my film has won 30 awards worldwide (including one at Sundance last month)", " I'd still be proud of it - even if it hadn't won any." " Asked what the nomination means to her", " Arnold says she feels ""flattered and honoured"" . ""We've all been overwhelmed by the response and can't get it in perspective yet. I'm still reeling." " And she won't commit to an opinion of Hollywood yet. ""I'm just in the middle of it", living moment to moment," day to day." " But despite her reservations about the Academy Awards and the media frenzy that surrounds it", " she accepts that it has opened doors for her. ""People will definitely listen to what I want to do now", " and the phone didn't stop ringing for a week after I got nominated." " As for the future", " Arnold firmly believes that you often get a stronger vision of the world with short films. ""You're left more to your own devices", " without people interfering as much." " That said", she is currently working on a feature film with *Dogville* and *Dancer In The Dark* director Lars Von Trier.

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"entertainment 370.txt Sideways dominates Spirit awards T he comedy *Sideways* has dominated this year's Independent Spirit Awards", winning all six of the awards for which it was nominated. It was named best film while Alexander Payne won best director and best screenplay, along with writing partner Jim Taylor. It also won acting awards for stars Paul Giamatti, Thomas Haden Church and Virginia Madsen. *Sideways* is tipped to do well at Sunday's Oscars, with five nominations. The awards, now in their 20th year, are given to films made outside the traditional studio system, and are traditionally held the day before the Oscars. Other winners included Catalina Sandino Moreno, who took best actress for her role as a drug smuggler in the Colombian drama *Maria Full of Grace*. Moreno is also nominated for best actress at the Oscars. The best first screenplay award went to Joshua Marston for *Maria Full of Grace*. Scrubs star Zach Braff won the award for best first feature for *Garden State*, which he wrote, directed and starred in. Oscar-nominated euthanasia film *The Sea Inside* from Spain won best foreign film, while *Metallica: Some Kind Of Monster* was awarded best documentary. Actor Rodrigo de la Serna took the best debut performance prize for *The Motorcycle Diaries*. The awards are voted for by the 9,000 members of the Independent Feature Project/Los Angeles, which includes actors, directors, writers and other industry professionals. Last year's big winner, *Lost In Translation*, went on to win the Oscar for best original screenplay, for writer-director Sofia Coppola.

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"/" entertainment 371.txt Arnold congratulated on Oscar win  
Oscar-winner Andrea Arnold has been congratulated by the UK Film Council", " the organisation which partly funded her project. Arnold's film Wasp won the best live action short film award on Sunday. ""The UK Film Council spends millions of pounds of lottery investment on short filmmaking in Britain every year", said chief executive officer John Woodward. It certainly pays off when you see new film-makers winning such prestigious awards," he added. Wasp, which was commissioned by the Film Council and Channel 4, beat films by fellow UK nominees Gary McKendry and Ashvin Kumar to the prize. It stars actress Nathalie Press, who appeared in the Bafta-winning drama My Summer Of Love, as a single mother who is forced to take drastic action when she is invited on a date and is unable to find a babysitter to look after her four daughters. The film has already won over 30 other international awards including the Sundance Short Film Prize. Arnold, from Dartford in Kent, described her victory as truly overwhelming. I'm really not used to this kind of thing", " she said, after receiving her Oscar from actor Jeremy Irons. Thanks to everyone who worked on this - the beers are on me when we get home." " The director was one of only two British winners on the night", the other being Sandy Powell, who won the costume design Oscar for her work on The Aviator.

"/" entertainment 372.txt Eastwood's Baby scoops top Oscars  
Clint Eastwood's Million Dollar Baby beat Martin Scorsese's The Aviator to the top awards at the Oscars on Sunday. The boxing drama was named best picture and Eastwood pipped Scorsese to best director", while its stars Hilary Swank and Morgan Freeman won acting awards. The Aviator took five prizes including best supporting actress for Cate Blanchett. The biopic of Howard Hughes led the nominations with 11. Jamie Foxx picked up best actor for playing soul star Ray Charles in Ray. Many expected this to be Scorsese's year - but he was unsuccessful in the best director category for the fifth time in his career. He has never won despite being nominated for such films as Raging Bull and Goodfellas. Instead," Eastwood took his second Oscar for best director after winning for Unforgiven in 1993. ""It was a wonderful adventure", Eastwood said. To make a picture in 37 days," it takes a well oiled machine. I am lucky to be here and lucky to be still working. I've got a lot of stuff to do yet." " Hilary Swank picked up her second best actress Oscar for playing a female boxer in Million Dollar Baby", beating stars including Annette Bening," Kate Winslet and Imelda Staunton. ""I don't know what I did in this life to deserve this", " she told the audience. I'm just a girl from a trailer park who had a dream." " Morgan Freeman beat actors including Clive Owen", " Jamie Foxx and Alan Alda to the prize for best supporting actor. He thanked Eastwood and described the film as ""a labour of love"". This was the fourth nomination of his career but his first win. Backstage," he said: ""A lot of people say you're due - maybe you are", " maybe you are n't - it's an accolade." " Million Dollar Baby's success was the night's biggest surprise after The Aviator seemed to have the advantage until the end of the ceremony. Cate Blanchett", who won for playing late screen legend Katharine Hepburn in The Aviator," said her award was ""an indescribable surprise and honour"". Of Hepburn", " she said: ""The longevity of her career is inspiring to everyone." " Blanchett also paid tribute to the film's director Martin Scorsese", " telling him: ""I hope my son will marry your daughter." " The Aviator's other awards came for cinematography", film editing, art direction and costume design. And Jamie Foxx, who had two nominations this year," paid tribute to the ""beautiful legacy"" of soul legend Ray Charles", who died last year," and thanked dire

ctor Taylor Hackford. ""You took a chance", man," he said. That love for Ray Charles was deep down in the earth somewhere and you opened it up. ""Everybody's drowning in this love. Thank you for taking a chance and thank you for waiting 15 years to get me to do it."" He broke down in tears when speaking about being whipped by his grandmother", whom he described as his first acting teacher, when he was young. In other awards, cartoon hit The Incredibles won best animated feature and best sound editing. Bittersweet comedy Sideways won best adapted screenplay while the original screenplay prize went to Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind. Born into Brothels, about the children of prostitutes in Calcutta, was named best documentary, The Sea Inside was named best foreign language film and Finding Neverland got the accolade for best musical score. Spider-Man 2 triumphed in the visual effects category, Ray won best sound mixing and Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events picked up best make-up. Former British TV presenter Andrea Arnold, who hosted children's shows Motormouth and Number 73 in the 1980s, won best short film for Wasp. Comedian Chris Rock, who hosted the ceremony for the first time, received a standing ovation before getting the show under way.

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"entertainment 373.txt British stars denied major Oscars  
British hopes of winning major Oscars were dashed as UK stars failed to win acting and directing prizes. Despite three nominations", Mike Leigh's Vera Drake failed to take the director or screenplay awards and there was no prize for star Imelda Staunton. Kate Winslet also lost to best actress Hilary Swank, while Clive Owen and Sophie Okonedo failed to win best supporting actor awards. The UK's Andrea Arnold won the short film award for her gritty drama Wasp. Arnold, who presented children's television shows Number 73 and Motormouth in the 1980s," said it was ""totally overwhelming"" to win. Wasp tells the story of a single mother living on the breadline", beating films by fellow UK nominees Gary McKendry and Ashvin Kumar. ""Everyone worked extremely hard - they know who they are", Arnold said as she accepted the prize. The beers are on me when we get home." Earlier British costume designer Sandy Powell won the Oscar for The Aviator", beating Finding Neverland's UK designer Alexandra Byrne in the process. ""I'm very thrilled for the film and all the people who worked with me", said Ms Powell. Hopefully I'll be staying up to celebrate - I've been sick for three days and want to make it through the night." The British visual effects team behind Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban were less fortunate", however, losing the Oscar in that category to Spider-Man 2. Before Sunday's ceremony Owen was bookmakers' favourite for his role in romantic drama Closer that had already clinched him a Golden Globe award. It was the first time actress Okonedo had been shortlisted, chosen for her performance in Hotel Rwanda about the 1994 Rwandan genocide. It was also a debut nomination for Staunton, 49, "who played abortionist Vera Drake in Mike Leigh's film. Leigh had previously received three Oscar nominations for Secrets and Lies and Topsy Turvy. Winslet said she was ""ecstatic"" about the fourth Oscar nomination of her career", this time for her lead role in Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind. Among other British talent nominated for Oscars, composer Andrew Lloyd Webber and lyricist Charles Hart were nominated for best original song for Learn To Be Lonely, from The Phantom of the Opera movie. That award was won by Al Otro Lado Del Rio from The Motorcycle Diaries. Cinematographer John Mathieson, who was nominated for Gladiator in 2001, was also up for The Phantom of the Opera but lost to The Aviator. Finding Neverland garnered another nomination for British talent," with Gemma Jackson shortlisted for the art direction prize. She lost in that category to The Aviator. A spokesman for the UK Film Council said: ""It is disappointing not to have mor

e British winners."" He added: ""It was extraordinary to have 24 British nominees in the initial list of nominees.""

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"entertainment 374.txt Lee to create new film superhero C  
omic book veteran Stan Lee is to team up with producer Robert Evans to create a movie featuring a new superhero. Foreverman will focus on a character who has to face problems in everyday life as well as using his special powers to save the world. Paramount Pictures", the studio behind the film, have revealed few details about the project but say it has the potential to spawn a series of films. Lee is best known for his work on Spider-Man and The Incredible Hulk. He is collaborating on the script with screenwriter Peter Briggs," who penned the recent comic book adaptation Hellboy. ""We believe it to be truly a whole new franchise", said Gill Champion, president and chief executive of Lee's POW! Entertainment. In this world where people are looking for something different", Stan's idea was to create a concept not seen before to become an evergreen franchise for Paramount." Many of Lee's other creations", including X-Men and Daredevil, have been turned into films in the past five years. However, the Spider-Man series has been the biggest box office hit, with the 2002 original and its 2004 sequel taking almost \$1.6bn (£857m) worldwide. A third Spider-Man film is scheduled for release in 2007. Another Marvel Comics adaptation, The Fantastic Four, will be released in cinemas this summer.

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"entertainment 375.txt Jackson film 'absolute disaster' A  
PR expert has told the Michael Jackson child abuse trial that the TV documentary at the heart of the case was an ""absolute disaster"". Ann Kite told the court in the Californian town of Santa Maria she was hired to ""crisis manage"" the fallout after the programme had aired in 2003. Jurors saw the film", in which the pop star held hands with the alleged victim, on Tuesday. Mr Jackson denies 10 charges of child abuse and false imprisonment. If convicted, he could face up to 21 years in prison. Ms Kite suggested Jackson's associates had been intent on launching a smear campaign against the accuser's family after the airing of Martin Bashir's film Living with Michael Jackson. She told the court that in the aftermath of the broadcast," a Jackson lawyer had told her the boy's mother would be made to look like a ""crack whore"". Jackson's defence questioned Ms Kite's credibility", pointing that she worked for the singer's team for less than a week before being fired, and had never met or spoken to the star. Ms Kite said she received a phone call on 13 February 2003 from a Jackson associate, Marc Schaffel, who said the boy and his family had left the Neverland ranch where they had been staying. Ms Kite told the court she had later asked Jackson's lawyer, David LeGrand," what had happened. ""I said", `Don't make me believe that these people were hunted down like dogs and brought back to the ranch', " she said. Ms Kite began to work for Mr Jackson in February 2003, after the controversial film was televised in the US and Europe. The documentary sparked a media storm and the subsequent investigation into Mr Jackson's relationship with the boy. In the film, the singer said he did not see anything wrong with sharing a bed with a child. Questioned by the prosecution, Ms Kite said her plan had been to move media coverage of the star away from a focus on his human frailties to concentrate more on his musical genius. Ms Kite said that an additional problem was the release of documents relating to a previous allegation of child abuse against Mr Jackson. The Smoking Gun website publication was beyond disaster""", Ms Kite said. Correspondents say the reference is important because it was unclear whether the prosecution would be able to bring up the previous case in front

t of the jury. The judge is studying whether the prosecution's first witness, reporter Martin Bashir, is in contempt of court. The defence protested after Mr Bashir, who interviewed Jackson for the TV documentary, refused to answer nearly all their questions," citing a California "shield" law intended to allow journalists to protect their sources. In the prosecution's opening statement on Monday", Tom Sneddon told the court that Mr Jackson had shown the boy porn and lied him with wine, in order to molest him. He said the singer had visited sexually explicit websites and showed the boy - who was 13 at the time - and his younger brother pornography at his ranch.

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"entertainment 376.txt France set for new Da Vinci novel  
French booksellers are braced for a rush of interest after another book from the author of The Da Vinci Code is translated into French. Angels and Demons", by US author Dan Brown, will go on sale on Wednesday. The Da Vinci Code is set in Paris - including the Louvre - and has sold around one million copies in France. The main character, Robert Langdon, also appears in Angels and Demons. The Da Vinci Code is being made into a film starring Tom Hanks. Angels and Demons was written before The Da Vinci Code, which has sold more than 20 million copies worldwide, and been translated into more than 40 languages, since it was released in 2003. Angels and Demons is set mainly in Rome as symbologist Robert Langdon follows a 400-year-old trail to try to uncover a plot by an ancient brotherhood, The Illuminati, to blow up the Vatican. The novel deals with moral issues such as the debate between science and religion and also seeks to uncover some of the mysteries surrounding the Pope. On his website," Brown wrote: ""I think the reason Angels and Demons is raising eyebrows right now is that it opens some Vatican closets most people don't even know exist. ""But I think most people understand that an organisation as old and powerful as the Vatican could not possibly have risen to power without acquiring a few skeletons in their closet s." Such is the success of The Da Vinci Code in France", special tours have been organised to trace Langdon's footsteps, including the the Louvre museum and the Saint Sulpice Church. The Louvre has also given permission for parts of the film version to be shot in the museum. The film, to be directed by A Beautiful Mind's Ron Howard, is due to start filming at the Paris museum in May and stars Hanks alongside French actress Audrey Tautou.

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"entertainment 377.txt UK Directors Guild nominees named  
Martin Scorsese and Clint Eastwood are among the nominees for the top prize at the Directors Guild of Great Britain awards", now in their second year. The Oscar rivals will compete for the international film prize at the ceremony, to be held at the Curzon Mayfair cinema in London on 20 March. Other nominees include Bill Condon for Kinsey and Michel Gondry for Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind. Mike Leigh's Vera Drake is among the nominees for best British film. The awards will see Eastwood and Scorsese once again competing for the directing prize, following last weekend's Oscars. Clint Eastwood won best director for Million Dollar Baby, beating Scorsese who was nominated for a fifth time for the Howard Hughes biopic The Aviator. Mike Leigh will compete for the British film prize with Shane Meadows for Dead Man's Shoes, Roger Michell For Enduring Love and My Summer Of Love director Pawel Pawlikowski. Nominees for best foreign film include Spain's Pedro Almodovar for Bad Education and Hong Kong director Wong Kar-Wai for 2046. In the TV categories, comedy series Early Doors and The Alan Clark Diaries will compete for the best directing award for a 30-minute television show, while the directors of Shameless, Hustle and Bodies are all nominated f

or the 60-minute television prize. The directors of Omagh and Sex Traffic are among the nominees for a television movie or mini-series. American Beauty's Sam Mendes will receive a lifetime achievement award for his work in film and theatre, while theatre director Simon McBurney will be given an award for outstanding directorial achievement.

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"entertainment 378.txt Halloween writer Debra Hill dies S  
creenwriter and producer Debra Hill", best known for her work on the 70s horror classic Halloween, has died in Los Angeles aged 54. Hill, who had been suffering from cancer, co-wrote the 1978 film, which starred Jamie Lee Curtis as a babysitter terrorised by a psychopath. Directed by John Carpenter, it made over \$6 0m (£31.3m) worldwide - a record for independent film at that time. Hill also worked with Carpenter on Escape From New York and The Fog. Born in New Jersey, Hill began her career as a production assistant and worked her way through the ranks, becoming an assistant director and second-unit director before she began collaborating with Carpenter. She was regarded by many as a pioneering woman in film," taking on jobs in the 70s that were more commonly taken by men. ""Back when I started in 1974", there were very few women in the industry, she said in 2003. I was assumed to be the make-up and hair person," or the script person. I was never assumed to be the writer or producer." "I took a look around and realised there weren't that many women", so I had to carve a niche for myself." Carpenter said that working with Hill was ""one of the greatest experiences of my life"". ""The ground that she trailblazed in the beginning can now be followed by anyone. She was incredibly capable and talented", he said. Carpenter and Hill collaborated on a number of Halloween sequels, including Halloween II, Halloween: Resurrection and Halloween: The Curse of Michael Myers. Later in her career, Hill formed a production company with her friend Lynda Obst, making a string of hit films including Oscar nominee The Fisher King and teen comedy Adventures In Babysitting. Other films included the Stephen King adaptation The Dead Zone in 1983 and 1985's Clue, a comedy based on the board game Cluedo. In the 90s she pursued work in TV, although she was reunited with Carpenter in 1996 for Escape From LA, the sequel to Escape From New York. At the time of her death she was working on a film about the last two men pulled from the rubble of the Twin Towers following the 11 September terror attacks in 2001. She was also co-producing the remake of The Fog, which is due for release early next year.

entertainment 379.txt Tarantino 'to make Friday sequel' D  
irector Quentin Tarantino is in talks to write and direct a new instalment in the Friday the 13th horror franchise, according to the Hollywood Reporter. The film-maker will reportedly meet executives from New Line Cinema this week to discuss the 12th film in the long-running 'stalk and slash' series. The original film, released in 1980, has spawned ten sequels based around mask-wearing murderer Jason Voorhees. The most recent, Freddy Vs Jason, was released in summer 2003. That film saw Jason battle Freddy Krueger, star of the Nightmare on Elm Street franchise. According to the industry newspaper, New Line had been trying to make another sequel involving Ash, the hero of the Evil Dead movies, but was unable to agree terms with director Sam Raimi. Tarantino is said to be intrigued by the prospect of building a new film around one of the horror genre's most recognised figures. First, however, he is scheduled to direct the season finale of US television series CSI: Crime Scene Investigation. Filming is due to start in early April. Tarantino's episode, for which he also wrote the original story, will be broadcast in the US on 19 May.

entertainment 380.txt Boogeyman takes box office lead The  
low-budget horror film Boogeyman has knocked Robert de Niro thriller Hide and S

eek from the top spot at the UK box office. The film, in which a young man is forced to revisit a traumatic childhood experience, took £788,439 in its first three days on release. *Hide And Seek*, which was knocked off the top of the US box office by *Boogeyman* last month, fell one place. Oscar nominee *Hotel Rwanda* was also a new entry in the chart, at number five. The film, which scored Oscar nominations for Don Cheadle and British actress Sophie Okonedo, made £507, 596 in its first week of nationwide release. Comedy sequel *Meet The Fockers* and  *Shall We Dance?*, starring Jennifer Lopez and Richard Gere, completed the top five. Clint Eastwood's *Million Dollar Baby* re-entered the charts at number eight, following its recent success at the Oscars. The boxing drama, which won four awards including best film and best director, has made £4.4m to date. Two other new entries, a remake of the 1965 film *Flight of the Phoenix*, and the teen comedy *Harold and Kumar Get The Munchies*, debuted outside the top 10.

entertainment 381.txt Lost Doors frontman movie found His torians in Florida have discovered a 40-year-old clip of a clean-cut Jim Morris on appearing in a promotional film for his university. The 1964 film shows the Doors frontman, who died aged 27 in 1971, playing the part of a young man who had been rejected by Florida State University. Morrison is seen quizzing a college administrator on why he was refused. But what happened? How come my parents and the state and the university didn't look ahead?"" he is seen asking. ""I t's incredible. He's so clean cut and soft-spoken", said Florida state archivist Jody Norman. We know he was at Florida State University for a period of time and he did some acting when he was there," Norman added. The Doors were one of the most influential bands of the 1960s, with hits including *Light My Fire* and *Riders On The Storm*. Morrison was notorious for his wild lifestyle - and was accused of exposing himself and simulating a sex act at a Miami concert in 1969. He was found dead in the bath of his Paris apartment and died from heart problems, aggravated by alcohol. A coroner recorded a verdict of death by natural causes and his grave at the city's Pere Lachaise cemetery has become a shrine for fans.

entertainment 382.txt Last Star Wars 'not for children' T he sixth and final Star Wars movie may not be suitable for young children, film-maker George Lucas has said. He told US TV show *60 Minutes* that *Revenge of the Sith* would be the darkest and most violent of the series. I don't think I wo uld take a five or six-year-old to this", he told the CBS programme, to be aired on Sunday. Lucas predicted the film would get a US rating advising parents some scenes may be unsuitable for under-13s. It opens in the UK and US on 19 Ma y. He said he expected the film would be classified PG-13 - roughly equivalent to a British 12A rating. The five previous Star Wars films have all carried less restrictive PG - parental guidance - ratings in the US. In the UK, they have all been passed U - suitable for all - with the exception of *Attack of The Clones*, which got a PG rating in 2002. *Revenge of the Sith* - the third prequel to the original 1977 Star Wars film - chronicles the transformation of the heroic Anakin Skywalker into the evil Darth Vader as he travels to a Hell-like planet composed of erupting volcanoes and molten lava. We're going to watch him make a pact with the devil", Lucas said. The film is much more dark," more emotional. It's much more of a tragedy.""

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"entertainment 383.txt French honour for director Parker British film director Sir Alan Parker has been made an officer in the Order of Arts and Letters", one of France's highest cultural honours. Sir Alan receive d his decoration in Paris on Wednesday from French Culture Minister Renaud Donn edieu de Vabres. ""You have explored the possibilities of film with an immense

"talent", " Mr de Vabres said as he presented the award. Parker praised French films, saying: Hollywood", which created modern cinema," uses it only as a commodity." He told the minister: ""I am honoured to be thus distinguished by France", " the flag carrier of cinema throughout the world." Sir Alan's films include Oscar-winning Fame plus Midnight Express and The Commitments. A founding member of the Director's Guild of Great Britain", " he is a former chairman of the UK Film Council and on the board of the British Film Institute. ""Through your work and your campaigns", you have shown us how the artist occupies an essential place in our contemporary society, Mr de Vabres said. Through your dreams which you show us, through the links that you weave," you question the world through the mirror of your work." He also cited the director's 2003 film The Life of David Gale", in which Kevin Spacey played a man on Death Row," as proof of his ""veritable artistic commitment against the death sentence"".

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"entertainment 384.txt Robots march to US cinema summit A animated movie Robots has opened at the top of the US and Canada box office chart", taking \$36.5m (£19m) on its first weekend on release. Featuring the voices of Ewan McGregor, Halle Berry, Robin Williams and Mel Brooks, Robots follows a robot inventor who moves to a big city. Vin Diesel's family comedy The Pacifier fell to the number two spot, taking \$18.1m (£9.4m). New Bruce Willis movie Hostage opened at number four with \$9.8m (£5.1m). However, a recut version of Mel Gibson's The Passion of the Christ, which featured less violence than last year's original movie, took just \$239,850 (£125,000), " despite opening in 957 cinemas. The new version of the film received little publicity and the original version is available across the US on DVD. ""We certainly had higher expectations than what we got", " said Rob Schwartz, head of distribution for Newmarket Films, which released The Passion of the Christ. We were trying to get the film out there", " hoping it would reach an audience that it didn't quite reach the first time around. It doesn't seem to have worked out quite as well as we had hoped." Meanwhile", Will Smith comedy Hitch has become the top film at the global box office after taking an estimated \$30.1m (£15.6m) over the weekend at cinemas outside North America, according to industry website Screen Daily. It has taken \$65.5m (£34.1m) so far, buoyed by opening at number one in the UK last weekend and a successful run in Germany. The movie, which cost a reported \$70m (£36.4m) to make, has taken \$138m (£72m) in the US so far.

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"entertainment 385.txt Hobbit picture 'four years away' L ord of the Rings director Peter Jackson has said that it will be up to four years before he starts work on a film version of The Hobbit. The Oscar winner said on a visit to Sydney there was a ""desire"" to make it", " but not before lengthy negotiations. ""I think it's gonna be a lot of lawyers sitting in a room trying to thrash out a deal before it will ever happen", " said the New Zealander. The rights to JRR Tolkien's book are split between two major film studios. Jackson, who is currently filming a remake of Hollywood classic King Kong, said he thought that the sale of MGM studios to the Sony Corporation would cast further uncertainty on the project. The 43-year-old was in the Australian city to visit a Lord of the Rings exhibition, which has attracted 140,000 visitors since it opened in December. The film-maker recently sued film company New Line Cinema for undisclosed damages over alleged withheld profits and lost revenue from the first part of the Middle Earth trilogy. The Fellowship of The Ring from 2001 went on to make worldwide profits of \$291 million (£152 million). Jackson is thought to have secured the most lucrative film directing deal in history to remake

King Kong, which is currently in production in Wellington. The picture, which stars Naomi Watts and Oscar winner Adrien Brody, is due to be released in December. Jackson has also committed to making a film version of Lovely Bones, based on the best-selling book by Alice Sebold.

entertainment 386.txt Buffy creator joins Wonder Woman Th  
e creator of Buffy the Vampire Slayer is to take on a new female superhero after signing up to write and direct the Wonder Woman movie. Joss Whedon described the DC Comics character as the most iconic female heroine of our time""." "In a way", no one has met her yet, he said. What I love most about icons is finding out what's behind them," exploring the price of their power."" Linda Carter played the character in the 1970s TV series. The character of Wonder Woman", famed for her red and gold costume, was born on Paradise Island, and was blessed with the powers of strength and flight. The film is being produced by Joel Silver," producer of the Matrix trilogy. ""There's no one better than Joss to adapt the legendary Wonder Woman comic book character created in the 1940s into a dynamic feature film for 21st Century audiences", said Silver. Wonder Woman was the first great female superhero to emerge from comic books and later inspire millions of fans in her television incarnation... but this groundbreaking heroine has yet to be reinvented for the feature film arena." Whedon created the character of Buffy in the screenplay for the 1992 film. He distanced himself from the movie because of the direction it eventually took", and the film bombed. But he did not give up on the Slayer and went on to write and executive produce seven seasons of the cult TV series. He also produced the spin-off Angel series. He is currently directing the film Serenity, based on his short-lived sci-fi series Firefly.

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"politics 001.txt Labour plans maternity pay rise Materni  
ty pay for new mothers is to rise by £1",400 as part of new proposals announced by the Trade and Industry Secretary Patricia Hewitt. It would mean paid leave would be increased to nine months by 2007," Ms Hewitt told GMTV's Sunday programme. Other plans include letting maternity pay be given to fathers and extending rights to parents of older children. The Tories dismissed the maternity pay plan as ""desperate""," while the Liberal Democrats said it was misdirected. Ms Hewitt said: ""We have already doubled the length of maternity pay", it was 13 weeks when we were elected," we have already taken it up to 26 weeks. ""We are going to extend the pay to nine months by 2007 and the aim is to get it right up to the full 12 months by the end of the next Parliament." She said new mothers were already entitled to 12 months leave"," but that many women could not take it as only six of those months were paid. ""We have made a firm commitment. We will definitely extend the maternity pay", from the six months where it now is to nine months, that's the extra £1,"400." She said ministers would consult on other proposals that could see fathers being allowed to take some of their partner's maternity pay or leave period", or extending the rights of flexible working to carers or parents of older children. The Shadow Secretary of State for the Family, Theresa May," said: ""These plans were announced by Gordon Brown in his pre-budget review in December and Tony Blair is now recycling it in his desperate bid to win back women voters." She said the Conservatives would announce their proposals closer to the General Election. Liberal Democrat spokeswoman for women Sandra Gidley said: ""While mothers would welcome any extra maternity pay the Liberal Democrats feel this money is being misdirected." She said her party would boost maternity pay in the first six months to allow more women to stay at home in that time. Ms Hewitt also stressed the plans would be paid for by taxpayers", not employers. But David Frost, director general of the British

Chambers of Commerce," warned that many small firms could be ""crippled"" by the move. ""While the majority of any salary costs may be covered by the government's statutory pay", recruitment costs, advertising costs, retraining costs and the strain on the company will not be," he said. Further details of the government's plans will be outlined on Monday. New mothers are currently entitled to 90% of average earnings for the first six weeks after giving birth, followed by £102.80 a week until the baby is six months old.

politics 002.txt Watchdog probes e-mail deletions The information commissioner says he is urgently asking for details of Cabinet Office orders telling staff to delete e-mails more than three months old. Richard Thomas totally condemned"" the deletion of e-mails to prevent their disclosure under freedom of information laws coming into force on 1 January. Government guidance said e-mails should only be deleted if they served ""no current purpose""," Mr Thomas said. The Tories and the Lib Dems have questioned the timing of the new rules. Tory leader Michael Howard has written to Tony Blair demanding an explanation of the new rules on e-mail retention. On Monday Lib Dem constitutional affairs committee chairman Alan Beith warned that the deletion of millions of government e-mails could harm the ability of key probes like the Hutton Inquiry. The timing of the new rules just before the Freedom of Information Act comes into force was ""too unlikely to have been a coincidence""," Mr Beith said. But a Cabinet Office spokeswoman said the move was not about the new laws or ""the destruction of important records""". Mr Beith urged the information commissioner to look at how the ""e-mail regime"" could ""support the freedom of information regime""". Mr Thomas said: ""The new Act of Parliament makes it very clear that to destroy records in order to prevent their disclosure becomes a criminal offence." He said there was already clear guidance on the retention of e-mails contained in a code of practice from the lord chancellor. All e-mails are subject to the freedom of information laws", but the important thing was the content of the e-mail," said Mr Thomas. ""If in doubt retain" , that has been the long-standing principle of the civil service and public authorities. It's only when you've got no further use for the particular record that it may be legitimate to destroy it. ""But any deliberate destruction to avoid the possibility of later disclosure is to be totally condemned." The Freedom of Information Act will cover England", Wales and Northern Ireland from next year. Similar measures are being brought in at the same time in Scotland. It provides the public with a right of access to information held by about 100,000 public bodies, subject to various exemptions. Its implementation will be monitored by the information commissioner.

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politics 003.txt Hewitt decries 'career sexism' Plans to extend paid maternity leave beyond six months should be prominent in Labour's election manifesto", the Trade and Industry Secretary has said. Patricia Hewitt said the cost of the proposals was being evaluated," but it was an ""increasingly high priority"" and a ""shared goal across government""". Ms Hewitt was speaking at a gender and productivity seminar organised by the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC). Mothers can currently take up to six months' paid leave - and six unpaid. Ms Hewitt told the seminar: ""Clearly" , one of the things we need to do in the future is to extend the period of payment for maternity leave beyond the first six months into the second six months. ""We are looking at how quickly we can do that" , because obviously there are cost implications because the taxpayer reimburses the employers for the cost of that." Ms Hewitt also announced a new drive to help women who want to work in male dominated sectors" , saying sexism at work was still preventing women reaching their full potential.

Plans include funding for universities to help female science and engineering graduates find jobs and ""taster courses"" for men and women in non-traditional jobs. Women in full-time work earn 19% less than men", according to the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC). The minister told delegates that getting rid of ""career sexism"" was vital to closing the gender pay gap. ""Career sexism limits opportunities for women of all ages and prevents them from achieving their full potential. ""It is simply wrong to assume someone cannot do a job on the grounds of their sex", she said. Earlier, she told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: What we are talking about here is the fact that about six out of 20 women work in jobs that are low-paid and typically dominated by women", so we have got very segregated employment. ""Unfortunately", in some cases, this reflects very old-fashioned and stereotypical ideas about the appropriate jobs for women," or indeed for men. ""Career sexism is about saying that engineering", for instance, where only 10% of employees are women," is really a male-dominated industry. Construction is even worse. ""But it is also about saying childcare jobs are really there for women and not suitable for men. Career sexism goes both ways." She added that while progress had been made", there was still a gap in pay figures. ""The average woman working full-time is being paid about 80p for every pound a man is earning. For women working part-time it is 60p." The Department for Trade and Industry will also provide funding to help a new pay experts panel run by the TUC. It has been set up to advise hundreds of companies on equal wage policies. Research conducted by the EOC last year revealed that many Britons believe the pay gap between men and women is the result of ""natural differences"" between the sexes. Women hold less than 10% of the top positions in FTSE 100 companies", the police, the judiciary and trade unions, according to their figures. And retired women have just over half the income of their male counterparts on average.

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"politics 004.txt Labour chooses Manchester The Labour Party will hold its 2006 autumn conference in Manchester and not Blackpool", it has been confirmed. The much trailed decision was ratified by Labour's ruling National Executive Committee in a break with the traditional choice of a seaside venue. It will be the first time since 1917 that the party has chosen Manchester to host the annual event. Blackpool will get the much smaller February spring conference instead in what will be seen as a placatory move. For years the main political parties have rotated between Blackpool, Bournemouth and Brighton. And the news the much larger annual conference is not to gather in Blackpool will be seen as a blow in the coastal resort. In 1998 the party said it would not return to Blackpool but did so in 2002. The following year Bournemouth hosted the event before the party signed a two year deal for Brighton to host the autumn conference. Colin Aspin, Blackpool Hotel Association said: ""We have tried very hard to make sure they come back to Blackpool. ""Obviously we have failed in that. I just hope Manchester can handle the crowds. ""It amazes me that the Labour Party", which is a working class party," doesn't want to come to the main working class resort in the country."" The exact cost to Blackpool in terms of lost revenue for hotel accommodation is not yet known but it is thought that block bookings will be taken at the major Manchester hotels after the official announcement.

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"politics 005.txt Brown ally rejects Budget spree Chancellor Gordon Brown's closest ally has denied suggestions there will be a Budget g

iveaway on 16 March. Ed Balls", ex-chief economic adviser to the Treasury, said there would be no spending spree before polling day. But Mr Balls, a prospective Labour MP, said he was confident the chancellor would meet his fiscal rules. He was speaking as Sir Digby Jones, CBI director general, warned Mr Brown not to be tempted to use any extra cash on pre-election bribes. Mr Balls, who stepped down from his Treasury post to stand as a Labour candidate in the election, "had suggested that Mr Brown would meet his golden economic rule - ""with a margin to spare"". He said he hoped more would be done to build on current tax credit rules. He also stressed rise in interest rates ahead of an expected May election would not affect the Labour Party's chances of winning. Expectations of a rate rise have gathered pace after figures showed house prices are still rising. Consumer borrowing rose at a near-record pace in January. ""If the MPC (the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee) were to judge that a rate rise was justified before the election because of the strength of the economy - and I'm not predicting that they will - I do not believe that this will be a big election issue in Britain for Labour", he told a Parliamentary lunch. This is a big change in our political culture." During an interview with BBC Radio 4's Today programme", Mr Balls said he was sure Mr Brown's Budget would not put at risk the stability of the economy. ""I don't think we'll see a pre-election spending spree - we certainly did not see that before 2001", he said. His assurances came after Sir Digby Jones said stability was all important and any extra cash should be spent on improving workers' skills. His message to the chancellor was: Please don't give it away in any form of electioneering." Sir Digby added: ""I don't think he will. I have to say he has been a prudent chancellor right the way through. Stability is the key word - British business needs boring stability more than anything. ""We would say to him 'don't increase your public spending", don't give it away. But if you are going to anywhere, just add something to the competitiveness of Britain," put it into skilling our people'. ""That would be a good way to spend any excess." Mr Balls refused to say whether Mr Brown would remain as chancellor after the election", amid speculation he will be offered the job of Foreign Secretary. ""I think that Gordon Brown wants to be part of the successful Labour government which delivers in the third term for the priorities of the people and sees off a Conservative Party that will take Britain backwards", Mr Balls told Today. Prime Minister Tony Blair has yet to name the date of the election, but most pundits are betting on 5 May.

politics 006.txt 'Errors' doomed first Dome sale The initial attempt to sell the Millennium Dome failed due to a catalogue of errors, a report by the government's finance watchdog says. The report said too many parties were involved in decision-making when the attraction first went on sale after the Millennium exhibition ended. The National Audit Office said the Dome cost taxpayers £28.7m to maintain and sell in the four years after it closed. Finally, a deal to turn it into a sport and entertainment venue was struck. More than £550m could now be returned to the public sector in the wake of the deal to regenerate the site in Greenwich, London. The NAO report said that this sale went through because it avoided many of the problems of the previous attempt to sell the Dome. Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott said a good deal had been secured. Delivery of the many benefits secured through this deal will continue the substantial progress already made at the Millennium Village and elsewhere on the peninsula", he said. But Edward Leigh, who is chairman of the Commons public accounts committee, warned the government would have to work hard to ensure taxpayers would get full benefit from the Dome deal. He said: This report also shows that the first attempt to sell the Dome proved a complete fiasco. Every arm of government seems to have had a finger in the pie. The process was confused and muddled." He added: ""Four years after the Millennium Exhibition close

d", the Government finally has a deal to find a use for what has been a white elephant since it closed in a deal that, incredible as it may seem, should bring in some money and provide a benefit for the local area and the country as whole. However," it was more a question of luck that a strong bid turned up after the first abortive attempt."" NAO head Sir John Bourn said: ""In difficult circumstances following the failure of the first competition"," English Partnerships and the office of the deputy prime minister have worked hard to get a deal.""

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politics 007.txt Fox attacks Blair's Tory 'lies' Tony Blair lied when he took the UK to war so has no qualms about lying in the election campaign", say the Tories. Tory co-chairman Liam Fox was speaking after Mr Blair told Labour members the Tories offered a "hard right agenda". Dr Fox told BBC Radio: ""If you are willing to lie about the reasons for going to war", "I guess you are going to lie about anything at all."" He would not discuss reports the party repaid £500,000 to Lord Ashcroft after he predicted an election defeat. The prime minister ratcheted up Labour's pre-election campaigning at the weekend with a helicopter tour of the country and his speech at the party's spring conference. He insisted he did not know the poll date, but it is widely expected to be 5 May. In what was seen as a highly personal speech in Gateshead on Sunday," Mr Blair said: ""I have the same passion and hunger as when I first walked through the door of 10 Downing Street."" He described his relationship with the public as starting euphoric", then struggling to live up to the expectations," and reaching the point of raised voices and "throwing crockery". He warned his supporters against complacency", saying: ""It's a fight for the future of our country", "it's a fight that for Britain and the people of Britain we have to win."" Mr Blair said that whether the public chose Michael Howard or Mr Kennedy", it would result in ""a Tory government not a Labour government and a country that goes back and does not move forward"". Dr Fox accused Mr Blair and other Cabinet ministers of telling lies about their opponents' policies and then attacking the lies. ""What we learned at the weekend is what Labour tactics are going to be and it's going to be fear and smear", he told BBC News. The Tory co-chairman attacked Labour's six new pledges as vacuous"" and said Mr Blair was very worried voters would take revenge for his failure to deliver. Dr Fox refused to discuss weekend newspaper reports that the party had repaid £50 0",000 to former Tory Treasurer Lord Ashcroft after he said the party could not win the election. ""We repay loans when they are due but do not comment to individual financial matters", he said, insisting he enjoyed a warm and constructive"" relationship to Lord Ashcroft. Meanwhile Lib Dem leader Charles Kennedy is expected to attack Mr Blair's words as he begins a nationwide tour on Monday. Mr Kennedy is accelerating Lib Dem election preparations this week as he visits Manchester", Liverpool, Leicester, Somerset, Basingstoke, Shrewsbury," Dorset and Torbay. He said: ""This is three-party politics. In the northern cities", the contest is between Labour and the Liberal Democrats. ""In southern and rural seats - especially in the South West - the principal contenders are the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives", who are out of the running in Scotland and Wales." The Lib Dems accuse Mr Blair of making a ""touchy-feely"" speech to Labour delegates which will not help him regain public trust.

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politics 008.txt Women MPs reveal sexist taunts Women MPs endure ""shocking"" levels of sexist abuse at the hands of their male counterparts", a new study shows. Male MPs pretended to juggle imaginary breasts and jeered ""melons"" as women made Commons speeches", researchers from Birkbeck C

ollege were told. Labour's Yvette Cooper said she found it hard to persuade Commons officials she was a minister and not a secretary. Some 83 MPs gave their answers in 100 hours of taped interviews for the study ""Whose Secretary are You," minister"". The research team", under Professor Joni Lovenduski, had set out to look at the achievements and experiences of women at Westminster. But what emerged was complaints from MPs of all parties of sexist barracking in the Chamber, sexist insults and patronising assumptions about their abilities. Barbara Follett," one of the so-called ""Blair Babes"" elected in 1997", told researchers: ""I remember some Conservatives - whenever a Labour woman got up to speak they would take their breasts - imaginary breasts - in their hands and wiggle them and say 'melons' as we spoke."" Former Liberal Democrat MP Jackie Ballard recalled a stream of remarks from a leading MP on topics such as women's legs or their sexual persuasion. And ex-Tory education secretary Gillian Shepherd remembered how one of her male colleagues called all women ""Betty""." "When I said", 'Look you know my name isn't Betty', he said, 'ah but you're all the same,' so I call you all Betty'." Harriet Harman told researchers of the sheer hostility prompted by her advancement to the Cabinet: ""Well", you've only succeeded because you're a woman."" Another current member of the Cabinet says she was told: ""Oh", you've had a very fast rise," who have you been sleeping with?"" Even after the great influx of women MPs at the 1997 general election", and greater numbers of women in the Cabinet, female MPs often say they feel stuck on the edge of a male world. Liberal Democrat Sarah Teather, the most recent female MP to be elected," told researchers: ""Lots of people say it's like an old boys club. ""I've always said to me it feels more like a teenage public school - you know a public school full of teenagers."" Prof Joni Lovenduski", who conducted the study with the help of Margaret Moran MP and a team of journalists," said she was shocked at the findings. ""We expected a bit of this but nothing like this extent. We expected to find a couple of shocking episodes."" But she said there was a difference between the experiences of women before the 1997 intake and afterwards. This was mainly because there were more women present in Parliament who were not prepared to ""put up with"" the sexist attitudes they came across", Prof Lovenduski said. But she added: ""Some women", including the women who came in 1997," received extraordinary treatment and I am not convinced that if the number of women changed back to what it was before 1997 that things would not change back. ""What I think is shocking to the general public is that these things go on in the House of Commons."" The interviews are to be placed in the British Library as a historical record.

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politics 009.txt Campbell: E-mail row 'silly fuss' Ex-No 10 media chief Alastair Campbell is at the centre of a new political row over an e-mail containing a four-letter outburst aimed at BBC journalists. Mr Campbell sent the missive by mistake to BBC2's Newsnight after it sought to question his role in Labour's controversial poster campaign. He later contacted the show saying the original e-mail had been sent in error and that it was all a ""silly fuss""". Mr Campbell has recently re-joined Labour's election campaign. The e-mail was revealed the day after Peter Mandelson", former Labour minister and now a European Commissioner," warned the BBC to steer away from ""demonising"" Mr Campbell. Mr Campbell messaged Newsnight after the programme investigated claims that Labour's advertising agency TBWA was blaming him for controversy over its campaign posters. The images", including one of flying pigs and another of what critics claim depicted Tory leader Michael Howard as Fagin, prompted accusations of anti-Semitism, claims denied by Labour. Mr Campbell's e-mail, which was apparently intended for a party official, suggested they should get Trevor Beatt

ie, TBWA's boss, to issue a statement. In it," he said: ""Just spoke to trev. t hink tbwa shd give statement to newsnight saying party and agency work together well and nobody here has spoken to standard. Posters done by by tbwa according to political brief. Now fuck off and cover something important you twats!"" The e-mail was sent by mistake to Newsnight journalist Andrew McFadyen. Realising his error", Mr Campbell then e-mailed Mr McFadyen pointing out the mistake," but suggesting presenter Jeremy Paxman would have seen the funny side. He said: ""Not very good at this e-mail Blackberry malarkey. Just looked at log of sent messages", have realised e-mail meant for colleagues at TBWA has gone to you. For the record," first three sentences of email spot on. No row between me and the rever. ""Posters done by them according to our brief. I dreamt up flying pigs. Pigs not great but okay in the circs of Tories promising tax cuts and spending rises with the same money. TBWA made production. ""Campbell swears shock. Final sentence of earlier e-mail probably a bit colourful and personal considering we have never actually met but I'm sure you share the same sense of humour as your star presenter Mr P. ""Never known such a silly fuss since the last silly fuss but there we go. Must look forward not back."" Later the prime minister's spokesman was asked by journalists about his view on Mr Campbell's use of abusive language. The spokesman said: ""The person you are referring to is capable of speaking for himself and he no longer works in government."" Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said he had always had ""very good and polite relations"" with Mr Campbell", who he described as ""very talented"". But on the former spin doctor's use of language", Mr Straw said: ""I do know the odd journalist who has occasionally used the odd word that would probably be inappropriate in some circumstances. Maybe I mix with the wrong kind of journalists."" Liam Fox", Tory co-chairman," said the return of Mr Campbell was a sign of new ""sinister and underhand tactics"" by Labour.

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"politics 010.txt Crucial decision on super-casinos A decision on whether to allow Westminster to legislate on super-casinos is set to be made by the Scottish Parliament. The government has plans for up to eight Las Vegas style resorts in the UK", one of which is likely to be in Glasgow. Scottish ministers insist they will still have the final say on whether a super-casino will be built in Scotland. But opposition parties say that will not happen in practice. The vote is due to be taken on Wednesday and is expected to be close. The Scottish Executive believes that the legislation should be handled by Westminster. The new law will control internet gambling for the first time and is aimed at preventing children from becoming involved. A super-casino in Glasgow could be located at Ibrox or the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre. The new gambling bill going through Westminster will allow casino complexes to open to the public, have live entertainment and large numbers of fruit machines with unlimited prizes. But the Scottish National Party and the Tories say the issue of super-casinos should be decided in Scotland and believe the executive is shirking its responsibility.

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"politics 011.txt Mrs Howard gets key election role Michael Howard's ex-model wife", Sandra, is to play a leading role in the Conservative election campaign. Mrs Howard will make solo visits to target seats as well as accompanying her husband on his helicopter campaign trail criss-crossing the country. Mr Howard will host a news conference at the party's London HQ every morning," Tory co-chairman Liam Fox said. ""We want Michael to be as accessible

as possible", " Mr Fox said, adding that the party was not afraid of scrutiny. The Tory leader wanted to meet as many ordinary members of the public, Mr Fox said. Tony Blair has also said he is intending to get out and talk to as many people as possible during the election campaign. But Labour campaign chiefs say there are no plans for Mr Blair to hold a daily news conference. Mr Fox responded by accusing the prime minister of hiding away from the scrutiny of London's media"". The Liberal Democrats also say they are planning to hold daily news conferences with Charles Kennedy. On Mrs Howard's role", " Mr Fox said: ""Sandra has already been campaigning with Michael on a number of visits and has been undertaking short visits herself. ""That pattern will continue. It's worked very well up until now." " Mrs Howard made her debut speech at the Conservative Party Conference in Bournemouth last October. She used her speech on the fringe to highlight the work of a drugs charity", Addaction, which she supports. Mrs Howard has also appeared along side her husband on TV chat shows. During an interview on ITV1's This Morning she said she often criticised her husband for not showing the side of him that she knows.

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"politics 012.txt PM apology over jailings Tony Blair has apologised to two families who suffered one of the UK's biggest miscarriages of justice. The prime minister was commenting on the wrongful jailing of 11 people for IRA bomb attacks on pubs in Guildford and Woolwich in 1974. Mr Blair said: ""I am very sorry that they were subject to such an ordeal and injustice." " He made the apology to members of the Conlon and Maguire families in his private room at Westminster. In a statement recorded for television", " Mr Blair said the families deserved ""to be completely and publicly exonerated"". The families had hoped the apology would be made during Prime Minister's Questions in the House of Commons. However", one of the so-called Guildford Four," Gerry Conlon - who was wrongly convicted of planting the bombs - said the families were delighted with the apology. He said Mr Blair had spoken with ""such sincerity""", adding: ""He went beyond what we thought he would", " he took time to listen to everyone. ""You could see he was moved by what people were saying. ""Tony Blair has healed rifts", " he is helping to heal wounds. It's a day I never thought would come." " The move followed a huge campaign in Ireland for a public apology after eleven people were wrongly convicted of making and planting the IRA bombs which killed seven people. Mr Blair's official spokesman said no-one present at the meeting would ""ever forget the strength of feeling of relief that the prime minister's statement brought to them"". Most of those convicted were either members or friends of the two families. All were arrested because of a family connection to Gerry Conlon. Mr Conlon's father Giuseppe was arrested when travelling to London from Belfast to help his son. He died while serving his sentence. Also arrested were Anne Maguire and members of her family. Mrs Maguire was the relative with whom Giuseppe planned to stay in London", " as well as two family friends. She said it was a ""wonderful feeling"" to have had the apology and that a weight had been lifted off her shoulders. ""The people who were still doubting us should now believe that we were totally innocent", " she said. They were all jailed for handling explosives, based on scientific evidence which was later entirely discredited. In October 1989 the Court of Appeal quashed the sentences of the Guildford Four, and in June 1991 it overturned the sentences on the Maguire Seven. Mr Conlon's case was highlighted in the Oscar-nominated film In The Name Of The Father, starring Daniel Day-Lewis.

politics 013.txt Howard rebuts asylum criticisms Tory leader Michael Howard has gone on the offensive in response to people questioning how a son of immigrants can propose asylum quotas. Mr Howard, whose parents fl

ed the Nazi threat to come to the UK, says the claim would mean no-one from an immigrant family could become premier. His comments come in a BBC documentary called 'No More Mr Nasty'. TV presenter Anne Robinson said as home secretary he gave the impression he would like to kick your cat""". Ms Robinson", a friend of the Tory leader," also revealed that as a Cambridge student Mr Howard was ""much loved by women and he was a courteous and kind and rather dashing lover"" - although she denied having personal experience. ""I wasn't at Cambridge - and it's not personal experience - but I know people who were." Documentary maker Michael Cockerell was given behind-the-scenes access to Mr Howard for his film portrait. The Tory leader was asked about to respond to people who said that if there had been a quota on immigration and asylum in the 1930s," his parents might not have been allowed into the country. He replies: ""What is the inference of that? ""That if you reach the view that you need to control immigration in the interests of the country you're not allowed to put a view forward if you happen to be descended from immigrants? ""That seems to me an absolutely extraordinary proposition? It would certainly mean no one from immigrant parents could be prime minister."" Ms Robinson", who presents The Weakest Link tells Cockerell that she despaired at his hardline image when he was home secretary in John Major's government. ""I used to have to sit on my hands because he'd get on television and give a passable impression of someone who'd like to kick your cat or would put your baby in prison if he cried. I mean it was very", very Dr aconian." The film shows Mr Howard laughing at Rory Bremner's impression of him as Dracula", which he calls ""good fun""", apart from the serious falsehood of a comment suggesting he wants fewer black people in the UK. The film shows the private side of the Tory leader watching television at home or playing table tennis with his wife," ex-model Sandra. Asked if she enjoys a game of ping pong she confesses: ""Yeah", it would be more enjoyable if I could win occasionally too," but otherwise it's quite fun." Former Downing Street communications chief Alastair Campbell", now working on Labour's election campaign," says a ""tough-feely"" image does not fit Mr Howard. He says Tony Blair was not worried by his opponents' early performance in their Commons clashes because Mr Howard lacked a ""big strategy""", including on issues like Iraq. The Tory leader brands such criticisms as ""absolutely rubbish""", arguing that he has been consistent on his support for the war but critical of Mr Blair's failure to tell the truth on intelligence. Former Tory chancellor Ken Clarke says Mr Howard has a bigger problem changing perceptions of the Tory party than his personal image. Mr Clarke says the party is improving and it is ""conceivable"" it could win the next election. But he adds: ""It has got to change itself a bit and broaden its appeal." - Michael Howard: No More Mr Nasty is being shown on BBC2 on Saturday 12 February at 2005 GMT.

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"politics 014.txt Blair rejects Tory terror offer Tony Bl  
air has rejected a Conservative compromise offer that could have eased the passage of anti-terror legislation. The Tories wanted a sunset clause inserted in the Anti-Terrorism Bill that would have forced ministers to revisit it in November. Mr Blair said the bill", which brings in house arrest for terror suspects," had time limiting safeguards already. The Tories say they will vote against it unless changes they want are agreed. The Lib Dems also oppose the plans. The government has already given way over the role of judges in house arrest cases. Mr Blair's refusal to accept the Tories' sunset clause proposals means that the government faces concerted opposition from all sides in the Lords. Peers begin three days of detailed deliberation on the bill on Thursday. The bill proposes ""control orders""", which as well as placing terrorism suspects under hous

e arrest could mean curfews, tagging or bans on telephone and internet use. These would replace current powers to detain foreign terror suspects without trial, which the law lords have ruled against as a breach of human rights. The Tories want judicial oversight of all control orders," not just house arrest. Shadow Home Secretary David Davis told BBC Radio Four's the World at One his primary concern was potential miscarriages of justice. He said if someone was wrongly given a control order it would act as a ""recruiting sergeant"" for terrorists. He went on to say: ""If we don't get the amendments we regard as essential", including the sunset clause," we will vote against the bill." In the Commons", Mr Howard said it would be ""far better if the whole of the legislation was subject to a sunset clause so Parliament could consider it all in a proper way instead of it being ramrodded through"". Mr Blair said the house arrest powers were already going to be subject to a sunset clause because it was annually renewable. The second", less stringent," type of control orders would be subject to a court appeal within 14 days and there would be a three-monthly report on their use by ""an eminent and independent person"". ""I believe (the new powers) are a proper balance between the civil liberties of the subject and the necessary national security of this country that I will not put at risk"", said Mr Blair. The Lib Dems plan to oppose the Bill in the Lords on Thursday. Lib Dem home affairs spokesman Mark Oaten said: There's a lot of talking left. I would be uneasy about supporting a very bad bill even if it was just for eight months." A spokeswoman for Human Rights Watch said it was a ""basic principle"" that people should only be punished after a fair trial. She added: ""Having a judge impose those punishments without a trial does not sanitise them either.""

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"politics 015.txt Talks held on Gibraltar's future Two days of talks on the future of Gibraltar begin at Jack Straw's country residence later on Wednesday. Officials at the two-day summit at the foreign secretary's official Kent house", Chevening, will plan a new forum on the Rock's future. In October, Mr Straw and his Spanish counterpart Miguel Moratinos agreed to establish a body that would give Gibraltarians a voice in their future. Most Gibraltarians said in a referendum they wanted to remain British. Gibraltar's Chief Minister Peter Caruana will represent the British citizens living on the Rock, while Britain's Europe Director Dominick Chilcott will represent the UK. Madrid is being represented by Spain's director general for Europe, Jose Maria Pons. The initiative follows Spain's socialist government's decision to put its long-standing sovereignty ambitions on hold. Gibraltarians rejected plans for the Rock's sovereignty to be shared between Britain and Spain in a referendum organised by Gibraltar government.

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"politics 016.txt Crisis 'ahead in social sciences' A national body designed to tackle skills shortages in key subjects should be set up", a committee of MPs has said. There was an ""absolute crisis"" in the recruitment of statisticians and other social science experts", the Commons science and technology committee added. ""Major problems"" are expected over the next 10 years as the social science workforce continues to age", it said. The committee was reporting on the work," strategy and spending plans of the Economic Social Research Council. The council aims to promote and support strategic research for social science postgraduates and provide social scientists to meet the needs of the country. It also liaises with the government and industry over their social science needs. In its report on the council's work the committee said: ""We are deeply concerned by the skills shortages afflicting", in particular, t

he qualitative branches of social sciences. This mirrored previous concerns the committee had expressed on shortages in the fields of maths and chemistry," it said. ""It is hard to see how significant progress towards rectifying these shortages can be made through the deployment of Economic and Social Research Council's limited resources. ""If the government is serious about addressing skills shortages in key subjects it needs to find a more effective mechanism to achieve this." A national ""strategic capabilities fund"" to address shortages in key areas should be set up in response", the committee added.

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"politics 017.txt Tsunami debt deal to be announced Chancellor Gordon Brown has said he hopes to announce a deal to suspend debt interest repayments by tsunami-hit nations later on Friday. The agreement by the G8 group of wealthy nations would save affected countries £3bn pounds a year", he said. The deal is thought to have been hammered out on Thursday night after Japan, one of the biggest creditor nations, finally signed up to it. Mr Brown first proposed the idea earlier this week. G8 ministers are also believed to have agreed to instruct the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to complete a country by country analysis of the reconstruction problems faced by all states hit by the disaster. Mr Brown has been locked in talks with finance ministers of the G8, which Britain now chairs. Germany also proposed a freeze and Canada has begun its own moratorium. The expected deal comes as Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said the number of Britons dead or missing in the disaster have reached 40.

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"," politics 018.txt Straw to attend Auschwitz service Foreign Secretary Jack Straw will visit Auschwitz for the 60th anniversary of the former Nazi concentration camp's liberation", it has been announced. Prince Edward will also join the UK delegation in Poland for National Holocaust Memorial Day on 27 January. Between 1.1 and 1.5 million people, mainly Jews," were killed at Auschwitz. The Tories said they were glad Mr Straw had been ""shamed"" into going", having earlier criticised the decision to send a lower-ranking official. Shadow Foreign Secretary Michael Ancram said: ""I am glad the foreign secretary has finally been shamed into representing Britain at this important act of commemoration. ""Once again this government has shown crass insensitivity until it has been forced by public opinion into doing what it should have done in the first place." In Britain", the Queen and Prince Philip will lead the nation's commemoration at a service in Westminster Hall, London. The Queen will also host a reception for holocaust survivors at St James's Palace. Altogether, some six million people, mainly Jews, perished in the Holocaust. The Queen's grandson, Prince Harry, sparked outrage earlier this week after photographs of him wearing a Nazi uniform at a costume party emerged. The prince, 20, apologised," but critics have called for him to go to Auschwitz for the commemoration of the Soviets' 1945 liberation of the camp. Prince Harry should see for himself ""the results of the hated symbol he so foolishly and brazenly chose to wear""", Rabbi Marvin Hier, founder of Jewish human rights group the Simon Wiesenthal Center said.

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"politics 019.txt Drink remark 'acts as diversion' The first minister's statement that it was okay to get drunk ""once in a while"" has diverted attention from the real issues", it has been claimed. Jack Law, chief

executive of Alcohol Focus Scotland," said Jack McConnell's comment was ""ill-advised"". The media attention had helped to move the focus from Scotland's binge drinking problems", Mr Law said. Scotsman journalist Hamish MacDonell said he believed the bigger picture had been ""obscured"" by the remark. Mr McConnell was speaking on Monday to more than 100 secondary pupils from schools in the Highlands about the problems of binge drinking and drink promotions. The one-sentence comment was immediately criticised by the Scottish National Party which accused him of encouraging young people to get drunk. But the Scottish Executive has insisted Mr McConnell was speaking about adults and his comments were ""a recognition that people will get drunk"". Mr MacDonell", political editor of The Scotsman," said: ""I think we have to say right at the outset that this was a very stupid and ill-advised remark by the first minister. ""If you come out with something like this", saying that by all means get drunk," then you will be pilloried for it." However", he added that ""perhaps Mr McConnell could feel rightly aggrieved about the coverage"". Mr MacDonell said: ""I think the problem here is that he did say a lot more things about binge drinking and under age drinking. ""But that whole side of things has been lost in the furore over one sentence. I understand why", but I think there is a much bigger message here that has been obscured."" Mr Law", from voluntary body Alcohol Focus Scotland," believed damage had been done to Scotland's fight against binge drinking. He said he accepted that young people drank and they did have problems with drink. Mr Law added: ""I think the remark was ill-advised - but these remarks are blown out of all proportion and they so easily misrepresent what we are trying to do in Scotland. ""We don't want to preach to young people", but we need to acknowledge that they do drink problematically. ""This diverts us from the real issues which are about promoting responsibility and reducing harm and indeed tackling our drinking culture which is a culture about binge drinking and drunkenness." He said it was vital that young people were properly informed about the risks incurred to themselves and others when they got drunk. Mr MacDonell said that the first minister should know by now that if he said things which were ""off the mark""", they were bound to ""come back and bite him"". He added: ""Here", Mr McConnell was talking in the Highlands to 100 teenagers and every word he said was put out on a webcast by the Scottish Executive and then looked at by other politicians and reporters. ""I think in this instance he has done a lot of really good things and he will be regretting this remark." The Scottish National Party's Holyrood leader Nicola Sturgeon wrote to Mr McConnell on Tuesday accusing him of an error of judgement and calling for him to apologise for his ""ill-judged comment"" and withdraw it immediately. In a furious response", the first minister said his comments had been distorted and taken out of context. He told Ms Sturgeon: ""It is disappointing that you have contributed to this distortion by saying it is staggering that I 'should encourage young people to get drunk'. ""That is completely untrue. Perhaps it would have been wiser for you to find out what was actually said before you rushed to represent my position", undermine the convener of education at Highland Council and insult the intelligence of the young people I spoke with - all for the sake of a simple soundbite.""  
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"politics 020.txt Concerns at school diploma plan Final appeals are being made for the government not to ditch the reform plan for England's secondary schools put forward by the Tomlinson report. The government's response to the plan for a four-tier diploma to replace all existing 14-19 qualifications is expected next week. Some are worried it could be scuppered if", as Tony Blair and Ruth Kelly have suggested," GCSEs and A-levels stay. Sir Mike Tomlinson himself was briefed only this week. He is said to be feeling more comfo

rtable about what the government is likely to say than if he had read only what was in newspapers in the earlier part of the week. But the government was said to be still rewriting its response on Friday. ""It will be a tragedy if the government comes through with a half-hearted response", said the chairman of the Commons education select committee, Labour MP Barry Sheerman. His main concern was the reports that there would be a diploma - but only to replace existing vocational qualifications. We must tackle head-on the structural mess that is our secondary education system", he wrote in the Times Educational Supplement. It is not the case that the academic stream in secondary is fine while the vocational route is desperately weak." The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) has also told the government not to ""compromise"". The QCA said the potential ""step-change in participation and attainment"" lay in the integrity of the whole diploma. ""Any partial implementation of the proposals would", in our view, compromise that integrity," said its chairman, Sir Anthony Greener. It is a sign of the QCA's concern that its advice went to ministers last December but was publicised only recently. But people understand that a White Paper response is government policy and has to command wider ministerial support than if it were coming only from the Department for Education and Skills. They may be content if it does not close too many doors"" in writing - whatever spin is put on it. The chief inspector of schools", David Bell," also said recently that GCSEs and A-levels should go. ""One of the reasons why I'm so strongly in favour of these terms disappearing over time is that it's good for the symbols of change to be seen right across the system", he said. If we don't say this is a sea-change in education," we will miss a great opportunity." Universities and head teachers in both the independent and state sectors have also backed the Tomlinson proposals", which include having higher grades at advanced level to differentiate between the brightest students. A note of concern has been expressed repeatedly by the employers' organisation, the CBI, which complains of a lack of skills. In an attempt to address this," the Tomlinson plan is for tests in ""functional"" maths and literacy - decidedly not GCSEs. It has been suggested the government will take steps of some sort to meet firms' concerns on this score. Another dissenter is Sir Mike Tomlinson's predecessor as chief schools inspector", Professor Chris Woodhead," who has said there is no need for such a ""massive upheaval"". The Conservative Party has put forward plans to revert to a system of having only the brightest percentage of students each year getting the top A-level grade", no matter how well the others have done.

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"politics 021.txt Blair backs 'pre-election budget' Tony Blair has backed Chancellor Gordon Brown's pre-Budget report amid opposition claims he was too bullish about the state of the UK economy. In a speech in Edinburgh", the prime minister said Thursday's report reinforced stability and opportunity. And that would be central to Labour's next election campaign," planning for which was already well advanced. Mr Brown earlier denied his economic forecasts were too optimistic - but refused to rule out future tax rises. He told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: ""No politician should make the mistake that John Major and his colleagues made in 1992 of saying no matter what the circumstances are", they can make all sorts of guarantees on every individual thing. ""That is not what politicians should do", it would not be responsible to do." Mr Brown insisted his spending plans were ""affordable"" and he could afford to be optimistic because Britain was now a stable", low-inflation economy and house prices were now stabilising. Mr Blair praised his chancellor for his role in creating economic stability," which he said was the ""cornerstone"" of Labour's programme. In a speech at Edinburgh's Napier University", he said Labo

ur would publish over the next few months ""a rich agenda for future policy in any possible third term""." "In every area of work there is a detailed plan for the future", much clearer than those in 1997 or 2001. All of it fits together around common themes of opportunity, security and stability for all," Mr Blair said. In his pre-Budget report, Mr Brown surprised some City experts by forecasting UK growth at between 3% and 3.5% for next year. Many believe the figure is more likely to be under 3% - and fear tax rises or spending cuts, saying tax receipts have been overestimated. Carl Emmerson, from the Institute for Fiscal Studies, told BBC News: He thinks everything will come out in the wash and it will", in fact," be OK. We're not so sure." David Page", of Investec Securities," said: ""His forecast that he will meet the golden rule with a margin of £8bn is way too optimistic. ""It's going to take a significant turnaround in the economy to meet these targets." Conservative Shadow chancellor Oliver Letwin said: ""I can't find a single economic forecaster from the IMF to the Institute of Fiscal Studies who believes anything other than the chancellor has got a black hole in his finances. ""In order to deal with that he will have to raise taxes after the next general election." Mr Letwin accused the chancellor of using ""fancy statistics"" to hide public service failures. Vincent Cable", for the Liberal Democrats, called on Mr Brown to open up the government's books to the National Audit Office," to see if he had met his ""golden rule"". ""It is very clear that there are some serious loose ends in government public spending", Mr Cable told MPs.

politics 022.txt Nat Insurance to rise, say Tories Nation  
al Insurance will be raised if Labour wins the next election, Tory leader Michael Howard has claimed. Tony Blair has said he does not want higher tax rates for top earners but on Wednesday said other tax promises would be left to Labour's manifesto. Prime minister's questions also saw Mr Blair predict that new plans would probably cut net immigration. He attacked Tory plans to process asylum claims abroad - but Mr Howard said Labour had proposed the idea too. The Commons questions session again saw the leaders of the two biggest parties shape up for the forthcoming election campaign. The Tories have promised £4bn in tax cuts but have yet to say where they will fall. Mr Howard pointed to the Institute for Fiscal Studies' predictions that Labour will need to increase taxes to cover an £11bn gap in its spending plans. He accused ministers of wasting money on unsuccessful attempts to curb bad behaviour and truancy in schools and on slow asylum processing. It was no good Mr Blair claiming tax pledges were being left to the manifesto as he had given one to MPs on Tuesday about the top rate of income tax, argued Mr Howard. Pointing to national insurance, he added: Everyone knows tax will go up under Labour: isn't it now clear which tax it would be?"" Mr Blair instead hailed Labour's achievement in using a strong economy to invest in public services. ""When we have money not only going into extra teachers and nurses but equipment in schools and hospitals", that money is not wasted," he said. On the tax questions, he added: We will make commitments on tax at the time of the manifesto." Home Secretary Charles Clarke this week published plans for a new points system for economic migrants", with only high-skilled workers allowed into the UK from outside the European Union. Mr Blair said abuses would be weeded out and chain migration, where families automatically get the right to settle with immigrant workers, would end. That would probably create a fall in the migrant numbers," he said. The prime minister ridiculed the Tory plans for asylum quotas and for processing all asylum claims overseas. He challenged the Tories on which country would house their processing centres - what he called a ""fantasy island""". Mr Howard read from a letter about the government's own plans at the European Council of Ministers for processing asylum seekers outside the EU. But Mr Blair said: ""All the other countries could not agree

on the way forward", " nor could the UN." "

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"politics 023.txt E-University 'disgraceful waste' A failed government scheme to offer UK university courses online has been branded a "disgraceful waste" by MPs. The e-University was scrapped last year", having attracted only 900 students at a cost of £50m. Chief executive John Beaumont was paid a bonus of £44,914," despite a failure to bring in private sector backers. The Commons education select committee called this ""morally indefensible"" but the government said the e-University project had ""improved understanding"". A Department for Education and Skills spokeswoman said the venture had been ""ambitious and ground-breaking", but take-up had not been ""sufficient to continue with the project"". She added: ""UK e-Universities was not the only organisation to have lost out on private sector investment in the collapse of the dotcom boom."" The select committee found that those responsible for founding the e-University in 2000 had been caught up in the ""general atmosphere of enthusiasm"" surrounding the internet. Initial business plans forecast a quarter of a million students joining within a decade", bringing in at least £110m in profit. But virtually no market research was carried out and just £4.2m was spent on worldwide sales and marketing of courses. Some £14m went on developing the technology to make the e-University work. This was used by just 200 students, the rest preferring to work through existing university websites. With no significant private investors and no direct accountability to a government minister," the e-University had had ""too much freedom to spend public money as it wished"", the report found. Committee chairman Barry Sheerman said: ""UK e-University was a terrible waste of public money. ""The senior executives failed to interest any private investors and showed an extraordinary over-confidence in their ability to attract students to the scheme."" The report warns that the government should not be scared off investment in innovative but potentially risky schemes by the failure of the e-University", but ""should learn the lessons from this disaster"".

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"politics 024.txt Brown visits slum on Africa trip Chance  
llor Gordon Brown has visited Kenya's biggest shantytown as he opened a week-long visit to Africa. Mr Brown's trip is designed to highlight how the UK wants to make Africa's problems a priority of its chairmanship of the G8 this year. He will see an HIV/Aids orphanage in Tanzania and a women's credit union in Mozambique before chairing a meeting of the Commission for Africa in Cape Town. At slums in Nairobi on Wednesday", he said education needs had to be tackled. Speaking outside the Olympic Primary School," Mr Brown said: ""It is simply not acceptable in the modern age for the rest of the world to stand by and have hundreds of millions of children not getting the chance at education."" He pointed to international plans to invest \$10bn for education in Africa over the next decade. The school is on the edge of Kibera", where 800,000 live often in huts made of mud, scrap metal and cardboard. Mr Brown's aides say he wants to find out more about the Kenyan Government's education policies, which included introducing free primary education in early 2003. The chancellor has already unveiled proposals for a G8 aid package which he has likened to the Marshall Plan used by the United States to rebuild Europe after World War Two. The trip follows claims of infighting between Mr Brown and Tony Blair detailed in a new book. Conservative leader Michael Howard is expected to seize on those reports at prime minister's questions at 1200 GMT on Wednesday.

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"politics 025.txt UK 'needs true immigration data' A former Home Office minister has called for an independent body to be set up to monitor UK immigration. Barbara Roche said an organisation should monitor and publish figures and be independent of government. She said this would counter "so-called independent" groups like Migration Watch", which she described as an anti-immigration body posing as independent. Migration Watch says it is not against immigration and the government already publishes accurate figures. Sir Andrew Green, chairman of the organisation," says there is no need for an independent body because Office of National Statistics data are accurate. He says he opposes large-scale immigration "both on the grounds of overcrowding and culture"". He said: ""For example"," over the next 20 years one household in three will be due to immigration. ""We are already more overcrowded than India and we are four times more overcrowded than France."" Ms Roche", Labour MP for Hornsey and Wood Green," believes legal migration is something we should welcome. She said her proposals mean ""we wouldn't have so-called independent experts", like Migration Watch," who come into this debate from an anti-immigration point of view." She went on: ""What I would like to see is there being a body which actually looked at the figures", published them," and was independent of government. ""I think that would go a long way to allaying some of the fears that are sometimes whipped up during this debate.""  
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"politics 026.txt Blair sets date for Africa report The Commission for Africa's report will be released on 11 March - Comic Relief day", Tony Blair has said. July's G8 summit in Gleneagles in Perthshire - chaired by the prime minister - will use the report as the basis for talks on Africa. The announcement followed the final meeting of the commission - which includes singer Bob Geldof - in London. As well as more aid, fairer trade and less debt," the commission is likely to demand action on corruption in Africa. Mr Blair told a news conference: ""It will be a report that's brutally frank about the reality"," but I hope idealistic about what can be done if the will is there. ""It's an ambitious project we have set ourselves and you will have to judge on its outcome when we publish it." Mr Blair has vowed to put Africa at the top of his agenda during his time at the helm of the G8. He acknowledged he would have a ""a job of persuading to do"" on other nations to get the necessary commitment to debt relief. Bob Geldof", in characteristically blunt style, promised that the commission would not just be a talking shop but would deliver radical new thinking to change direction for Africa. The former rock star's presence on the commission has been interpreted as a sign that it will be uncompromising in its demands. The people involved include two African government leaders and a range of other African politicians, as well as experts from some other developed countries.  
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"politics 027.txt Butler launches attack on Blair Former civil service chief Lord Butler has criticised the way Tony Blair's government operates", accusing it of being obsessed with headlines. He also attacked the way the Iraq war was ""sold"" to the public", with important warnings on the strength of the intelligence left out. Tory leader Michael Howard said Lord Butler had given the ""most damaging testimony"" he could remember. But Downing Street said Mr Blair should be judged by results not his style. Lord Butler said Mr Blair bypassed the Cabinet and relied instead on small"," informal groups of advisers to help him make decisions. The prime minister's official spokesman sa

id the Cabinet was still used to achieve a consensus on important issues. But he added: ""You cannot", in a modern government," take every decision in Cabinet. It's just not possible." Lord Butler said the government had too much freedom to ""bring in bad Bills"" and ""to do whatever it likes"" and it relied too much on the advice of political appointees. The former cabinet secretary said in an interview with The Spectator magazine: ""I would be critical of the present government in that there is too much emphasis on selling", "there is too much central control and there is too little of what I would describe as reasoned deliberation which brings in all the arguments." Mr Howard described Lord Butler's intervention as ""very important"". ""This is from someone who was an insider at the very heart of the Blair government. ""It is certainly the most damaging testimony I can ever remember from someone in such an eminent position." Lord Butler's report earlier this year into Iraq intelligence said the government's September 2002 weapons dossier did not make clear intelligence about claims that Saddam Hussein had stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons was ""very thin"". The reason for this is that it would have weakened ministers' case for war", Lord Butler said in his Spectator interview, which was conducted by the magazine's editor, Conservative MP Boris Johnson. He said: ""When civil servants give material to ministers", they say these are the conclusions we've drawn," but we've got to tell you the evidence we've got is pretty thin. ""Similarly", if you are giving something to the United Nations and the country you should warn them." Asked why he thought the warnings were not there Lord Butler said: ""One has got to remember what the purpose of the dossier was. The purpose of the dossier was to persuade the British why the government thought Iraq was a very serious threat." When asked whether he thought the country was well-governed on the whole", he replied: ""Well. I think we are a country where we suffer very badly from Parliament not having sufficient control over the executive", and that is a very grave flaw. ""We should be breaking away from the party whip. The executive is much too free to bring in a huge number of extremely bad Bills", a huge amount of regulation and to do whatever it likes - and whatever it likes is what will get the best headlines tomorrow. ""All that is part of what is bad government in this country." Lord Butler's assessment was backed by his predecessor as Cabinet Secretary", Lord Armstrong. Lord Armstrong told BBC Two's Newsnight: ""I agree ... there doesn't appear to be the sort of informed collective political judgement brought to bear on decision-making that those affected by decisions are entitled to expect." Liberal Democrat deputy leader Menzies Campbell said he thought Lord Butler's comments were ""well justified"" and Mr Blair's style of leadership was ""corrosive of the whole system of government"". But Labour former minister Jack Cunningham accused Lord Butler of basing his comments on the first eight months of the incoming Labour administration", when he was cabinet secretary. Mr Cunningham told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: ""Taken together", Robin Butler's comments are partial," inaccurate and cannot be taken as anything other than politically biased against the Labour government."

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"politics 028.txt Lib Dems demand new inquiry A judge should look into the David Blunkett controversy as key questions remain unanswered", the Lib Dems say. Sir Alan Budd's inquiry linked the ex-home secretary to the speeding up of a visa claim by his ex-lover's nanny. But he could not say whether Mr Blunkett had treated the nanny as a special case or had used her as an example of immigration problems. Lib Dem spokesman Mark Oaten said the number of officials who had forgotten what happened was worrying. He told BBC News: ""I'm extremely concerned that 20 individuals appear to have forgotten what hap

pened or more suspiciously are not prepared to say what happened. ""That must be bad for government,"" it must be bad for public confidence in the system.""  
Mr Oaten said people would be mystified why Sir Alan's inquiry failed to uncover why processing of the visa application was speeded up. He said: ""There is a strong case for a judge-led judicial review of this because", of course," next time it happens it may not be about a nanny and their visa. It may be about something even more important than that. ""So we do need to understand what took place and who was involved.""  
The Tories criticised the Lib Dem stance", saying Mr Oaten had initially said he accepted Mr Blunkett's word unless further evidence emerged. But Lib Dem officials say Mr Oaten was speaking when an inquiry was under way and was avoiding rushing to judgement.

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"politics 029.txt UK set to cut back on embassies Nine overseas embassies and high commissions will close in an effort to save money", UK Foreign Secretary Jack Straw has announced. The Bahamas, East Timor, Madagascar and Swaziland are among the areas affected by the biggest shake-up for the diplomatic service for years. Other diplomatic posts are being turned over to local staff. Mr Straw said the move would save £6m a year to free up cash for priorities such as fighting terrorism. Honorary consuls will be appointed in some of the areas affected by the embassy closures. Nine consulates or consulates general will also be closed, mostly in Europe and America. They include Dallas in the US, Bordeaux in France and Oporto in Portugal, with local staff replacing UK representation in another 11. The changes are due to be put in place before the end of 2006, with most savings made from cutting staff and running costs. Some of the money will have to be used to fund redundancy payments. In a written statement," Mr Straw said: ""The savings made will help to underpin higher priority work in line with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's strategic priorities", including counter-proliferation, counter-terrorism," energy and climate change. ""Some of the savings will also be redeployed to strategic priority work within certain regions where we are closing posts. ""In Africa", for instance, we plan to create new jobs to cover these issues across the region, with a new post in Nairobi to help support our work on climate change," one in Nigeria to cover energy and one in Pretoria to cover regional issues more generally as well as covering Maseru and Mbabane.""  
The Foreign Office currently has about 6,100 UK-based staff. It has opened major new missions on Baghdad and Basra in Iraq," Kabul in Afghanistan and Pyongyang in North Korea since 1997 in response to what the government says are changing needs. Since 1997 10 overseas posts have been closed - excluding Wednesday's cuts - but 18 new embassies or consulates have been opened. The shake-up is aimed at helping making £86m in efficiency savings between 2005 and 2008. The chancellor has demanded all government departments make similar savings. Shadow foreign secretary Michael Ancram said there was a constant need to ensure value for money from foreign missions. ""But the government must give a far clearer reason for making the dramatic changes it has announced and must show that British commercial interests and the interests of Britons abroad will not be adversely affected", he said.

politics 030.txt Labour targets 'hardcore truants' A fresh crackdown on persistent truants in England has been launched by Education Secretary Ruth Kelly. Serial truants make up one in 13 pupils. Previous initiatives brought 40,000 pupils back to school since 1997, according to official statistics. Parenting contracts, penalty notices and fast track"" prosecution systems have been used to tackle what has been a stubborn problem. It is thought that nearly half a million children skip school each day. Tories say Labour's previous success regarding the issue came because it tackled the easy part of the pro

blem by reducing authorised absence", where parents are permitted to take children out of school. Such absences are often due to family holidays. However, serial truants avoid the classroom despite government schemes costing £885m. Those missing classes are more likely to become involved in crime as well as failing academically. Measures such as parenting contracts and penalty notices were adopted by most local education authorities last term and come into force in the remainder this term. In one local education authority alone 800 parents were warned they would receive a penalty notice unless their child's attendance improved. The tough stance paid off with just 24 issued, while attendance improved in 776 cases. Truancy has been reduced by 5% at the 128 worst hit schools through the government's Behaviour Improvement Programme. This is the equivalent of 200 pupils back in classes since September. The new measures come on top of national truancy sweeps - the sixth of which will take place on Monday. Police and education welfare officers patrol problem hotspots picking up truants and returning them to school. Held twice each year, in addition to routine local patrols, previous country-wide sweeps have apprehended 31,000 pupils dodging school. In almost 14,000 of those cases," the youngsters were accompanied by their parents. A Department for Education and Skills source said: ""Every day in school counts. ""It is clear from these figures that schools and local education authorities are now seizing the tools we have given them to improve school attendance and crack down hard on the very small numbers of pupils which account for almost half of the nation's truancy.""

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politics 031.txt Blunkett sorry over murder plan David Blunkett has apologised to MPs after the Home Office announced ""prematurely"" via press release a review of murder laws. The home secretary confirmed the review was to get under way in the wake of a Law Commission report which branded the current murder law as ""a mess"". He said the review would look at partial defences to murder", including provocation and at mandatory sentences. The Home Office has already said the review will begin next year. On Wednesday, a Home Office spokeswoman said the terms of reference for the review had not been established but it was likely to include only England and Wales. News of the review was released because it was thought Mr Blunkett would make the official announcement in a Commons debate on Wednesday. But the announcement never came, with the home secretary saying the debate had never reached that stage. Amid opposition anger," Mr Blunkett had to answer an emergency question in Parliament on Thursday. He said he had taken steps to ensure the incident was not repeated. Shadow home secretary David Davis welcomed his ""gracious apology"" and the review itself. But he argued the minister should have volunteered a formal statement instead of having to be ""dragged"" to face MPs. In its report", the Law Commission said it had found wide support among criminal justice professionals for an end to the mandatory life sentence for murder. The panel suggested different kinds of murders could be ""graded"" to recognise the seriousness of the offence. But the Home Office said mandatory life sentences would not be abolished and argued courts already had flexibility. The commission", an independent body including two judges, a senior barrister and sentencing experts," had been asked to consider reforms to the defence of provocation in murder cases. But it said its proposals were unlikely to work without a far wider review of the law. Results of a consultation exercise showed 64 respondents out of 146 - among them 21 judges - believed a mandatory life sentence for every murder was ""indefensible and should cease"". A key question was whether one category should continue to cover all types of murder from mercy killings to serial or contract killings. The commission found support for the idea of grading murderers so that the sentenc

e reflected the seriousness of the offence. But speaking after the report was published", Home Office minister Baroness Scotland said: ""Murder is the most serious of crimes and we have no intention of abolishing the mandatory life sentence. ""Where an offender is convicted of murder", the court must pass a life sentence." The commission also recommended tightening the law so that the provocation defence cannot be used in cases where someone has killed for revenge", such as a jealous husband who murders an unfaithful wife.

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"politics 032.txt Hunt demo at Labour meeting Pro-hunt supporters are set to protest at Labour's spring conference. The Countryside Alliance says it expects up to 4",000 supporters to demonstrate against the hunting ban. They have agreed to keep to a demonstration site on the other side of the River Tyne from the conference venue in Gateshead. A bid to overturn the law banning hunting with dogs in England and Wales has begun in the Court of Appeal. The ban comes into force on 18 February. The Court of Appeal is expected to rule early next week on whether the alliance's challenge has succeeded. Richard Dodd, regional director of the Countryside Alliance, said he expected between 2,000 and 4,000 supporters in Tyneside to make their protest," with hunt horns and placards. Campaigners have been asked not to bring any animals or alcohol. Mr Dodd said he did not believe there would be any repeat of the trouble which marred the pro-hunt demonstration outside Parliament in September. ""We are holding a static demonstration", just to remind Labour that we are not going away," he said. Northumbria Police said the pedestrian Millennium Bridge, by the demonstration site, will be shut if necessary. But Assistant Chief Constable David Warcup has liaised with several protest groups and said all negotiations had gone well. Fathers 4 Justice, pensioners' rights activists and Stop the War campaigners were also expected to demonstrate during the three-day conference which starts on Friday. Pro-hunt campaigners claims the 1949 Parliament Act - which extends the right of the House of Commons to overrule the House of Lords - was itself invalid because it was never passed by peers. The High Court last month ruled the act was valid and the proposed hunting ban was lawful. Pro-hunt supporters formally launched their second legal challenge to the ban in London's High Court on Thursday. The Countryside Alliance has lodged papers seeking a judicial review on human rights grounds. Animal welfare groups have welcomed the ban, many of whom have campaigned for a ban for decades saying hunting is cruel and unnecessary.

politics 033.txt Protesters plan airport challenge Campaigners against the expansion of Britain's airports have begun challenging the government's plans in the High Court. BAA's expansion of Stansted Airport in Essex by building an extra runway is one of the most fiercely opposed plans. Opponents say the £2bn cost of the new runway could not be met unless cash from Heathrow and Gatwick was used. They said this is illegal under current rules and are trying to block the government from changing legislation. BAA are also owners of the airports at Heathrow and Gatwick. They have said they cannot raise the money needed for the Stansted upgrades from current landing charges. BAA also says it has attempted to involve communities in any future airport plans. Groups challenging the plans include Stop Stansted Expansion, Heathrow anti-noise campaigners HACAN Clearskies and the London boroughs of Hillingdon and Wandsworth. Their opponents are also likely to complain there was no public consultation before an extra runway was built at Luton Airport, or when it changed take-off and landing procedures at Heathrow. If the group wins, the government's future aviation plans outlined in last year's transport White Paper could be left in ruins. The campaigners will say the government did not adequately consider the bu

ilding of new airports, such as one planned for the Isle of Sheppey east of London. Lord Hanningfield, leader of Essex County Council, told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: We are going to the High Court because we want a judge to rule there should be a proper inquiry. ""We want a judge to say there has been inadequate preparation", " consultation and thought before the government came out with its Green Paper. ""Then there could be a proper debate nationally about where this extra capacity should go." He added: ""Politicians should not decide where runways should be." The Stansted expansion", apart from the building of the new runway, would also need to include new terminal buildings to deal with the projected 50m passengers who will use it every year. The airport is the hub of many of the no-frills airlines operating in the UK. But BAA has said it has attempted to involve communities in any future airport plans. At Heathrow, Gatwick, Edinburgh and Glasgow airports, BAA launched a series of consultations on blight to properties from the proposed expansion in September 2004, which will close next week. BAA is also offering to buy noise-hit properties for an index-linked, unblighted price. At Heathrow, BAA said it was working closely with all interested parties to see how the strict environmental, air quality and noise targets for a third runway can be met. At Gatwick, the company has written to homes and business likely to be affected by any extra runway.

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"politics 034.txt Tories attack burglar 'U-turns' Tory leader Michael Howard has accused Tony Blair of performing U-turns over rules on using force against burglars. The government has ruled out amending the present law", " which allows ""reasonable force"" in self defence. Mr Howard branded the decision unacceptable", " saying: ""It is not householders who should be frightened", " it's the burglars." Home Secretary Charles Clarke said ministers had kept to their pledge to review the law. Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir John Stevens last month backed a Tory attempt to change the law so only householders using ""grossly disproportionate"" force could be prosecuted. The pressure prompted the prime minister to say the police and Crown Prosecution Service would be consulted as part of a review of the law. He told MPs: ""If we get the right response from those people", we will, of course," support a change in the law." Instead", the government has decided no change is needed but there will be a publicity campaign so people are clear they are entitled to defend themselves. On Thursday, Mr Howard told BBC Radio 4's Today programme Mr Blair had initially refused the law change," then had come round to the idea and was now backtracking again. He said: ""We've had three policy positions in three months and two U-turns. ""It's not surprising Gordon Brown told him: 'There's nothing you could say to me now that I could ever believe.'"" Mr Howard said the ""grossly disproportionate"" test matched the hurdle ministers had introduced for civil cases where burglars were claimed compensation from householders. The issue entered the public spotlight when Norfolk farmer Tony Martin was jailed for shooting dead a 16-year-old burglar in 1999 as he ran away from the farm. But the home secretary said Mr Howard was wrong to say the law was biased in favour of burglars. The barrister who had represented Mr Martin had said the rules were ""weighted overwhelmingly"" in favour of the householder", " said Mr Clarke. He said: ""The problem is there has not been enough understanding of it - that was the point Sir John Stevens was making and the prime minister was making." The new guidance would help ensure clarity on the issue", added Mr Clarke. The director of public prosecutions, Ken Macdonald, says only 11 householders or occupiers of business premises have been prosecuted in the last 15 years. Those cases included a warehouse manager who had waited for a burglar, tied him up, beat him and set him alight, he said. Tory MP Patrick Mercer's private member's bill to

change the law received a first reading in Parliament on Wednesday and goes to a full debate next month.

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"politics 035.txt Leaders meet over Turkish EU bid Tony Blair has met Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder to talk about Turkey entering the EU. The Downing Street talks covered a range of other topics ahead of an EU summit in Brussels later in the week. Mr Blair is an enthusiastic proponent of talks to bring Turkey within the recently-expanded EU. Italy and Germany also favour an early start to talks", but there is scepticism in France and elsewhere. Some are worried that Turkey's large and rapidly growing population and low average income might make integration into the EU difficult. Some are concerned that a change of government could lead to Turkey reneging on key human rights reforms it has recently enacted. And many in France would prefer Turkey to admit that World War I-era killing of Armenians constituted genocide. There are also issues in France and the Netherlands over the possible problems of integrating the first major Muslim nation into the EU. But Mr Blair and the Labour government have been the staunchest backers of Turkish accession," provided it sticks with human rights and economic reform. Mr Blair's official spokesman said: ""The prime minister has regular meetings with both of them and particularly in advance of European Councils. ""The key issue at this week's council will be that of Turkey"" but they will also discuss a range of other matters.""

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"politics 036.txt Choose hope over fear - Kennedy Voters will have a clear choice between the politics of fear and the politics of hope in the next general election", said Charles Kennedy. In his New Year message the Liberal Democrat leader said Labour and the Conservatives were united in relying on fear and ""populist scares"". He said his party was the one of hope and was ready for a 2005 poll. On the Asian tsunami he said it had been ""very heartening"" to learn of the generosity being shown by Britons. Mr Kennedy said his thoughts were with all those caught up in the disaster", which had dominated the Christmas and New Year period. At home he said many people were turning to the Liberal Democrats as they became disheartened with the politics of the other two main parties. The general election would be a three-party struggle," as the Conservative party ""fades away"" as a national force and the Liberal Democrats challenge Labour in its heartlands", he said. ""A clear division is emerging in British politics - the politics of fear versus the politics of hope. ""Labour is counting on the politics of fear", ratcheting up talk of threats, crime and insecurity. While the Conservatives are re-working their populist scares about asylum and the European 'menace', he said. He said the government was using this climate of fear to try to strip away civil liberties. It was already using detention without trial at Belmarsh Prison, ignoring a recent Law Lords judgement that this contravenes basic human rights, he said. He also criticised attempts to bring in trial without jury, plans to lower the burden of proof in some criminal trials, curbing of rights to protest, increased stop and search powers and ID card plans. He said while everyone had the right to be secure they also had the right to be protected against unfair discrimination. But at the same time", an overmighty state is a dangerous one," he said. His party instinctively"" understood the ""new liberal Britain"" which is no longer a nation with one family structure", and one colour," he said. ""We are less deferential; more inclined to think for ourselves; more open about sexuality and equality. ""Ou

r national institutions are changing too. We are no longer a nation of one church; we are a nation of many faiths. In our attitudes and the way we live our lives", "this is in many ways a liberal Britain."

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"politics 037.txt Profile: David Miliband David Miliband  
d's rapid rise through the ranks of government continues with his promotion to Cabinet Office minister. Elected in a safe Labour seat in 2001 his previous job was school standards minister - a role he won in May 2002. Prior to the last election he was a key figure in New Labour as the head of the Downing Street policy unit where he was a key member of the manifesto writing team. Seen as one of the more intellectual figures in the government", he was also working for Tony Blair in his policy unit when he was leader of the opposition. A brief glance at Mr Miliband's family background reveals an impressive socialist pedigree in the form of his father Ralph, who died in 1994. He was an eminent and influential leftwing academic. And while David Miliband is seen as a key Blair lieutenant his brother Ed is a special advisor to Chancellor Gordon Brown. Prior to working for Mr Blair, David Miliband spent time at the left-leaning Institute for Public Policy Research. He then became secretary of the Commission on Social Justice. The 39-year-old was educated at Haverstock Comprehensive before going on to Oxford to study politics, philosophy and economics. He also took an MSc in political science from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

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"politics 038.txt Borders rail link campaign rally Campaigners are to stage a rally calling for a Borders rail link which was closed in 1969 to be reopened. They will mark the 36th anniversary of the line closure", which ran from Edinburgh through the Borders and on to Carlisle, with a walk at Tweedbank. Anne Borthwick, of Campaign for Borders Rail, said reopening the Waverley Line would restore the area's prosperity. MSPs are considering the reintroduction of passenger rail services through Midlothian to the Borders. Campaigners have said that reopening the Waverley Line, which could cost up to £100m, would be a huge economic boost for the Borders. In 2000," Borders Council said the area's economy had suffered since the closure. Ms Borthwick said the lobby group was determined to keep the pressure on the Scottish Executive. ""We are hoping that many people will join us in a march to mark the 36th anniversary of the closure of the Waverley Line", she said. Campaign for Borders Rail is the biggest independent lobby group in Scotland and we have been lobbying tirelessly for the reinstatement of rail services to the Borders and eventually to Carlisle. ""We believe that it is time for the Scottish Executive to commit to the first phase of the project by pledging to fund the line between Edinburgh and Tweedbank in the first instance and then investigate extending the line in the future." Ms Borthwick said reopening the line would be a prosperous move and protect the character of the Scottish Borders. A study in 2000", which was commissioned by the executive, Scottish Borders Council, Midlothian Council and Scottish Borders Enterprise, found that a half-hourly service from Tweedbank to Edinburgh could cover its operating costs. It also found that a half-hourly service from Gorebridge to Edinburgh could cover operating costs and that a freight railway joining the West Coast Main Line at Longtown could also be reinstated.

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"politics 039.txt 'Hitler' row over Welsh arts cash An artist critical of Welsh arts funding being brought under assembly government con

trol has denied comparing the idea with dictatorships in Russia and Germany. Shani Rhys James is worried that the Arts Council of Wales may be taken over by the Welsh Assembly Government. Culture Minister Alun Pugh said it would be ""crass and ignorant"" to liken a quango review to Hitler's Germany. But Ms James emphasised she had actually said artists needed freedom. The future of the Arts Council of Wales has been in question since it was announced that most Welsh quangos would eventually be abolished. It was announced last July that three Welsh quangos", education and training body Elwa, the Wales Tourist Board and the Welsh Development Agency, would be brought under assembly government control. The Arts Council of Wales may be among the next to come under the assembly government's umbrella. But Ms James, who won the £30,000 Jerwood painting prize in 2003," said arts funding should be separate from government. Ms James told BBC Radio Wales: ""It's quite dangerous when you involve politicians because it's not like the health service and it's not like the railways. ""Free expression is absolutely vital in a democratic society. You need distance", "you do not need government interference because it could be taken the wrong way." But she said reports that she had likened the assembly government to totalitarian regimes were inaccurate. She told Good Morning Wales: ""Just to put the record straight", that business in the paper where it said I likened the government to Bolshevik Russia or Hitler's Germany," the actual quote I gave was: 'It is vital to a civilised society that we allow artists to express themselves without government control'. ""As we know from past European history", i.e. Russia and Germany in the early 20th Century," artists will go underground or leave the country or rather than compromise their expression'. ""Artists need a free voice to express themselves - they reflect a truth through their own art forms.'"" She said the assembly government was not best placed to run the arts in Wales. She added: ""It would be a momentous change and devastating to the arts. It would set the arts scene back 60 years", "because I really don't think the government has the expertise. ""If you have the National Assembly taking control", "I fear you are going to be going back to the dragons and leeks and the choirs. ""Wales has moved on. It is international now. It is not set back in How Green Was My Valley?" Responding to Ms James' criticisms", Mr Pugh said: ""The structure of unelected quangos is under review and we have made it clear that further announcements are due shortly. ""Comparing the Welsh Assembly Government to Hitler's Germany is a crass and ignorant response to a real issue about democratic accountability." Ms James", whose father was Welsh, was born in Melbourne where her parents worked in the theatre. She moved to Powys nearly 20 years ago where she works from her studio near Llangadfan. She has won a number of arts prizes including the Wales Open in 1989 and the Mostyn Open in 1991.

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"politics 040.txt Lords wrong on detainees - Straw Jack Straw has attacked the decision by Britain's highest court that detaining foreign terrorist suspects without trial breaks human rights laws. The foreign secretary said the right to life was the ""most important liberty"" and the government had a duty to protect people from terrorism. Law lords were ""simply wrong"" to imply the men were being held arbitrarily. New Home Secretary Charles Clarke vowed the nine men would remain in prison while the law was being reviewed. The House of Lords ruled by an eight to one majority in favour of appeals by the men - dealing a major blow to the government's anti-terror policy. But Mr Straw denied it amounted to a ""constitutional crisis"". He said those held had a right of appeal to the special immigration appeal tribunal and the decision to hold the suspects was upheld by that court. ""The law lords are simply wrong to imply that this is a decision to detain these people on the whim or the certifi

cate of the home secretary", " he told BBC Radio 4's Today programme. The foreign secretary insisted it was for Parliament, and not judges, to decide how best Britain could be defended against the threat of terrorism. But Liberal Democrat peer Lord Carlile, the government's independent reviewer of anti-terrorism laws, said it was possible some of the detainees could now be released. He said the Law Lords' ruling was an embarrassment"" for the government and major changes were needed to the law. The ruling came on Charles Clarke's first day as home secretary following David Blunkett's resignation. In a statement to MPs", " Mr Clarke said: ""I will be asking Parliament to renew this legislation in the New Year. ""In the meantime", " we will be studying the judgment carefully to see whether it is possible to modify our legislation to address the concerns raised by the House of Lords." " The detainees took their case to the House of Lords after the Court of Appeal backed the Home Office's powers to hold them without limit or charge. The government opted out of part of the European Convention on Human Rights concerning the right to a fair trial in order to bring in anti-terrorism legislation in response to the 11 September attacks in the US. Any foreign national suspected of links with terrorism can be detained or can opt to be deported. But those detained cannot be deported if this would mean persecution in their homeland. On Thursday", " Lord Bingham - a senior law lord - said the rules were incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights as they allowed detentions ""in a way that discriminates on the ground of nationality or immigration status"" by justifying detention without trial for foreign suspects", but not Britons. Lord Nicholls of Birkenhead, in his ruling, " said: ""Indefinite imprisonment without charge or trial is anathema in any country which observes the rule of law. In a statement", " detainee 'A' in Woodhill Prison said: ""I hope now that the government will act upon this decision", " scrap this illegal 'law' and release me and the other internees to return to our families and loved ones." " The case was heard by a panel of nine law lords rather than the usual five because of the constitutional importance of the case. Solicitor Gareth Pierce", who represents eight of the detainees," claimed the detention had driven four of the detainees to ""madness""", saying two were being held in Broadmoor hospital.

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"politics 041.txt Profile: David Blunkett Before he resigned the position of home secretary on Wednesday", David Blunkett had been in charge of a substantial body of government portfolios including race, policing and immigration. His responsibilities in running the Home Office included civil emergencies, security, terrorism and expenditure. Named home secretary after the 2001 general election, Mr Blunkett had seen the focus on his office intensify. The attacks on the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001 heightened concern for security and immigration in particular. A Labour loyalist from a working class background Mr Blunkett, 57, had been unafraid of pushing for tough changes to Labour policy. Recently the issue of identity cards had provoked controversy with questions raised over cost and invasions of civil liberties. Mr Blunkett was also at the centre of a humiliating scandal involving the former immigration minister Beverly Hughes. Having received his full backing, Ms Hughes was forced to resign in April over abuses in the visa processing system," which she claimed to be unaware of. Mr Blunkett's own comments on immigration had prompted concern - he told refugees from Afghanistan and Kosovo to ""get back home"" to start rebuilding their countries. And he also urged people from ethnic minorities to develop a ""sense of belonging"" in Britain", telling them to speak English at home. Avoiding political correctness is second nature to the former home secretary," who spurns a metropolitan elite and ""airy fairy libertarians"" and

earlier in the year coined the phrase ""liberati""", as an amalgam of ""glitterati"" and ""liberal""". Yet in January of this year he courted further controversy over his seemingly liberal reclassification of cannabis", from a Grade B to Grade C status drug . Before the recent furore, Mr Blunkett had always appeared more interested in politics than his personal life. Mr Blunkett told the Daily Telegraph in 2001 that he continued to wear his wedding ring, in spite of being a divorcee," as ""a useful way of ensuring that people don't casually think I am available"". He added: ""I am not available because I am just getting on with the job."" Mr Blunkett entered Parliament for Sheffield Brightside in 1987", after first contesting the Sheffield Hallam seat in 1974. He is one of very few blind MPs, and was the first to reach the front bench and the Cabinet. His relaxed performances - with his guide dog by his side - at the despatch box, in the Labour Party's National Executive," and on the conference platform made it easy to forget his disability. Mr Blunkett himself described not being able to see as simply ""an inconvenience"". Using Braille for speeches", and briefed by his officials on tape, he also has a sharp tongue at times, and a pragmatic approach to politics. Mr Blunkett was schooled in Sheffield where he led the city council for seven years before entering the Commons. He chaired the Labour Party nationally, and was a unifying force in the 80s and 90s, shadowing health and education. In Tony Blair's first government Mr Blunkett was put in charge of education and employment, where he won big increases in funds for schools, while insisting on improved standards of literacy and numeracy. He was prepared to stand up to the teaching unions - which sometimes heckled his speeches - and his policy of charging university students for tuition fees was not popular. In the Labour Party he has been regarded as a loyal colleague, a conciliator who avoids factions, and a man whose humour and determination make him widely popular. There have been wry smiles as well. In 1999, his then guide dog Lucy threw up in the Chamber during the speech of his Tory opponent. Lucy was replaced by her half-sister, Sadie, a black Labrador-curly-coated retriever cross, in 2003 after nearly a decade by Mr Blunkett's side.

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"politics 042.txt Strike threat over pension plans Millions of public service workers could strike if ministers scrap their final salary pension scheme and make them work longer", warn union leaders. The Cabinet Office has confirmed it is reviewing the current pension system, prompting unions representing 4.5m workers to threaten united action. They believe the plans include raising the mandatory retirement age for public service workers from 60 to 65. The government says unions will be consulted before any changes are made. It is thought the proposed overhaul, due on Thursday," could mean pensions could be based on a ""career average"" salary. For each year served", staff currently get one eightieth of their highest salary in the final three years. Ministers will be anxious to avoid mass strike action in the lead-up to the next general election, which is widely expected next May. In a statement on Sunday, the Cabinet Office said it was reviewing the Civil Service Pension Scheme," and hoped to announce proposals soon. ""Unions will of course be consulted about any proposed changes. ""Public sector pension schemes need to remain affordable and sustainable. People are living longer and pensions are getting more expensive. ""To maintain the long-term affordability of our pension scheme", the government announced in its Green Paper on pensions that pension age would rise from 60 to 65." On Monday", Tony Blair's official spokesman declined to say whether the prime minister backed the plans. He said: ""What's important is that there's a process going on", it's out for consultation at the moment," let's wait for that process to complete itself." There is already widespread anger over the cha

ncellor's plans to get rid of more than 100",000 civil servants. Now public service unions are united against the plans and the Trades Union Congress is discussing the issue next Monday. Dave Prentis, general secretary of Unison," said changes to pension provisions for workers in the public sector would mean they had to pay in more but would still face a raw deal. ""Members working in the NHS or for local government have never had high pay or city bonuses", but they could look forward to a decent pension - now all that is being taken away, he said. What really riles me is the breathtaking hypocrisy of MPs who recently voted themselves the best pension scheme in Europe," but say they can't afford it for anyone else. ""This is a position that Unison cannot accept and will oppose. It will lead to conflict between Unison and the government", if not this year then next." Mr Prentis said workers did not want to go on strike and called for talks between unions and the highest level of government. Mark Serwotka", from the Public and Commercial Services union said there should be a co-ordinated one day strike unless there was a government rethink. The Fire Brigades Union said the government was planning to cut ill health retirement benefits for firefighters and other measures to chip away at pensions. Pensions officer Paul Woolsteholmes said: ""The pensions of millions of public sector workers are under threat - apart from MPs and judges who have the most generous pensions arrangements in the country.""

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"politics 043.txt Parties warned over 'grey vote' Politic  
al parties cannot afford to take older UK voters for granted in the coming election", says Age Concern. A survey for the charity suggests 69% of over-55s say they always vote in a general election compared with just 17% of 18 to 24 year olds. Charity boss Gordon Lishman said if a ""decisive blow"" was struck at the election it would be by older voters who could be relied on to turn out. A total of 3",028 adults aged 18 or over were interviewed for the study. Mr Lishman urged the next government to boost state pension. He also called for measures to combat ageism and build effective public services to ""support us all in an ageing society"". ""Older people want to see manifesto commitments that will make a difference to their lives", Mr Lishman said. Political parties must wake up to the fact that unless they address the demands and concerns of older people they will not keep or attract their vote." In the survey carried out by ICM Research", 14% of people aged between 18 and 34 said they never voted in general elections. Among the over-65s, 70% said they would be certain to vote in an immediate election," compared with 39% of people under 55. Age Concern says the over-55s are ""united around"" key areas of policy they want the government to focus on. For 57%", pensions and the NHS were key issues, while the economy was important for a third, and tax was a crucial area for 25%.

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"politics 044.txt MPs quiz aides over royal income Senior officials at the two bodies generating private income for the Queen and Prince of Wales are to be questioned by MPs. Aides from the Duchy of Lancaster and Duchy of Cornwall will appear before the Commons Public Accounts Committee. It has been reported they could be questioned about Prince Charles' spending on Camilla Parker Bowles. But BBC correspondent Peter Hunt said they are not responsible for how money is spent and may be unable to answer. Duchy officials", who will appear before the committee on Monday, are only responsible for generating money. The Duchy of Lancaster provides the Queen's private income, while the Duchy of Cornwall provides Prince Charles' annual income. The Duchy of Cornwall is a 140,000-acre estate across 25 counties, and also includes residential propert

ies, shops, offices, stocks and shares. It was set up in 1337 by King Edward II I to provide income for successive heirs to the throne. It covers the cost of the prince's public and private life - neither Charles, nor William and Harry, receive taxpayers' money from the Civil List. However, the Prince of Wales did receive over £4m from government departments and grants-in-aid in 2003-4. The dynasty last year generated almost £12m. The prince has voluntarily paid income tax - currently 40% - since 1993.

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"politics 045.txt Tory leader 'cleared' over work Scottish Conservative Party leader David McLetchie claims he has been cleared over a potential conflict of interest. The Edinburgh MSP earns up to £30,000 a year from the law firm Tods Murray, where he is a partner. Mr McLetchie said he has taken advice from Holyrood officials about what details he needs to declare. He was advised to exercise judgement to avoid the perception of a conflict and said he had done nothing wrong. As an MSP, Mr McLetchie signed a parliamentary motion questioning expansion plans for Edinburgh Airport. It then emerged Tods Murray has a client which opposes the development. Mr McLetchie then sought guidance from the standards committee to clarify his position. BBC Scotland's political correspondent Glenn Campbell said no complaint had been made against Mr McLetchie," but questions were raised about his dual role. Glenn said MSPs are advised to guard against a conflict of interests and a perception of a conflict. Mr McLetchie said: ""I'm quite clear that no conflicts of interest arise in my case," that the judgement I took has effectively been vindicated when you look at the advice that has been given to me and that these allegations are unfounded." He said nothing had changed in respect of his work with the law firm and it was a matter he would have to discuss with the other partners at Tods Murray. ""The firm and I have a very good working relationship and we have done for the last six years", said Mr McLetchie. I don't suppose I'll be working forever as a lawyer or a politician. I deserve to retire from both," but I'm not willing to put time limits on them.""

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"politics 046.txt Blair and Blunkett Sheffield trip Tony Blair is to join Home Secretary David Blunkett in a visit to Sheffield on Thursday. Mr Blunkett's conduct is being looked at to establish whether he abused his position in relation to his ex-lover. The Parliamentary standards watchdog is looking at his decision to give Kimberly Quinn free rail tickets. He is also being investigated over the visa application of Mrs Quinn's ex-nanny. The visit to Sheffield will be seen as a show of unity by Mr Blair. On Wednesday during Prime Minister's Questions", Tory leader Michael Howard went on the offensive over comments Mr Blunkett is alleged to have made in a new biography. He is understood to have made a series of criticisms about his Cabinet colleagues from the prime minister down. Mr Howard said Mr Blunkett had complained he had inherited a ""giant mess"" when he took over at the Home Office from Jack Straw", now foreign secretary. The Tory leader went on: ""He doesn't stop there: he thinks the culture secretary's weak; he thinks the trade secretary doesn't think strategically and he thinks the education secretary hasn't developed as expected. ""He says the prime minister doesn't like being told the truth and the chancellor - no doubt the prime minister will agree with this - is a bully."" Mr Blair retorted voters remembered the record of a government and no comments by politicians. The home secretary has already admitted he was wrong to give the two first class tickets", given to him as an MP," to Mrs Quinn and has since paid the £180 back. He has apologised for ""a genuine mistake"" and says he will write t

o the watchdog to answer further questions. The rail tickets are meant to help MPs' spouses get between Westminster and their constituencies. After his inquiry", Parliamentary watchdog Sir Philip Mawer will report to the Commons Standards and Privileges Committee, the group of MPs who will recommend to the full House of Commons what action - if any - should be taken against Mr Blunkett. The separate inquiry by ex-senior civil servant Sir Alan Budd is investigating whether the home secretary helped fast-track a bid by Mrs Quinn's nanny, Leoncia Casalme, to stay in the UK. Last week, Mr Blunkett won the first round of a High Court battle with Mrs Quinn for access to her son. Mr Blunkett declined to comment about his own position, saying the inquiry was under way and the High Court had stressed his right to privacy did not affect his job in improving security and stability. Downing Street has stressed Mr Blair's support for the home secretary.

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"politics 047.txt Student 'fee factor' played down A rise has been recorded in the number of students from south of the border applying to universities in Scotland. However", Lifelong Learning Minister Jim Wallace said that this would not result in Scottish students missing out. Applications from England and Wales rose by 17% between January 2005 and the previous year, up 23,600 to 27,700. Fears had been expressed that a flood of ""fee refugees"" would try to avoid top-up fees of up to £3",000 a year being introduced in England. In June last year, Mr Wallace announced proposals to increase tuition fees for English students studying in Scotland by £2,000 in an attempt to prevent a cross-border flood, although no figure has yet been agreed. Legislation to introduce the top-up fees in England is not due to take effect until autumn 2006 and students who start before then will not have to pay additional fees at all. The figures were made public on Thursday by admissions service Ucas. Universities Scotland, which represents university principals, claimed that an increase in applications did not amount to Scottish students being squeezed out. Director, David Caldwell, said some students could be applying in an attempt to avoid the possible increase in annual fees at English universities," but this was not a major factor. He told BBC Radio Scotland's Good Morning Scotland programme: ""The reason people are opting for Scottish universities is that they are perceived as being of very high quality",, they offer very attractive courses and Scotland is seen as a very attractive place to study. ""They know that when they take up their studies in 2006 they will be hit by top-up fees if they are going to a university in England and that may be part of the reason why the numbers coming to Scotland are so inflated. ""However",, it does not mean that we will see thousands of additional students from England studying here." Mr Wallace agreed and said the figures had to be looked at in context. He explained that when applications were translated into acceptances", the number was not huge - an additional figure of about 200. Also, the picture was further blurred by the fact that applications from Wales, where there are no plans for top-up fees, have also risen," by 19%. Mr Wallace said: ""Accepting students from all parts of the world does show the high regard in which Scottish higher education is held",, not just in Britain. ""We want to make sure that when students are making their choice",, they do so on the nature of the course and not because they are under some sort of financial pressure to go to Scotland. ""We do not want to have a situation where it becomes impossible for Scottish students to get places at Scottish universities because we are seen as the cheap option. ""Very often the quality of the university experience is enhanced by the fact there are students coming from a wide range of backgrounds so it would be wrong to go the other way and start excluding students.""

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politics 048.txt Anglers 'could face prosecution' Angler  
s and fishermen could find themselves prosecuted under plans to crack down on a  
nimal cruelty", a committee of MPs has warned. Sloppy wording of the draft ani  
mal welfare bill could leave anglers facing court even though it was not intend  
ed," the environment select committee said. The MPs said they were ""concerne  
d"" the government had not consulted directly on its plans to improve animal we  
lfare. They raised complex and emotive issues which needed to be resolved"," MP  
s said. They called for a ""cast-iron guarantee"" that the government consults  
on any plans to regulate animal industries like pet fairs and game bird rearin  
g. The draft bill seeks to modernise and improve animal welfare legislation","  
and intends to protect ""kept animals"" and ""companion"" animals by setting up  
a ""duty of care"". In addition to maintaining existing cruelty offences"," it  
creates an offence of neglect by keepers who fail to protect the animals for wh  
om they are responsible. The bill would allow animal welfare officers to interv  
ene to prevent harm to an animal as well as outlawing ""mutilation"" of animals  
- unless it can be demonstrated to be in the animal's best interest. The envir  
onment select committee made 101 recommendations after hearing evidence from 51  
organisations and individuals. One was a call to amend the bill so that prosecu  
tions against those engaged in fishing were not inadvertently encouraged - even  
if they were to later fail. ""We accept that neither commercial fishing nor rec  
reational angling should fall within the remit of the of the draft bill and we  
therefore support the government's intention to exempt fishing as an activit  
y."" But the committee said an amendment was needed to ensure cases were not b  
rought. ""However", in exempting fishing, the government should be careful to e  
nsure that those persons who catch fish are not given 'carte blanche' to inflict  
unnecessary suffering in the course of pursuing this activity," the committee  
added. The committee also said some legal protections for animals were downgrad  
ed by the bill, such as the law on abandonment of animals which would be signif  
icantly weakened"". MPs urged the government to redraft clauses relating to the  
prosecution of cruelty offences. This was because as it stood the draft bill wo  
uld allow certain acts that should be prosecuted - such as unnecessary sufferin  
g caused to an animal through neglect", or unnecessary mental suffering - to g  
o unpunished. Committee chairman Michael Jack said: ""Any change in the law as  
it affects animals always arouses powerful emotions and great public interest.  
""This draft bill is no exception. My committee welcomes the development of an  
approach to animal welfare which doesn't just wait for a problem to occur but e  
nables action to be taken to protect animals before irreversible suffering take  
s place."" But Mr Jack said the bill ""very much had the feel of a 'work in pro  
gress'", and urged the government to guarantee that ""an obligation to consult  
will be enshrined in law"" before it extended legislative plans to areas such a  
s pet fairs", circuses and game bird farms. ""The government must work hard to  
take the rough edges of its initial proposals before the bill is introduced to  
Parliament", he added.

politics 049.txt Clarke to press on with ID cards New Hom  
e Secretary Charles Clarke has vowed to plough on with plans for ID cards despi  
te a call for him to pause for thought"" from Charles Kennedy. The Lib Dem lea  
der said David Blunkett's resignation was a ""good opportunity"" to question wh  
ether the legislation was necessary. But Mr Clarke said he had supported the pl  
ans when Mr Blunkett argued for them in Cabinet and he supported them now. ""ID  
cards are a means to creating a more secure society", he said. Mr Clarke ackno  
wledged how the measure was introduced remained a matter for debate but he said  
legislation had already been significantly influenced"" by the recommendations

of the Commons' home affairs committee. The issue would be debated in Parliament next Monday as scheduled he insisted. Earlier Mr Kennedy", "whose party opposes the ID cards plan as ""deeply flawed"" said with Christmas coming up the new home secretary had time to think again. He told BBC Radio 4's Today programme that Mr Clarke had been reported to be less enthusiastic about ID cards than his predecessors. ""Wouldn't this be a good opportunity for a new home secretary", a new broom," to sweep clean in this respect and why do we need this legislation in the first place?"" he asked. Earlier this week the Tories announced they would back the government's plans although Michael Howard was forced to deny the shadow cabinet was split over its decision. They had decided to support the plans as the police said they would help fight terror", crime and illegal immigration. Among those reported to have serious reservations over the strategy were senior shadow cabinet members David Davis, Oliver Letwin and Tim Yeo. The chairman of the Bar Council," Guy Mansfield QC has warned there is a real risk that people on the ""margins of society"" would be driven into the hands of extremists. ""What is going to happen to young Asian men when there has been a bomb gone off somewhere? They are going to be stopped. If they haven't [ID cards] they are going to be detained." The Home Office says people will pay £85 for a passport and ID card together or a undecided fee for a separate ID card. The first cards would be issued in 2008 and when he was introducing the bill", Mr Blunkett suggested Parliament could decide in 2011 or 2012 whether to make it compulsory for everybody to own the cards, although not to carry them. The new bill will also create new criminal offences on the possession of false identity documents. And there will be civil penalties including a fine of up to £1,000 fine for people who fail to say they have moved house or changed other details and of up to £2,500 for failing to sign up if the cards become compulsory. The scheme will be overseen by a new independent watchdog.

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"politics 050.txt Scots smoking ban details set out Smok e-free areas will save lives and improve Scotland's health", First Minister Jack McConnell has insisted. He told the Scottish Parliament on Wednesday that a ""comprehensive ban"" on smoking in public places would be introduced by the spring of 2006. Mr McConnell said the country's health rates were ""lamentable"" not least because of smoking. He said fines of up to £2",500 would be levied on employers and licences would be removed for non-compliance. Earlier, the Scottish Executive considered a range of options but agreed unanimously to introduce an all-out ban on smoking in public places. In a statement to parliament, Mr McConnell said that the licensed trade would be asked to join an expert committee prior to the ban coming into force. The health arguments far outweighed lingering public disquiet about a complete ban and claims by the licensed trade that jobs would be lost," he told MSPs. He said there would be an international marketing campaign whereby ""tourists can enjoy smoke free environment and the sick man of Europe image becomes a thing of the past""." There are still national habits which hold us back - the time has come for this parliament to accelerate improvements in health", he declared. Health rates are lamentable because of a lack of exercise, drugs abuse," excessive drinking and over-eating. ""They all make us one of the most unhealthy countries in Europe", and too many smoke. ""It is clear that Scotland must not be held back by poor public health - the single biggest contribution devolved government can make is to reduce the toll of preventable death caused by smoking." The legislation will be introduced as part of the Health Service (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill", which will be considered by parliament before Christmas. Main points of the plan: - A comprehensive ban on smoking in all enclosed public places in Scotland - The legislat

ion will be enforced by environmental health and local licensing officers - Licensees or employers who fail to enforce the law will face fines up to a maximum of £2,500 - Licensees who persistently refuse to comply with the law will face the ultimate sanction of losing their liquor licence - A system of issuing fixed penalty notices for those individuals who break the law will be examined - Individuals who persistently break the law will face a maximum fine of £1,000. Mr McConnell claimed there was evidence that smoking bans had helped smokers to either give up quicker or smoke less. He said there had been falling cigarette sales of 13% in New York and 16% in Ireland. Mr McConnell added that there had been a near nine per cent rise in tax revenues from New York bars and restaurants and, in Ireland, only a one point three per cent volume sales fall, where they were declining before the ban. The afternoon announcement, following a cabinet meeting on Wednesday morning, won broad support from opposition parties. The Scottish National Party's Holyrood leader, Nicola Sturgeon, " welcomed the move but added that the public should be consulted as the clock ticked towards the ban date. She said: ""The time has come for a ban on smoking in public places. ""There is evidence a ban can cut deaths from passive smoking and makes it easier for the 70% of smokers who desperately want to give up the habit. ""But we must also recognise that some people have concerns and reservations - there are people who are yet to be persuaded." The Scottish Conservative Party leader", David McLetchie, " questioned what would be exempted from the ban. He was keen to know if inmates in Scottish prisons would continue to be allowed to smoke. Mr McLetchie asked: ""Would it not be ironic and perhaps entirely typical of the first minister's brave new Scotland that the criminals can be smokers but the smokers will become criminals?"" The Scottish Green Party's health spokeswoman", Eleanor Scott, " said she was pleased Scotland would be following the ""success stories of New York and Ireland"". She believed the majority of people in Scotland wanted to go out without having to breathe in harmful tobacco smoke.

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"politics 051.txt MPs criticise child access system Divorced parents seeking access to their children are often disadvantaged by the legal system", MPs have said. The Constitutional Affairs Select Committee said parents with custody could exploit delays in the system to stop former partners gaining access. Courts should be used as a last resort, but where they are, their orders should be enforced more rigorously," MPs said. But they rejected the claim made by some campaign groups that there should be a legal presumption of equal access. Currently the presumption is that the interests of the child are paramount. ""An arbitrary 'template' imposed on all families", whatever the needs of the child, would relegate the welfare of individual children to a secondary position, the MPs said. They said the law should be changed to require family courts specifically to take account of the importance of sustaining the relationship between the child and the non-resident parent in contested cases. This would reassert the rights of non-resident parents to contact with their children, as well as the rights of children to contact with both their parents," while maintaining sufficient flexibility to cope with issues of safety""," they said. Delays in court hearings and the inability to effectively enforce court orders allowed ""a new 'status quo' arrangement for the children to become established by default""," they said. ""Although the courts rigorously avoid conscious bias"," there are considerable grounds for accepting that non-resident parents are frequently disadvantaged by the system as it is administered at present. ""Given the strong animosity between the parties which is common in contested family cases"," we find it hard to believe that tactical delay is not sometimes

used to the advantage of resident parents."" Committee chairman Alan Beith said the five-month inquiry had been a ""complex and emotive"" one. ""At the moment", far too many contact and residency cases are being dealt with by the courts when they could be better resolved through professional mediation and negotiation, he said. This situation has to change. The court system should only be used as a last resort," where mediation and negotiation have completely broken down or where issues of abuse or domestic violence need to be dealt with. ""This will help to reduce delays and improve the lives of many children across the country.""

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"politics 052.txt Nuclear strike 'key terror risk' The UK and US must realise they cannot prevent all terror attacks and should focus on making sure they are not nuclear strikes", says a top academic. Amitai Etzioni, a key influence on New Labour thinking," says the US emphasis on an ""Axis of Evil"" is misplaced. The priority should instead be on ""failing states""", including Russia and Pakistan, who cannot properly control their nuclear material, he argues. His report demands a major overhaul of world rules on nuclear technology. Professor Etzioni was a senior adviser to President Carter's White House and is the guru behind communitarian ideas which influenced the development of Blairite Third Way politics. In a report for the Foreign Policy Centre think tank," he says a nuclear terrorist attack is the main danger faced by many nations. ""Attempts to defend against it by hardening domestic targets cannot work", nor can one rely on pre-emption by taking the war to the terrorists before they attack, he says. That means there is an urgent need to curb terrorists' access to nuclear arms and the materials used to make them. We must recognise that we will be unable to stop all attacks and thus ensure terrorists will not be able to strike with weapons of mass destruction," Prof Etzioni continues. He suggests so-called rogue states such as Iran and North Korea are less of a problem than failed and failing states""", which are more likely to be a source of nuclear materials. He names Russia as the ""failing state"" of gravest concern as it has an estimated 90% of all fissile material outside America. And he is also worried about Pakistan after one of its top nuclear scientists", Abdul Qadeer Khan, admitted leaking nuclear secrets. Prof Etzioni criticises the US for overlooking those reports," suggesting it was done in return for Pakistani help in hunting Osama Bin Laden. ""This is like letting a serial killer go because he promised to catch some jay-walkers", he says.

- Upgrading security at nuclear arms stores as a temporary measure

- Creating a new Global Safety Authority to tackle nuclear terrorism, using the intelligence links established in the wake of 11 September

- backed by the United Nations' authority

- Encouraging, pressuring and using all available means"" to persuade countries to switch their highly-enriched uranium for less dangerous less-enriched uranium

- When possible", taking fissile material away from failing states to safe havens where it can be blended down or converted

- Compelling ""failing and rogue states""", and eventually all states, to destroy their nuclear bombs.

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"politics 053.txt Russian ex-spy on hunger strike An ex-Russian intelligence officer who risked his life spying for MI6 is entering the seventh week of a hunger strike near 10 Downing Street. Viktor Makarov",50, claims he has been betrayed by the British authorities," who promised he would live like an ""average British citizen"". But despite a £65",000 settlement four years ago," he says he has been denied defector status and a decent pension. Other ex-Russian spies have been given civil service pensions. ""Hunger strike is

a weapon of last resort. It can work only with determination and of course the realisation of the righteousness of your case - without that it will not work", "Mr Makarov told the BBC's Newsnight programme. Since I came to this country two batches of promises have been made and broken one after the other." "Oleg Gordievsky", a senior KGB officer who became a secret agent for the British, "said he was ""very happy"" with the way the government have treated him since him since he defected in 1985. Commenting on Mr Makarov's case", "he said: ""The British state is not a fat cow - it is impossible to come here and demand give me more money every week." "But Mr Makarov's case has been backed by David Kahn - a former Yale historian", and a leading expert on code-breaking," who has confirmed his information was valuable to the Western allies. ""I believe the government of the United Kingdom", which in that respect was probably the same as most other power authorities - took the information that Victor Makarov had, wrung him dry and left him to hang out in the cold," Mr Kahn said. Mr Makarov joined the KGB in 1970s Russia, as an idealistic 20 year-old. One of his fellow pupils at intelligence school was Vladimir Putin. At KGB headquarters in Moscow, he was posted to the secret 16th directorate - which decoded intercepted diplomatic traffic from the West. By the 1980s he had risen to the rank of senior lieutenant - and was privy to the thoughts of Western powers. But he had become deeply disenchanted with the Soviet regime - fuelled by its repression both at home and in Poland. Through his English teacher, he made an approach to MI6 - and then began passing secrets to the British intelligence service. He spied for MI6 for two years before being betrayed by a friend and sent to Perm 35 - a Soviet hard labour camp in the Arctic circle. Within a week of his release in 1992, he made contact with the British authorities he'd been spying for, who arranged a meeting between him and an MI6 agent in Latvia. He was given a false passport, and he says, promised that he would be given the chance to live like an average UK citizen. But after arriving in London 13 years ago, he feels this promise has not been fulfilled. After long periods of living in bedsits, with deteriorating health, four years ago he took legal action against the government - and settled for £65,000 to buy a small house. But he says he will remain on hunger strike until he receives a decent pension and the right to work, something he feels he has been denied because the authorities do not trust him. Government sources told the BBC they had reached a final settlement with the former spy, which he has been able to appeal to security and intelligence tribunals.

politics 054.txt Lib Dems 'to target stamp duty' The Liberal Democrats are promising to raise the stamp duty threshold if they win the general election, in a bid to court first-time house buyers. Vince Cable, the party's Treasury spokesman, said raising the threshold to £150,000 would prevent over 400,000 home-buyers from paying the tax. He said first-time buyers were being squeezed out" of the housing market. The Labour party said the Liberal Democrats needed to explain how they would pay for the plan. The plan forms part of a wider Lib Dems policy to encourage first time buyers and those on lower incomes into the market. Under the proposals", the average saving for a new buyer would be more than £1,000, according to Mr Cable. ""First time buyers are being squeezed out of the housing market not only by higher house prices but also by being swept into the stamp duty net", "he said. By failing to uprate the stamp duty threshold Gordon Brown has hit first time buyers and those on low incomes the hardest. ""By pledging to increase the threshold to £150,000, the Liberal Democrats will make it possible for many first time buyers to buy a property without facing this tax." "Paul Boateng MP", Labour's Chief Secretary to the Treasury, "said: ""The Lib Dems' sums don't add up. ""They can have no credibility until they can say how they would fund their ever growing list of tax and spending commitments." "Mr Cable will publish his ""Alternative Budget"" on Monday.

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"politics 055.txt Kelly trails new discipline power Teach  
ers could get more powers to remove unruly pupils from classes under a ""zero tolerance"" drive", " Education Secretary Ruth Kelly has suggested. Ms Kelly tol  
d the BBC progress had been made against severely disruptive children but paren  
ts were still worried about lower level problems. The minister also confirmed s  
he received ""spiritual support"" from the Catholic movement Opus Dei. But she  
denied her faith meant she would refuse key government jobs. The Conservatives  
have made school discipline one of their five priority areas in the run-up to t  
he next general election. Ms Kelly is expected to announce her plans on the iss  
ue in the next fortnight. She told BBC One's Breakfast with Frost: ""It is real  
ly important to support head teachers and teachers in tackling disruption in th  
e classroom. ""We have made huge progress on the really difficult cases", " the  
pupils who have severely disruptive behaviour. ""But quite rightly what teache  
rs are concerned about and what parents are concerned about is that this lower  
level disruption that goes on in the classroom now is tackled. ""I would like t  
o see the teacher being able to remove disruptive children from the classroom c  
ompletely and have either alternative provision within the school or indeed off  
the school and may be working together with other schools in a particular area  
to provide that provision." " It is thought the plans may distinguish between ex  
cluding pupils from schools and taking them out of mainstream classes. Head tea  
chers can currently exclude pupils who commit or threaten violence in school",  
who sexually abuse pupils or other people, who sell illegal drugs or who have p  
ersistent and malicious disruptive behaviour. Ms Kelly entered the Cabinet last  
month in the reshuffle forced by the resignation of the then Home Secretary Dav  
id Blunkett. Her links to Opus Dei," which means ""Work of God"" in Latin", hav  
e provoked controversy. Critics say the organisation, which adheres strictly t  
o Catholic teachings, is secretive and elitist but its members reject such clai  
ms. Asked if she was a member of the group," Ms Kelly said: ""I do have spiritu  
al support from Opus Dei and that is right. ""But those are private spiritual m  
atters and I'm sure you'll respect that politicians are entitled to a private l  
ife." " She categorically denied reports that her beliefs on issues such as cont  
rception would make her refuse to serve as a health or international developme  
nt minister. Her collective responsibility as a Cabinet minister meant she also  
took responsibility for policies in those areas", she argued. The government h  
as yet to issue its official response to the Tomlinson review," which recommend  
ed absorbing existing exam qualifications into a diploma. Ms Kelly said reforms  
should build on GCSEs and A-levels. Her comments did not impress Tory shadow ed  
ucation secretary Tim Collins. ""Ruth Kelly wants to ditch the Tomlinson report  
on exam structures but has absolutely no idea what to put in its place", he sai  
d. She also talks of improving discipline but cannot make her mind up how. This  
is an all talk agenda that lets down children," teachers and parents." "  
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"politics 056.txt Citizenship event for 18s touted Citize  
nship ceremonies could be introduced for people celebrating their 18th birthda  
y", " Charles Clarke has said. The idea will be tried as part of an overhaul of  
the way government approaches ""inclusive citizenship"" particularly for ethnic  
minorities. A pilot scheme based on ceremonies in Australia will start in Octob  
er. Mr Clarke said it would be a way of recognising young people reaching their  
voting age when they also gain greater independence from parents. Britain's you  
ng black and Asian people are to be encouraged to learn about the nation's heri  
tage as part of the government's new race strategy which will also target speci

fic issues within different ethnic minority groups. Officials say the home secretary wants young people to feel they belong and to understand their ""other cultural identities"" alongside being British. The launch follows a row about the role of faith schools in Britain. On Monday school inspection chief David Bell, " accused some Islamic schools of failing to teach pupils about their obligations to British society. The Muslim Council of Britain said Ofsted boss Mr Bell's comments were ""highly irresponsible"". The Home Office started work on its Community Cohesion and Race Equality Strategy last year and the outcome", launched on Wednesday, is called 'Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society'. It is aimed at tackling racism, exclusion," segregation and the rise in political and religious extremism. ""It represents a move away from the one-size-fits-all approach to focus on specifics within cultural groups", said a Home Office spokesman. It is not right to say that if you are from a black or ethnic minority group you must be disadvantaged." The spokesman highlighted specific issues that affect particular communities - for example people of south Asian origin tend to suffer from a high incidence of heart disease. ""It is about drilling down and focusing on these sorts of problems", the spokesman added. Launching the initiative Mr Clarke said enormous progress had been made on race issues in recent years. He added: But while many members of black and minority ethnic communities are thriving, some may still find it harder to succeed in employment or gain access to healthcare," education or housing. ""This strategy sets out the government's commitment to doing more to identify and respond to the specific needs of minorities in our society." Some 8% of the UK population described themselves as coming from a non-white ethnic minority in the 2001 Census. The Downing Street Strategy Unit in 2003 said people from Indian and Chinese backgrounds were doing well on average", often outperforming white people in education and earnings. But those of Pakistani, Bangladeshi and black Caribbean origin were significantly more likely to be unemployed and earn less than whites, it said. The Home Office wants more initiatives which try to promote a sense of belonging by encouraging young people to take part in voluntary work. The programmes are designed to support the citizenship lessons already taking place in schools.

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"politics 057.txt England children's tsar appointed The first children's commissioner for England has been appointed. Great Ormond Street Hospital professor of child health", Al Aynsley-Green, was chosen by the government and will start the £100,000-a-year job immediately. He will oversee a £2.5m annual budget and have the power to look into ""any matter relating to the interests and well-being of children"". Prof Aynsley-Green has also been the national clinical director for children in the Department of Health. He promised to make sure that children's opinions ""count"". ""I will be drawing on my experience of working with children and young people to help ensure that those with the power to improve children's lives do live up to their responsibilities. ""I want all children and young people to know that they can approach me to discuss any matter that affects them", knowing that I will value their opinion." Education Secretary Ruth Kelly said Prof Aynsley-Green would ""strengthen the voice of children and young people"". Prof Aynsley-Green was a lecturer at Oxford University", trained at Guy's Hospital Medical School, University of London; Oriel College," Oxford; and in Switzerland. He is described as ""a proud grandfather"" of four. Scotland", Wales and Northern Ireland already have children's commissioners.

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"politics 058.txt EU China arms ban 'to be lifted' The EU embargo on arms exports to China is likely to be lifted in the next six months despite US objections", UK Foreign Secretary Jack Straw has said. The 15-year-old ban was imposed in the aftermath of China's crackdown on protesters in Tiananmen Square. Mr Straw told a Commons select committee human rights concerns over China remained. But he said it was wrong to put China under the same embargo as countries such as Zimbabwe and Burma. In December, the EU pledged to work towards lifting the ban but said it was not ready to do so yet. The EU's move was welcomed at the time by Beijing," which described the embargo as a ""product of the Cold War"". German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and French President Jacques Chirac have repeatedly called for the embargo to be lifted. Britain has been more cautious on the issue"," but on Wednesday Mr Straw said he also wanted it to end. ""I have long understood China's argument", that to lump them in with, say, Burma and Zimbabwe is not appropriate and I don't think it is," he told the joint committee on Strategic Export Controls. He said it is more likely than not"" that the ban would be lifted before Britain takes over the presidency of the EU from Luxembourg in July. But he said an EU code of conduct would prevent an increase in the number of arms being exported to the country. ""If it is lifted we will end up with as effective arms controls in relation to China as we have now." Mr Straw said the US government was suspicious of ""the motives of some other countries within the EU"" in wanting the ban lifted. But he said many of Washington's objections were based on a ""lack of information and understanding"" of how export control guidelines worked in EU countries. And ""intense discussions"" were taking place with US officials to convince them it was the right thing to do. Washington is thought to fear it would lead to a buying spree for arms that could be used by China to threaten its diplomatic rival Taiwan. US officials say they are not satisfied the mechanisms in the EU code of conduct are robust enough to prevent abuses. US Undersecretary of State John Bolton is meeting British officials this week to press the case for keeping the embargo.

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"politics 059.txt 'Debate needed' on donations cap A cap on donations to political parties should not be introduced yet", the elections watchdog has said. Fears that big donors can buy political favours have sparked calls for a limit. In a new report, the Electoral Commission says it is worth debating a £10,000 cap for the future but now is not the right time to introduce it. It also says there should be more state funding for political parties and candidates should be able to spend more on election campaigning. There were almost £68m in reported donations to political parties in 2001, 2002 and 2003," with nearly £12m of them from individual gifts worth more than £1m. The rules have already been changed so the public can see who gives how much to the parties but the report says there are still public suspicions. The commission says capping donations would mean taxpayers giving parties more cash - something which would first have to be acceptable to the public and shown to work. ""While we are not in principle opposed to the introduction of a donation cap", we do not believe that such a major departure from the existing system now would be sensible," says its report. If there was to be a cap, it should be £10,000 - a small enough amount to make a difference but which would have banned £56m in donations between 2001 and 2003. Even without changes the commission does urge political parties to seek out more small-scale donations and suggests there should be income tax relief for gifts under £200. It also suggests increasing state funding for parties to £3m so help can be extended to all parties with at least two members in the House of Commons, European Parliament, Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly

ssembly or Northern Ireland Assembly. And it suggests new ways of boosting election campaigning, seen as a way of improving voter turnout. All local election candidates should be entitled to a free mailshot for campaign leaflets, says the watchdog. And there should be a shift in the amount of money allowed to be spent at elections from a national level to a local level to help politicians engage better with voters. The report suggests doubling the money which can be spent by candidates, while cutting national spending limits from £20m to £15m. The commission also says the spending limits for general elections should cover the four months before the poll - as happens with other elections. Electoral Commission chairman Sam Younger said: There is no doubt that political parties have a vital role to play in maintaining the health of our democracy and for this they need to be adequately resourced. "Our research has shown that people want to be more informed about party politics and that they want politicians to be more visible and accessible. "The public are reluctant for the state to fund parties but at the same time are unhappy with large private donations." He called for a wider public debate on party funding to find the consensus needed for radical changes to the current system.

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"politics 060.txt Cardinal criticises Iraq war cost Billions of pounds spent on conflict in Iraq and in the Middle East should have been used to reduce poverty", Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor has said. The head of the Catholic Church in England and Wales made the comments on BBC Radio 4 and will re-iterate his stance in his Christmas Midnight Mass. The cardinal used a Christmas message to denounce the war in Iraq as a ""terrible"" waste of money. He and the Archbishop of Canterbury have both spoken out about the war. Speaking on BBC Radio 4's Thought for the Day slot", he criticised the fact that ""billions"" have been spent on war", instead of being used to bring people ""out of dire poverty and malnourishment and disease"". The cardinal said 2005 should be the year for campaigning to ""make history poverty"". He added: ""If the governments of the rich countries were as ready to devote to peace the resources they are willing to commit to war", that would be to see with new eyes and speak with a new voice and perhaps then others would listen to us with new ears."" The cardinal will touch on this theme again on Friday night when he will tell the congregation of 2,000 at Westminster Cathedral that peace is ""worth", always," striving for"". ""How is it that peace has not arrived?", the cardinal will ask. How is it that there is war in Iraq, violence in the Holy Land," and the horror of pain and death amongst the poor and deprived who suffer from injustice and thus do not find peace?"" ""How can one wish a happy Christmas for our fellow Christians in Iraq or in the Holy Land or those who suffer in Africa unless you and I", in whatever way is open to us," say and do what makes for peace?"" Both the Cardinal and Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Rowan Williams appealed for the weapons inspectors to be given more time in Iraq before the war started. Dr Williams has since criticised the government over its case for war", saying the failure to find weapons of mass destruction had damaged faith in the political system. On Friday," the Cardinal will ask the congregation to search for peace. ""It is possible", it is real, it is worth, always, striving for, because of the promise of Our Saviour," he will say. I also wish you peace in your homes because peace in your home is the beginning of peace in the homes of the community. "" A spokesman said Downing Street had no comment to make. But Prime Minister Tony Blair has said he will put Africa at the top of the agenda when Britain chairs the G8 summit next year.

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"politics 061.txt Assembly ballot papers 'missing' Hundre  
ds of ballot papers for the regional assembly referendum in the North East have  
""disappeared""". Royal Mail says it is investigating the situation", " which ha  
s meant about 300 homes in County Durham are not receiving voting packs. Offici  
als at Darlington Council are now in a race against time to try and rectify the  
situation. The all-postal votes of about two million electors are due to be han  
ded in by 4 November. A spokesman for Darlington Council said: ""We have sent o  
ut the ballot papers", " the problem is with Royal Mail. ""Somewhere along the l  
ine", " something has gone wrong and these ballot papers have not been delivere  
d. ""The Royal Mail is investigating to see if they can find out what the prob  
lem is." A spokeswoman for Royal Mail said: ""We are investigating a problem w  
ith the delivery route in the Mowden area of Darlington. ""This is affecting se  
veral hundred properties", " which have failed to receive ballot papers. ""We ar  
e working closely with the council and will do all we can to help rectify the p  
roblem. ""No-one will not receive their ballot paper as special hand deliveries  
will take place where necessary. ""We are unaware of any other problems of this  
kind to do with the regional assembly vote."" The Darlington Council spokesman  
added: ""Initially we had complaints from a couple of residents in Mowden to sa  
y they thought they should have had their ballot papers by now. ""We then made  
further investigations and it became clear this was a bigger issue." A spokesw  
oman for the Electoral Commission told BBC News Online that letters were being  
sent out to those homes affected. She said the commission was satisfied that me  
asures had been put in place to ensure all voters received ballot papers in tim  
e. So far a total of 569",072 ballot envelopes have been scanned by bar code at  
counting offices across the North East.

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"politics 062.txt Muslims discuss election concerns Issue  
s that Muslims should be considering before voting in the next general election  
are to be debated by UK community representatives. The event is being held by  
the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB)", which believes Muslim voters could in  
fluence the result in up to 50 constituencies. Last year MAB, which opposed the  
war in Iraq," urged Muslims not to vote for Labour in the European elections. B  
ut a spokesman stressed the meeting was ""not necessarily anti-Labour"". ""This  
meeting is not anti-party in particular", it's anti-policy, it's on the issues  
we are going to ask Muslims to vote on, MAB spokesman Dr Azzam Tamimi said of T  
uesday's event. There are issues of concern to Muslims," and Muslims generally  
agree on them but have not in the past been aware of how a vote can serve these  
issues." Dr Tamimi said the main issues Muslims should consider were what he r  
eferred to as the war on Iraq", the Palestinian situation, the erosion of civil  
liberties for Muslims in the UK and economic, social and education problems. A  
pproximately 1.1m of the UK's 1.6m Muslims are of voting age. Previous election  
research has shown the overwhelming majority have traditionally voted Labour, b  
ut more recent studies have suggested Labour support has been falling away sign  
ificantly among some Muslim voters. Anger over the war in Iraq has appeared to  
be the main reason," with many saying it was ""unjustified"". Representatives f  
rom a number of Muslim organisations will attend Tuesday's event. Among them wi  
ll be the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB). The chairman of the MCB's public aff  
airs committee", Sher Khan," said the war in Iraq would be a ""significant fact  
or"" affecting Muslims' voting intentions. ""I think it's going to be quite sig  
nificant because of the number of seats in which they could have an impact", " M  
r Khan said. However, Professor John Curtice, of the University of Strathclyd  
e, is sceptical about how much difference tactical voting by Muslims could mak  
e. For the most part the Labour constituencies where there's a large Muslim com

munity are relatively safe", but there are one or two that are not quite so safe," Professor Curtice said. The constituencies where Labour was most at risk from a Muslim tactical vote were Bethnal Green, in east London, and Rochdale in Lancashire, he added. In Bethnal Green, former Labour MP George Galloway, who founded the anti-war party Respect, is standing against sitting MP Oona King, who had a 10,000-vote majority in 2001. In Rochdale, the Liberal Democrats - the mainstream party a 2004 ICM survey showed was benefiting most from Muslim disaffection with Labour - secured second place in the 2001 election, securing just under 6,000 votes fewer than Labour's Lorna Fitzsimons. But Professor Curtice said the Muslim anti-war vote could be split between the Liberal Democrats and Respect, meaning neither would benefit much at the ballot box. Ironically the Tories might be the beneficiaries if Labour does lose seats", which is generally the case," he said. But Dr Tamimi said MAB's intention was not to empower"" the Tories. ""We know the next government will be Labour", but we are aiming to send a message that it will make a difference if the Muslims use their vote properly. ""If the next Labour government has a reduced majority that's a great achievement because having a very big majority has been very harmful for politics in this country", Dr Tamimi said.

politics 063.txt Drive to 'save' festive holidays Efforts are being made to 'protect' workers' days off on Christmas Day and New Year's Day. Support is being sought for a bill which would ensure that large retailers in Scotland remain closed on Christmas Day and 1 January. The Usdaw trade union said shop workers should be able to enjoy a break with their families. MSP Karen Whitefield wants to ensure only those whose roles are essential are at work over the festive season. In recent years, more stores have been opening on traditional holidays, with some starting their end-of-year sale on Christmas Day or New Year's Day. Ms Whitefield said: I have found members of the public to be very supportive when I have been campaigning on the streets. ""The early evidence shows quite clearly that the vast majority of people believe that shop workers should be given these two special days to spend with friends and family." Usdaw general secretary John Hannett added: ""Christmas Day and New Year's Day are special days for everyone in Scotland and the fact that shops do not open is an important part of making them special. They are largely collective days of rest. ""We want people to tell Karen", through her consultation, whether they want the special nature of these days to remain, or whether they want them to become like any other trading day," with shops open for business as usual." The consultation on a Christmas & New Year's Day Trading Bill has so far attracted almost 500 responses and closes on 7 February.

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politics 064.txt Blair hails Turkey-EU talks deal Tony Blair has hailed a deal bringing Turkey a step closer to EU membership as important for the world's future ""peace and prosperity"". Mr Blair has been a leading advocate of Turkish membership despite controversy surrounding the idea. Leaving a Brussels summit Mr Blair said ""the fact Turkey is a Muslim country does not mean it should be barred"". The deal to open formal talks with Ankara came despite an EU demand for Turkey to recognise Cyprus. It was agreed the issue can be tackled at a later date but Turkish premier Recep Erdogan had to accept negotiations did not guarantee his country full EU membership. If it joins", Turkey may have to accept restrictions to limit migration by its citizens. Mr Blair said having Turkey in the EU was of ""importance to the future peace and prosperity of my country", Britain," and the wider world"". ""We are stating a fundamental principle that the fact Turkey is a Muslim country does not mean it should be barred from Europe. ""On the contrary", if it fulfils the same princip

les of human rights," then Muslim and Christian can work together." Under the agreement", Turkey must issue a written statement promising to sign an accord effectively recognising the Greek Cypriot government, but gives Turkey more time to sell the idea to its people. The internationally recognised southern part of Cyprus is an EU member, but Turkey, which occupies northern Cyprus, had previously insisted it would not bow to demands to recognise the country," calling the issue a ""red line"". It could take up to 15 years before Turkey is able to join", and entry cannot be guaranteed. The EU has also announced that it will start accession talks with Croatia in April 2005. However, talks will begin only if the country co-operates fully with the UN war crimes tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

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"politics 065.txt Guantanamo pair's passport ban The government has written to two of the British men freed from Guantanamo Bay telling them they will not be allowed passports. A letter sent to Martin Mubanga said his British passport would not be issued in the light of evidence gathered against him by the US. This suggested he was likely to take part in action against UK or allied targets if he left Britain", it said. An identical letter has been sent to Feroz Abbasi, the men's solicitor says. It is not known whether the other two men released from the Cuba detention camp in January - Richard Belmar and Moazzam Begg - have also received letters. The government is implementing the rarely used Royal Prerogative in order to withdraw the men's passports. It is only the 13th time the power has been used since 1947 - the last time was in 1976. The letter, from the Home Office," says: ""I am writing to inform you that on the basis of the information which has come to light during your detention by the United States", the home secretary considered that there are strong grounds for believing that, on leaving the United Kingdom, you would take part in activities against the United Kingdom," or allied targets."" The Home Office said it could not comment on individual cases. The Liberal Democrats say they suspect the move is part of a package of security measures agreed with the US in order for the men to be allowed home from Guantanamo Bay. Home Affairs spokesman Mark Oaten also demanded assurances that the evidence against the men was not gained under torture. He added: ""The power should only be used in absolute extreme circumstances and I find it hard to believe that these conditions have been met this time." He said the move also raised complex questions about the use of the Royal Prerogative. The Liberal Democrats have promised to raise the issue in Parliament. Amnesty International UK also questioned whether the decision had been based on ""torture evidence"" obtained at Guantanamo Bay. ""Furthermore", we believe there should be an investigation into the role played by the UK in the detention of UK residents and nationals and possibly many others at Guantanamo Bay," said director Kate Allen. The men's solicitor, Louise Christian, has raised questions about whether the evidence was gathered through torture. But the Pentagon told BBC News US policy condemns and prohibits"" torture and said there was no evidence that any British detainee was tortured or abused. Mr Abbasi",23, from Croydon, south London, was taken to Guantanamo Bay after being captured in Afghanistan in 2001. Mr Mubanga,29, from north London, was originally detained in Zambia.

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"politics 066.txt Commons hunt protest charges Eight protesters who stormed the House of Commons chamber during a debate on the Hunting Bill have been charged with disorderly conduct. The men were arrested in September after bursting into the chamber causing a hunting ban debate to be halted.

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Those charged included Otis Ferry", the 22-year-old son of rock star Bryan Ferry and Luke Tomlinson, 27, a close friend of princes William and Harry. They were charged under Section 5 of the Public Order Act, police said. Five of the eight men held an impromptu news conference outside Charing Cross Police Station on Monday evening, after the charges were formerly put to them. The men's solicitor Matthew Knight," said that at no time had it occurred to the men that they were committing a criminal offence. ""There is no offence of trespassing in the House of Commons - it is not a criminal offence", he said. If Parliament wanted to make entering the House of Commons chamber on foot a criminal offence it should have done so," but it can't do so retrospectively. ""We are not prosecuted for that. We are prosecuted for a Public Order Act offence. We are not guilty of it." "They will appear at Bow Street Magistrates' Court on 21 December", a police spokesman said. Otis Ferry, a former Eton pupil and joint leader of the South Shropshire Hunt," said: ""I have no regrets. ""We have done nothing wrong beyond the obvious which was to stand up for our rights and not act like a sheep like the rest of the country." "One of the men", David Redvers, 34, from Hartpury, Gloucestershire, said he and the other seven protesters would plead not guilty to the charges. The other protesters are John Holliday, 37, a huntsman from Ledbury, Herefordshire, Robert Thame, 34, who plays polo with Princes Charles in Team Highgrove, auctioneer Andrew Elliot, 42, from Bromesberrow, near Ledbury, point-to-point jockey Richard Wakeham, 34, from York, and former royal chef Nick Wood, 41. The 15 September protest came on the same day as a huge pro-hunting demonstration in Parliament Square. Four of the men ran out from behind the speaker's chair while another wrestled past a doorkeeper from a different entrance. The five tried to confront MPs before they were bundled out of the chamber and later led away handcuffed by police. Three others had been intercepted by security staff as they tried to join the five in the chamber. Speaker Michael Martin later said the men had used a forged letter to gain access to the House of Commons and had been helped to get close to the chamber by a parliamentary pass holder. In November, the use of the Parliament Act meant a total ban on hunting with dogs in England and Wales. However, many pro-hunt activists remained defiant after the law was passed, saying they would ignore the ban and continue to hunt. Last week," the Countryside Alliance said more than 250 hunts would meet legally the day after the ban on hunting with dogs comes into force. The alliance said the 19 February meets would show the new law was ""impossibly difficult to determine"" and open to different interpretations.

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"politics 067.txt Child access laws shake-up Parents who refuse to allow former partners contact with their children could be electronically tagged under plans being considered by ministers. Curfews and community service orders were other options which could be used if court orders to allow parental access were defied", Lord Falconer said. The constitutional affairs secretary outlined some of the plans on Tuesday. He denied fathers' activists had forced the changes," telling the BBC ""there is a recognition that something is wrong"". Between 15",000 and 20,000 couples go to court to resolve access disputes each year, although in nine out of 10 separations there is no court intervention. Lord Falconer told BBC Radio 4's Today programme he hoped voluntary mediation could help solve disputes before they reached court. But he opposed compulsory mediation, saying that it would lead to many people taking part with the wrong attitude. Other plans include: - Parenting plans to give advice on access arrangements, based on real-life examples that have worked in the past - Extending in-court conciliation - more informal hearings before contested court cases - Better access to legal," emotional and practical advice by telephone

and internet - Legal aid changes to give incentives for early resolution of disputes. Judges can already jail parents who breach contact orders but that was a ""nuclear option"" which was rarely used as it was not seen as being in the child's interests," a spokesman said. The aim of the new legislation was to provide a ""medium range"" of penalties", such as fines, community service orders, compulsory anger management or parenting classes or curfews. Failure to comply with these measures could result in offenders being electronically tagged. On the possibility of tagging uncooperative parents," Lord Falconer said: ""Tagging may be going too far"," but let's have a debate about that." Full details of the new powers will not be revealed until a bill is published ""in the next two weeks"," a spokesman said. The government's proposals have met with disapproval from fathers' rights groups. John Ison, from the controversial group Fathers 4 Justice, said: It is very disappointing. What we have got is a cynical case of recycling existing legislation." Jim Parton", from Families Need Fathers," said the new proposals ""lacked compulsion"". ""We would like to see couples develop a plan and then have it as a source of a court order - then you know where you stand"," you know what the minimum access is. ""Otherwise"," you see people make agreements which then fall apart." Mr Parton said he had been told by Children's Minister Margaret Hodge there was not enough time to pass the bill through parliament before the general election", which is likely to take place in May. The Conservatives have called for an equal split between parents on access to be made law. Theresa May, shadow secretary for the family," told BBC Radio 4's Today programme that the government's plans were ""inadequate"" and were ""papering over the cracks of the current system""". She said a Conservative government would bring a ""radical reform"" of the family courts", as well as enforcing a ""legal presumption of co-parenting and compulsory mediation""". ""We want to make courts the last resort", rather than the first resort," she added. The government says children cannot simply be divided up like property"" when a marriage collapses. The Liberal Democrats have argued for flexibility in deciding access rules", rather than having ""rigid targets"".

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politics 068.txt MPs to debate 'euthanasia laws' MPs are preparing to debate a bill which critics claim would legalise euthanasia ""by the back door"". The bill would give legal force to ""living wills""", where people say they want medical treatment withheld if they become severely incapacitated. The Mental Capacity Bill has broad support from charities who say it would give better safeguards over treatment. But Christian groups say it could mean doctors withholding food and fluids even if they think it inappropriate. Ministers insist the Mental Capacity Bill - for England and Wales - would not change laws on assisted suicide and contains a presumption in favour of preserving life. The bill would establish a legal presumption that everybody can make decisions about their own treatment unless proved otherwise. It would allow people to give somebody the power of attorney to make decisions on their behalf," which could be challenged by doctors. Critics fear it could allow ""killing by omission"" through withdrawing treatment. An amendment to the bill - specifically preventing decisions that would bring about death - has been tabled by former Conservative leader Iain Duncan Smith. Ninety one MPs have signed a petition backing the amendment. MPs could vote on it later on Tuesday", during the bill's report stage debate. The Bill will then go to a third reading and be debated in the Lords," before becoming law. The Christian Medical Fellowship (CMF) and Lawyers' Christian Fellowship (LCF) said the Mental Capacity Bill would allow euthanasia by the ""back door"". Peter Saunders of the CMF said it believed advance refusals should be only advisory", not legally binding. ""CMF is concerned that pati

ents will make unwise and hasty advance decisions to refuse food and fluids without being properly informed about the diagnosis and the expected course their illness will take", " he said. The LCF's Andrea Williams said there were too many loopholes that could be abused by unscrupulous doctors"". Ex-Labour minister Frank Field told BBC Two's Newsnight programme there was a danger people would feel under pressure to ""do away"" with themselves so relatives could inherit their assets. Constitutional Affairs Minister David Lammy said laws affecting 750",000 people with dementia needed updating. Mr Lammy told BBC News Labour MPs would not get a free vote as the law was being strengthened," not changed. ""We are against euthanasia", we are against assisted suicide but we are in a situation now where people can make living wills and that has the force of the common law," he said. Doctors are saying they want more clarity. Patients are saying they want more clarity." The Making Decisions Alliance", which includes the Alzheimer's Society, Age Concern, Mencap and the National Autistic Society," said misunderstandings over the bill had to be cleared up. ""It will not change the current law on euthanasia and will actually provide a series of better safeguards when decisions are made for people who lack capacity", " the alliance said in a statement. The British Medical Association also backs the bill, saying it just gives incapacitated people the same rights as others. Debate on legalising euthanasia has intensified in the UK because of cases like that of motor neurone patient Diane Pretty. She died two years ago after losing a legal battle to allow her husband to help her commit suicide.

politics 069.txt Talks aim to avert pension strike Talks aimed at averting a series of national strikes over pensions reforms will take place this weekend. Five public sector unions will hold private talks with Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott at Labour's spring conference in Gateshead. They want the government to withdraw regulations - due to be introduced in weeks - which would raise the pension age for council workers from 60 to 65. Up to 1.4m workers could take part in a strike already earmarked for 23 March. However, all sides are anxious to avoid a major confrontation in the run up to the general election, said BBC labour affairs correspondent Stephen Cape. In four days, Britain's biggest union Unison will start balloting 800,000 local government workers on strikes. Other public sector unions have pledged to follow. It is just weeks before new regulations are introduced to raise the pension age of local government workers. The five unions meeting Mr Prescott want the government to withdraw these regulations. This would allow months of tough negotiations to follow, said our correspondent. But a spokesman for Mr Prescott warned that the changes to the local government pension scheme would have to go ahead in April. Privately ministers believe this will be the less painful"" option", " our correspondent added. The Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) will co-ordinate any industrial action with up to six other public sector unions. PCS leader Mark Serwotka warned last week that there could be further walkouts unless there was a government rethink. ""For a government that lectures everyone on choice - choice on public service", choice on this and choice on that - isn't it ironic that they're saying to public sector workers there is no choice," he said. If you want the pension you were promised when you started you must work for an extra five years - that is working until people drop. ""In the 20th century", " it's completely unacceptable." Unison's 800",000 workers, the Transport and General Workers' Union's 70,000 and Amicus' 20,000 are among those being balloted about a 23 March walkout. Mr Prescott held a private meeting with senior union figures last week. It is understood no deal was offered in that meeting but there was room for further negotiations.

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"politics 070.txt Opposition grows to house arrests The Conservatives have expressed "serious misgivings" about government plans for keeping UK and foreign terror suspects under house arrest. Michael Howard said he would not back the Home Secretary's plans for "control orders" which include home detention. "I do not believe that anyone should be deprived of their liberty on the say so of a politician," he said. The Lib Dems also oppose the proposals, but ministers insist they are proportionate to the terror threat. The government proposed the idea and a range of other new powers after the laws lords said current detentions without trial broke human rights laws. New Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Ian Blair has backed the control orders, saying: I'm sorry. It is a dilemma," but there is only one choice." But Mr Howard said: "We have serious misgivings about both their effectiveness in protecting life and their consequences for the British way of life." He argued that people accused of terrorist offences should be brought to trial and be held in prison - not at home - while they await trial. Mr Howard said he feared "internment without trial creates martyrs" and could be "a very effective recruiting sergeant" for terrorists". His party plans to move an amendment to the Serious Organised Crime and Police Bill next week that would give a judge responsibility for assessing evidence and ensuring a balanced case is presented to the court. He called on the prime minister to "enter into constructive discussions" with his party to find a "better way forward". Controversy over the issue continues after a foreign terror suspect held in the UK without trial or charge since December 2001 was freed from jail. Home Secretary Charles Clarke said there was not enough evidence to keep the Egyptian man", known only as C, certified as a terrorist suspect. On Monday," the legal team for two Algerian suspects being held without trial told a court the men did not want bail if it meant being put under house arrest. Most of the terror suspects are detained at Belmarsh Prison in London. The Liberal Democrats say they also oppose house arrests and questioned the human rights implications of the measure. Home affairs spokesman Mark Oaten told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: "It's a matter of principle for us that we can't have a situation where the Home Secretary is able to impose house detention now on UK nationals as well as foreign nationals." The Lib Dems believe the Home Secretary should allow phone tapping evidence in prosecutions. "We think there could be a role for some form of control order - tagging", surveillance, limitation on use of mobile phones - but not with the Home Secretary's say so. That must be done with a proper judicial process, a judge involved in making those decisions," said Mr Oaten. Mr Clarke has rejected that idea saying intercept evidence is only a small part of the case against terror suspects and could put the lives of intelligence sources at risk. He said prosecutions were the government's first preference and promised the powers would only be used in serious" cases", with independent scrutiny from judges.

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"politics 071.txt Visa decision 'every 11 minutes' Visa processing staff are sometimes expected to rule on an application every 11 minutes", MPs have said. Pressure was placed on staff to be efficient, rather than to do a thorough examination of an application, the Public Accounts Committee found. Every officer had an annual target of 8,000 applications - equivalent to 40 a day or one every 11 minutes. MPs want research into whether UK visa holders leave at the end of their stays," or vanish into the black market. Committee chairman Edward Leigh said: "There is a worrying tension between quick processing and proper control over the visas issued. "Entry clearance staff are expected to deal with a visa application in about 11 minutes which is surely too little time to look closely at the supporting documents. " The committee's report

t also discussed the Romanian and Bulgarian visas scandal which led to the resignation of immigration minister Beverley Hughes last year. Committee members said the Home Office had been wrong to dismiss concerns from visa staff abroad who feared the system was being abused. Investigations carried out in the wake of Ms Hughes' resignation found more than 7", "000 people had entered the UK under the business visa scheme for Romanian and Bulgarian ""entrepreneurs""". Mr Leigh said the Home Office should now consider removing those who had not set up a valid business. A Home Office spokesman said the system had been toughened and tightened since the investigation. He added ""that the traditional system of a dual decision making process for all pre-entry applications will be replaced by a single pre-entry check at post," which will be simpler and more robust against abuse than the current system"".

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politics 072.txt 'No more concessions' on terror Charles Clarke says he has ""no desire"" to offer more concessions on his controversial anti-terror plans to get them on to the statute book. MPs voted in favour of the Prevention of Terrorism Bill after Mr Clarke agreed to key changes - but Labour's majority was reduced to 14. The Bill now faces opposition from peers angry at house arrest proposals. Lord Strathclyde", Tory leader in the Lords," said ministers should expect it to be ""substantially re-written""". The Bill proposes ""control orders""", which as well as house arrest could impose curfews, tagging or bans on telephone and internet use. They would replace current powers to detain foreign terror suspects without trial, which the law lords have ruled against. On Monday, MPs voted 272-219 in favour of the Bill after key concessions from Mr Clarke. The government earlier saw its 161-strong majority cut to just 14 as a cross-party amendment was narrowly rejected by the Commons despite the support of 62 Labour rebels. Mr Clarke won over critics by announcing he would introduce an amendment in the Lords to ensure the most controversial control order, amounting to house arrest," would be imposed by judges and not politicians. Lord Strathclyde warned ministers that they should ""prepare themselves for substantial rewriting of various aspects of the Bill""". ""They should consider far more seriously the use of intercept evidence in any trial and I think they should drop the most objectionable proposals""," which are for house arrest." But Mr Clarke told BBC Radio 4's Today programme he believed the changes he had made to the Bill to win over critics in the Commons should be sufficient to satisfy colleagues in the Lords. ""No Bill goes through Parliament without detailed consideration being made", but I believe that what I announced yesterday will be sufficient to secure the agreement of the House of Lords," he said. I have no desire to make further so-called concessions on the Bill." Mr Clarke's proposed amendment will be debated by the Lords on Tuesday without having been considered by MPs. The debate is unlikely to result in a vote. Speaking after the Commons debate," shadow home secretary David Davies said the bill had been ""clearly very badly drawn-up"" and that the government was trying to rush it through too quickly. He said it would be possible to ""rescue"" the government and make the law ""tolerable"" by amending it in the Lords. ""The scope for miscarriages of justice is enormous""," he told BBC News. Mark Oaten, for the Liberal Democrats, said Monday night's vote showed the government had lost the confidence of all sides of the House"". He said: ""They need to rethink the bill", and extend the power of a judge to decide on all control orders," build safeguards on evidence and create charges against suspects. ""Unless there is a major movement""," this bill is doomed to fail." BBC News political editor Andrew Marr said: ""I think that this is a bill in deep trouble. It's been unravelling in the House of Commons - it may unravel further." The government wants the

new bill to pass into law by 14 March", when the current powers expire.

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"politics 073.txt No to Royal succession shake-up A Labour peer has withdrawn proposals to give female members of the Royal Family the same rights as males. The legislation would have ended the right of male heirs with older sisters to succeed to the Crown. It would also have torn up ancient legislation banning heirs to the throne marrying Roman Catholics. But the government refused to back Lord Dubs' Succession to the Crown Bill", saying it was too complex and raised too many constitutional issues. The Lord Chancellor, Lord Falconer, agreed the 1701 Act of Settlement, which governs the succession, "was discriminatory but added that ""for all practical purposes its effects are limited"". The changes proposed by Lord Dubs were a ""complex and controversial undertaking raising major constitutional issues""", he said. Lord Falconer said there were 22 members of the Royal Family in the line of succession after the Prince of Wales - all of who were eligible to succeed and had been unaffected by the act. ""It is not a simple matter that can be tinkered with lightly. While we wish to remove all forms of discrimination... this isn't the proper form", he added. He did not rule out change in the future but said if Lord Dubs' private member's bill was passed by peers, he would urge MPs to oppose it in the Commons. Lord Dubs agreed to withdraw his bill after its second reading in the House of Lords, but urged the government to think again at a later stage. We cannot forever say we don't want to change things because it is too difficult", he told peers. During the debate, the Labour peer and former minister said: The monarchy should symbolise the values of this country. ""What we don't want is a situation where the values of the country have moved on and the monarchy is centuries behind the times. ""We are surely all opposed to discrimination on the grounds of gender and we are surely also opposed to discrimination against Catholics." But opponents of the bill", including Tory Lord Campbell of Alloway and the Bishop of Winchester, the Rt Rev Michael Scott-Joynt," said it would separate the state from both the Church of England and the Christian faith. Such a ""secular"" state would be markedly ""less tolerant""", Rt Rev Scott-Joynt argued.

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"politics 074.txt BNP leader Nick Griffin arrested The leader of the British National Party has been arrested as part of a police inquiry following the screening of a BBC documentary. A party spokesman said Nick Griffin was arrested on Tuesday morning on suspicion of incitement to commit racial hatred. West Yorkshire police confirmed they had arrested a 45-year-old man from outside their area. BNP founding chairman John Tyndall was arrested on Sunday on the same charge. In July", the BBC documentary Secret Agent featured covertly-filmed footage of BNP activists. Mr Griffin is the twelfth man to be arrested following the documentary. Nine men from West Yorkshire and another man from Leicester have been arrested and freed on bail. Seven of the men had been held variously in connection with suspected racially aggravated public order offences, conspiracy to commit criminal damage and possession of a firearm. Two men, both from Keighley, were arrested in September on suspicion of conspiracy to commit criminal damage. A 24-year-old man from Leicester was detained on Monday on suspicion of incitement to commit racial hatred. A BNP spokesperson said Mr Tyndall, from Brighton, was arrested following a speech he made in Burnley, Lancashire, and was released on police bail.

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"politics 075.txt Boris opposes mayor apology Ken Livings  
tone should ""stick to his guns"" and not apologise for his ""Nazi"" comment to  
a Jewish reporter", "Tory MP Boris Johnson has insisted. Mr Johnson also claim  
ed Tony Blair's intervention in the row was ""an attempt to reassure Jewish vot  
ers"". London mayor Mr Livingstone says he is ""standing by"" his remarks which  
likened an Evening Standard journalist to a ""concentration camp guard""". But t  
he prime minister says it is time for Mr Livingstone to say sorry. Labour's Mr  
Livingstone has said his comments may have been offensive but were not racis  
t", "and said earlier this week he would not apologise even if Mr Blair asked.  
Later the prime minister said: ""A lot of us in politics get angry with journal  
ists from time to time", but in the circumstances, and to the journalist becaus  
e he was a Jewish journalist, yes," he should apologise." "However", Mr Johnso  
n, who was forced to apologise last year for an article in the magazine he edit  
s about Liverpudlians grieving over the death of British hostage Ken Bigley," s  
aid Mr Blair ""should butt out of"" the row. ""I don't see why the prime minist  
er has to get involved in this", "The Spectator editor told BBC Radio 4's Today  
programme. It's a dispute between Ken Livingstone and a reporter on the Evening  
Standard." "Mr Johnson", MP for Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire," said he suspect  
ed Labour was now trying to reassure Jewish voters ""because of this curious wa  
y in which Labour seems to be trying to curry favour with disillusioned Muslim  
voters who may be disillusioned about the war""". ""Ken doesn't think he's got  
anything to say sorry for and if that's really his feeling", then I think that  
he should stick to his guns," he said. Mr Johnson apologised last October for p  
erpetuating an outdated stereotype"" of Liverpool in the leader article on the  
death of Mr Bigley. The article in the magazine suggested grieving Liverpudlian  
s were wallowing in their victim status. It also attributed blame to drunken Li  
verpool football fans for the 1989 Hillsborough disaster in which 96 died. Mr J  
ohnson told Today: ""It's perfectly true that I got into the grovelling game my  
self and when I apologised there were some things that I felt I ought to say so  
rry for ... there were also other things I didn't think I should apologise fo  
r", he said. But here's old Ken - he's been crass, he's been insensitive and th  
uggish and brutal in his language - but I don't think actually if you read what  
he said, although it was extraordinary and rude," I don't think he was actually  
anti-Semitic." "

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"politics 076.txt Report attacks defence spending The Min  
istry of Defence has been criticised over the soaring spending costs and growin  
g delays of its top equipment projects. A National Audit Office report on the  
20 biggest projects says costs have risen by £1.7bn in the past year. It says t  
here is ""little evidence"" the MoD's performance had improved", "despite the i  
ntroduction of a ""smart acquisition"" policy six years ago. A senior defence o  
fficial told the BBC lessons were being learned. The NAO's annual report showed  
the total cost of the 20 projects covered was expected to reach £50bn - 14% hig  
her than originally planned. The total delays amounted to 62 months", with aver  
age individual delays rising by three months. Sir John Bourn, head of the NA  
O," said the problems showed the principles of the scheme known as smart acquis  
ition had not been consistently applied. ""Many problems can be traced to the f  
act that the MoD has not spent enough time and resources in the assessment phas  
e", "the report says. The NAO found that projects launched since the start of t  
he scheme were showing the same worrying tendencies as the older legacy project  
s""", such as the Eurofighter. A senior defence official, speaking to the BBC's  
defence correspondent Paul Adams, said that although the figures were still not  
good enough, the report reflected unrealistic expectations early on in the proj

ect cycle. This year's overspend was significantly less than last year's £3.1bn total, and the Defence Procurement Agency - which is responsible for buying defence equipment - was improving. Lord Bach, Minister for Defence Procurement," said he was ""obviously still disappointed with the cost and time increases shown""", but insisted that the Defence Procurement Agency had ""undertaken a huge amount of work to expose any underlying problems on projects""". The latest findings follow a string of critical reports issued within the last 12 months", and, according to our correspondent," contain few new surprises. Turning around the Defence Procurement Agency ""was a little like trying to turn around a super tanker - it takes a very long time indeed""", he said. Our correspondent said it was the same projects, including the Joint Strike Fighter, the Nimrod and A400M aircraft and the Type 45 Destroyer, which were responsible for the bulk of the cost over-runs and delay. But he added some projects, such as the C-17 heavy lift aircraft and Successor Identification Friend or Foe (SIFF), were showing good performances.

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"politics 077.txt Brown names 16 March for Budget Chancellor Gordon Brown will deliver his Budget to the House of Commons on 16 March", the Treasury has announced. The Budget, likely to be the last before the General Election, will be at 1230 GMT on that Wednesday, just after Prime Minister's question time. The annual event is when the chancellor outlines the government's taxation and broader economic predictions. It is likely to set out much of the tax and spending battleground for the election, widely expected on 5 May. Next month's Budget will be Mr Brown's eighth since Labour came to power in 1997. If a May election is called, there could be as little as 18 days between the Budget and the announcement of a date for the election. A shortened Finance Bill would have to be rushed through Parliament with all-party support to allow the Government to continue collecting revenue. The full Finance Bill, with the Budget measures in it, would then be returned to the Commons after the election, if Labour secures another term in office. As Mr Brown announced the Budget date in a short ministerial statement," accountancy firm Ernst & Young urged him to put politics aside and focus on the long-term requirements of the economy. ""In the Budgets that were given immediately before the last six elections", taxes were cut by the incumbent chancellor and, in many cases, taxes were increased soon after the election result," said Aidan O'Carroll, E&Y's UK head of tax.

"politics 078.txt Asylum children to face returns The UK government is planning to return asylum seeker children without parents to Albania. The trial scheme, which could start in weeks, may be extended to apply to children from other countries. Children's charities have reacted with alarm, saying the policy amounts to forcible removal and may not guarantee the safety of those affected. But the Home Office says it may be in the children's best interests if it reunites them with their communities. The pilot, included in the government's five-year immigration plan, aims to return unaccompanied asylum-seeking children from Albania who have failed in their asylum claims. Since 2002, at least 9,000 under-18s have arrived in the UK to seek asylum without other family members. These children automatically become the responsibility of social services. Up to now, ministers have held back from final removal orders against unaccompanied children until after they are legally adults at 18. At least a dozen Albanian-born teenagers are thought to have been identified for return, according to sources, although there is no public confirmation of numbers. Those selected could either be returned to their families, should they be traced, or placed in the care of other Albanian authorities. Separate negotiations to establish a family tracing and returns scheme are believed to be underway with another

er country. Under the 1989 Children Act, public bodies have a duty to act in the best interest" of a child in their care. Laura Brownlee of Save the Children said there were grave concerns", "not least because of the well-documented trafficking of children into crime and prostitution in Albania. ""If children are going to be returned then there should be proper assessments and decisions on a case by case basis", she said. We do not think there are structures in place [to receive returning children in Albania]. 'If these decisions are not in the best interests of the child," then that is a forced removal because the child will not have any choice in the final decision." In its five-year immigration plan", announced on Tuesday," the government said it was addressing ""the difficult issue" of returning unaccompanied asylum seeking children. A spokesman for the Home Office said it was wholly wrong to suggest that the plan was to return children ""and leave them to rot"". ""We are developing a returns programme for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children whose asylum and humanitarian protection claims have been refused", said the spokesman. We have been exploring how we can establish reception and longer-term care arrangements in countries of origin and believe that it's possible to return children in a way that is in their best interests and is safe and sustainable. ""We do not believe that it is right", or in keeping with children's legislation," that children who can return should remain in the UK indefinitely separated from their families and communities." The spokesman stressed the UK would abide by its international human rights obligations. Only those children who could be provided with a carefully planned reintegration package would be returned", he said. But Andrew Hogg, spokesman for the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture," said ministers had so far failed to reassure agencies. ""From what is so far known", we strongly oppose the scheme because the welfare and best interests of the child will not properly be taken into account," said Mr Hogg. In Albania particularly there is no statutory child care or protection structure. ""The Medical Foundation has many serious concerns", including the assessment process for suitability for return, the degrading of best interests of the child principles and of child welfare," and the lack of safeguards in the chosen countries." A spokesman for the Albanian embassy in London said it was the first it had heard of a scheme", but did not rule out that there had been an agreement between the two countries.

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"politics 079.txt 'Fido' to be taken off vote lists The risk of pets and children being given votes could be cut by changing how people register to vote", the UK elections watchdog has said. Those are some of the mistakes found under the current system," where one person in each household applies for voting forms for the other occupants. The Electoral Commission says enabling people to register individually could cut some errors and combat fraud. Voters need to register by 11 March if the next poll is on 5 May as expected. But any individual registration scheme would not be introduced in Britain before that general election. The proposed scheme would mean voters using individual ""identifiers"" when they vote - such as their own voting number", date of birth and signature. The Electoral Commission says having voters register individually rather than the head of household do it for them fits better with human rights laws. Chairman Sam Younger told MPs on Tuesday care was needed to ensure that people were not lost off the register in the process - which happened when Northern Ireland switched to a similar system. There have been rare cases when household pets have been put on the electoral roll, the MPs heard. And some people have registered all their family, regardless of their age - birth dates are not included on the forms so election officers cannot easily check. Non-British

citizens who are not entitled to vote have also been registered in some cases. Mr Younger said there was anecdotal evidence of inaccuracies in the register," the vast majority of which were caused by genuine mistakes. He argued local councils could look harder at promoting targeted campaigns at ""hard to reach"" voters", for example. Some authorities already run such programmes but in others councillors worry about the party political impact of encouraging particular areas to turn out. Mr Younger said using the Royal Mail's postal redirection service had already helped election officers retrace about 50,000 voters. He argued individual registration would also increase security for postal ballots and other new ways of voting. There have been fears there are too few checks to ensure current postal votes are cast by the person on the voting form. He said it might also help register students in halls of residences, where the hall warden often has to do the job for everybody. The MPs on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Constitutional Affairs select committees pressed Mr Younger on how to avoid losing voters in any changeover. He said the Northern Ireland example illustrated real difficulties to be confronted. Currently, British voters have to re-register to vote every year or face being removed from the electoral rolls if they fail to do so two years running. Mr Younger suggested the re-registration could happen less frequently but argued efforts were needed to check the electoral rolls were up-to-date.

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"politics 080.txt 'More to do' on adult literacy The government will only hit its target for improving adult maths and literacy skills if courses are made more attractive", a report says. The National Audit Office praised ministers for reaching the benchmark of 750,"000 adults in England gaining basic qualifications by this year. But a target of 1.5 million more by 2010 needed ""creative"" ideas. Some 26 million adults lack maths or English skill levels expected of school-leavers. According to the report," "more than half" the qualifications achieved were by learners aged 16 to 18. These are defined as ""adults"" by the government for the purpose of compiling these figures. Normally adults are defined as being aged over 19. The number of these people gaining qualifications was ""rising slowly"". Auditor General Sir John Bourn said: ""Higher levels of literacy and numeracy will benefit England both socially and economically. ""More people will have the opportunity to live richer lives." In 2001," the government launched the Get On scheme - aimed at reducing illiteracy and innumeracy. Sir John said ""substantial progress"" had been made since," adding that this was ""only the beginning"". The government and its partners would ""need to be creative and responsive"". Some £3.7bn will be spent on implementing the programme by 2006. The report recommends gathering more details on the educational needs of areas," so courses can be set to meet local demand. Existing adult learners could use their ""enthusiasm"" commitment and local knowledge"" to attract other people. The Department for Education and Skills could also use more ""personalised learning"" and work with voluntary groups," councils and employers. It should also assess adult learners' progress ""at frequent intervals""", the report adds. When the government announced it had reached its 2004 target earlier this month," Prime Minister Tony Blair said it was ""only the start of the journey"". An estimated 5.2 million adults have worse literacy than that expected of 11 year olds", while 14.9 million have numeracy skills below this level. This is thought to cost the UK economy hundreds of millions of pounds each year. The qualifications achieved by those taking part in the government's scheme range up to GCSE equivalents. Get On's participation target has been set at 2.25 million by 2010," with an interim figure of 1.5 million by 2007. Education minister Ivan Lewis said: ""We will continue to use

creative ways of involving people with the lowest skill levels and the report shows that our efforts are gathering pace." "Shadow Education Secretary Tim Collins said: " "This is the third report in two days to highlight Labour's failure to ensure young people acquire the necessary levels of literacy and numeracy for their working life. " "Employers and business leaders have repeatedly voiced concern over the number of school-leavers without these basic skills", " but all the government have offered is more talk." "Liberal Democrat education spokesman Phil Willis added: " "Far too little has been done to enable adult learners to fit learning into their busy lives." "

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"politics 081.txt Tory backing for ID cards The Tories are to back controversial government plans to introduce ID cards. The shadow cabinet revealed its support ahead of next week's Commons vote on a bill to introduce compulsory ID. The decision follows a " "tough meeting" " where some senior Tories argued vociferously against the move", party sources told the BBC. The bill, which ministers claim will tackle crime, terrorism and illegal immigration," is expected to be opposed by the Liberal Democrats. They have said the scheme is " "deeply flawed" " and a waste of money. Sources within the Conservative Party told the BBC Michael Howard has always been in favour of ID cards", " and tried to introduce them when he was Home Secretary. The party has been " "agnostic" " on the issue until now but had now decided to come off the fence", the Tory source said. Despite giving their backing to ID cards," the Conservatives insisted they would hold ministers to account over the precise purpose of the scheme. They said they would also press Labour over whether objectives could be met and whether the Home Office would deliver them. And they pledged to assess the cost effectiveness of ID cards and whether people's privacy would be properly protected. " "It is important to remember that this bill will take a decade to come into full effect", " a spokesman said. It will do nothing to solve the immediate problems of rising crime and uncontrolled immigration." "Lib Dem home affairs spokesman Mark Oaten said: " "This has all the signs of Michael Howard overruling colleagues' concerns over ID cards. " "The Tories should have the courage to try and change public opinion not follow it." " The new chairman of the Bar Council", " Guy Mansfield QC warned there was a real risk that people on the " "margins of society" " would be driven into the hands of extremists. " "What is going to happen to young Asian men when there has been a bomb gone off somewhere? They are going to be stopped. If they haven't [ID cards] they are going to be detained." "

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"politics 082.txt Labour's 'EU propaganda' A " "taxpayer subsidised propaganda exercise" " on the EU is being used to lull the British public into a false sense of security", say the Tories. Shadow foreign secretary Michael Ancram told MPs a new White Paper was part of trying to soften up opinion ahead of the referendum on the EU constitution. His claims were denied by Foreign Secretary Jack Straw," who accused the Tories of " "running scared" " of debate. EU cooperation would help get better UK immigration controls", he argued. Mr Straw used Thursday's Commons debate to launch the new White Paper on the prospects for the EU in 2005. Security, stability and prosperity would be the key themes when the UK took over the chairmanship of the EU in July," said Mr Straw. Africa and climate change would also feature highly. He said the UK was trying to ensure future EU budgets were limited to 1% of Europe's economic output and were spent " "where it adds most value" ". Mr Straw promised to continue to ensure the UK's budget rebate", secured in 1984 by Margaret Thatcher," was " "full

y justified""." "We", like all other countries, have a veto on any changes proposed in this area," he said. Mr Ancram condemned the document, which the Foreign Office says has cost about £2,500 to design, print and deliver. Isn't the reason that the government is now involved in a taxpayer subsidised propaganda exercise to try to sell the new EU to the country in advance of the forthcoming referendum and general election?", he asked. The Tory spokesman also criticised the government for claiming the EU constitution would make Europe easier to understand. The government, last week, had to publish a commentary of 500 pages to try and explain this 'easy and simple' constitution to the British people," he said. Who are they trying to kid?"" The proposed question for the constitution referendum is: ""Should the United Kingdom approve the Treaty establishing a Constitution for the European Union?"" The Electoral Commission on Thursday said it was satisfied the question was easy to understand. The government has suggested the referendum on the constitution could take place in spring 2006", with the Tories set to campaign for a ""no"" vote. Mr Ancram said ministers were prolonging uncertainty by putting the vote off until the latest date possible. The foreign secretary hit back by saying Tory attitudes to Europe had helped keep the party out of power for more than a decade. Mr Straw argued cooperation with European partners could bring a ""level playing field"" on immigration and asylum controls. ""You are setting your face against all of these things," he added. For the Liberal Democrats, Sir Menzies Campbell said the UK should not ignore the need to reform the EU Common Agricultural Policy. Change was particularly important for developing countries wanting access to markets, he argued. Sir Menzies was among those worried about plans, backed by the UK, to lift the arms embargo imposed on China after the Tiananmen Square massacre. Mr Straw said no decisions had been taken - Chinese human rights had improved but not by enough.

politics 083.txt Hague 'given up' his PM ambition Former Conservative leader William Hague says he will not stand for the leadership again, having given up his ambition to be prime minister. Mr Hague, 43, told the Daily Telegraph he would now find a life dominated by politics too boring"" and unfulfilling. Mr Hague", who stepped down after his party's 2001 election defeat, does not rule out a return to the front bench. He also told the paper he hopes to remain MP for Richmond, North Yorks, and start a family with wife Ffion. Mr Hague, who recently had published the biography of William Pitt the Younger," also said he wanted to continue writing books and speech-writing. He told the newspaper: ""I don't know whether I will ever go back on to the front", but don't rush me." Asked if he would stand for the leadership again", Mr Hague replied: ""No. Definitely not." His determination to stay away from a central role will disappoint some senior Conservative members", who say the party needs him. Tim Collins, the shadow education secretary," said last week it would be a ""huge boost"" to the party if Mr Hague returned to the front bench. Mr Hague became an MP at 27 and Leader of the Opposition at 36. He said: ""I feel fortunate that", by the age of 40," I had crammed in an entire political career. ""I had been in the Cabinet and been leader of the party", so now I can branch out into other things...it is a very liberating feeling." Mr Hague added that he may have misjudged his own ambition to be prime minister. ""Maybe I wasn't as driven by politics as I thought I was", he said.

politics 084.txt Job cuts 'false economy' - TUC Plans to shed 71,000 civil service jobs will prove to be a false economy"" that could hamper public sector reforms", according to a TUC report. Public and Commercial Services union members have already voted to strike over cuts for one day on 5 November. The TUC said cuts would deliver less than 6% of the £22bn ministers hope to save through efficiency reforms. General secretary Brendan Barber warned the ""costs could easily outweigh the benefits"". ""The government's big boost

to public spending is now showing results", " said Mr Barber. Public services are improving but looking for simple savings through job cuts at this stage could be a false economy. ""They may shoot a Tory fox", " but cutting thousands of civil service jobs will hit the morale and capabilities of the public servants expected to implement government reforms. The costs could easily outweigh the benefits." Next Friday's strike action by the PCS is the biggest in the civil service since 1993", hitting Jobcentres, benefit agencies, pensions offices, customs and driving tests. The union says it is concerned about pensions, sick pay and forced relocation as well as the cut in jobs. Last month it was announced that a total of 37 social security offices and Jobcentres across the UK would close in the first wave of plans to shed civil service jobs. The number of civil servants in Britain rose to more than 520,000 in April. Other areas the strike will affect include passports, museums and galleries, libraries and health and safety inspections.

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"politics 085.txt UK's 'useless' quangos under fire The UK has 529 quangos financed with billions of pounds of taxpayers' cash - many of which are useless or duplicate each other's efforts", " a report claims. Essential Guide to British Quangos 2005 author Dan Lewis said at least 111 of the appointed bodies had been set up since Labour won power in 1997. He urged a limit on the number of quangos that could be set up by any individual government department. Tories and Lib Dems welcomed the report and called for a ""slimming down"". Conservative deregulation spokesman John Redwood said: ""The research endorses our policy of destroying unwanted and unnecessary quangos", " and slimming down the rest. ""A Conservative government will axe 162 quangos", " as part of its drive for more efficient and more accountable government." Lib Dem spokesman Ed Davey meanwhile said instead of the ""bonfire of quangos"" New Labour had promised", " there had been an ""explosion"" of them. ""For over two decades", under both Tory and Labour governments," these unaccountable agencies have mushroomed. ""Liberal Democrats would abolish many", merge others," and make any that remain properly accountable." Labour representatives were unavailable for comment. The quango guide follows last year's government-commissioned Gershon Report which recommended significant cuts in bureaucracy across the public sector. Mr Lewis wants a public inquiry into regional development agencies which cost £1.8bn a year - cash he says which ""appears to be almost entirely wasted""". As well as a departmental limit on quangos he also wants a statutory five-year limit on any such body with executive powers. He also listed what he dubbed the nine ""most useless quangos""". They were the British Potato Council", the Milk Development Council, the Energy Savings Trust, Agricultural Wages Committees, the Wine Standards Board, the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, the Football Licensing Authority, Investors in People UK and the Economic and Social Research Council. Mr Lewis branded the existence of the 60-employee Potato Council, set up in 1997 to research and promote overseas potato markets," ""surprising""". He said the £80m spent annually on the Energy Savings Trust", which promotes renewable energy," would be better spent on eight million boiler jackets for British homes. And he argued it was ""absurd"" to charge farmers for Agricultural Wages Committees", which set working and wage standards in the industry," when many were prepared to take advantage of immigrant labour prepared to work for £1 an hour. ""If a football team can afford to pay £27m for Wayne Rooney", " why should the taxpayer - not all of whom like football - be forced to fund the Football Licensing Authority to the tune of over £1.1m a year?"" Mr Lewis asked. The report is published by the Efficiency in Government Unit - a joint effort by right of centre think tanks the Economic Research Council and the Centre for Policy S

tudes. It says before a new public body is set up", an assessment should be made whether its proposed role is already carried out by an existing charity or other private organisation.

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"politics 086.txt Howard backs stem cell research Michael Howard has backed stem cell research", saying it is important people are not frightened of the future. The controversial issue was a feature of the recent US presidential election, where George Bush opposed extending it. But the Tory leader argued there was a moral case for embracing science which could help victims of Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and Motor Neurone disease. ""I believe we have a duty to offer hope to the millions of people who suffer devastating illnesses", he said. The use of embryonic stem cells in the UK is already allowed. Stem cells are master cells that have the ability to develop into any of the body's tissue types. Scientists hope that by growing such cells in the laboratory they can programme them to form specific tissue such as kidney, heart or even brain tissue. Mr Howard acknowledged there were genuine concerns about stem cell research. But he argued: We mustn't be frightened of change or nostalgic about the past - we must be optimistic about the future. ""Politicians must create the right framework so that the great potential of science can be harnessed for the benefit of mankind. ""With the life expectancy of the average Briton now around the mid-70s", society has a responsibility to enhance the quality of people's lives as they grow older. ""I know many people are concerned about stem-cell research. They are fearful of meddling with what they see as the stuff of souls. ""I respect those concerns. But I also believe we have a duty to offer hope to the millions of people who suffer devastating illnesses like Parkinson's, Multiple Sclerosis, Motor Neurone Disease," Alzheimer's and - as we saw in the papers today - now possibly heart problems." Mr Howard acknowledged there were ""no easy answers"" over such an issue but it was necessary to ""have the courage to do what we know to be morally right"". He added: ""Of course", stem cells are still a recent discovery. More research needs to be done. But we must look at their potential in a responsible and grown-up way. The hopes of millions of people rest on what could be achieved." Former Superman actor the late Christopher Reeve was an advocate for the research after he was paralysed in a horse riding accident. Mr Howard made his remarks during a speech in Westminster to the Conservative National Women's Committee on ambitions and values.

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"politics 087.txt Howard unveils Tory asylum plans Tory plans to cut immigration to the UK are not racist and will make the asylum system fairer for genuine refugees", Michael Howard has said. As his party set out detailed asylum reform plans," Mr Howard said they would help smash people smuggling gangs. There would be an annual limit on asylum and all claims would be processed overseas. Some charities say the plans would put refugees' lives at risk if they were turned away once quotas were filled. Tony Blair said Labour would set out workable plans for tackling immigration abuse in the next few weeks and attacked the Tory plans. ""By cutting the number of front-line immigration staff at our borders", they will actually make the problem worse," said Mr Blair. Liberal Democrat chairman Matthew Taylor said there needed to be a quick, fair and firm asylum system. But he said it was absolutely disgusting"" to propose a system which could turn away genuine refugees. The Conservatives say there is little risk of this happening as demand for asylum will be considered when quotas are set. In a speech in London on Monday", Mr Howard said: ""It's not racist", as some people to claim," to talk about controlling immigration far fro

m it." He said that coming from an immigrant family himself he recognised that ""firm but fair"" immigration controls were essential for good community relations. - Withdrawing from the 1951 United Nations Convention on refugees", which obliges countries to accept people being persecuted on the basis of need," not numbers - Introduce laws to allow the immediate removal of asylum seekers whose claims were clearly unfounded because they came from safe countries or had destroyed documents - Detain asylum seekers without documents so people whose identity was not known were not able to move freely around the UK - a worry for ""national security"" - Stop considering asylum applications inside the UK and instead take people from United Nations refugee agency camps. Anyone applying for asylum would be taken to new centres close to their countries of origin. The Tories also want quotas for those seeking work permits through an Australian-style points system and those wanting to join families in the UK. Mr Howard said nearly 160",000 people were settling in the UK every year - the size of a city like Peterborough. The plans would help achieve a ""substantial reduction"" in immigration", he said," although he could not predict a figure. He said that only two out of 10 asylum seekers had their claims accepted under the current ""unfair and inhumane"" system. ""We need to break the link between arriving in Britain and claiming asylum," Mr Howard said. By breaking that link we can smash the criminal gangs at the heart of the trade in people smuggling." But the UN refugees agency is worried the policy sends the wrong message to poorer countries which receive the bulk of refugees. And a spokesman for European Justice and Home Affairs Commissioner Franco Frattini said the plans would contravene EU asylum policy," which meant the UK could not simply refuse to hear an asylum case. Refugee Council Chief Executive Maeve Sherlock called the plans ""dangerous"," ill thought-out and hugely irresponsible". Lives could be put at risk if refugees were turned away once the quotas were filled"," she warned. Commission for Racial Equality chairman Trevor Phillips said asylum applications were down 40% and economic migration down about 10%. He did not think Mr Howard intended to centre the debate about race. But he warned that some campaigners could use his words to hint the policy was about keeping out people of a different colour or culture. Mr Howard called that suggestion ""disgraceful"".

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"politics 088.txt Campaign 'cold calls' questioned Labour and the Conservatives are still telephoning the millions of people who have signed up to make sure they do not get marketing ""cold calls"". The parties say they can stick to the rules by ensuring that their calls are not marketing - for instance by asking about people's voting intentions. The Lib Dems are asking the watchdog overseeing the rules to stop the calls. The information commissioner's office says surveys are allowed but there is a ""grey"" area if personal data is kept. Telephone call centres are expected to be used as never before by all the three major parties in the run-up to the general election. But seven million telephone numbers are on the Telephone Preference Service (TPS) lists"," which ban unsolicited sales and marketing calls. Both schemes are run by the Direct Marketing Association and backed by EU directives on privacy and electronic communications. The rules on marketing calls apply as much to politicians as to private sector companies. But that does not mean Labour and the Tories are not calling people signed up to the TPS. A Labour Party spokesman told the BBC News website the party avoided those on TPS lists when telephoning people about membership or fundraising. But that did not happen for ""voter identification"" calls. ""When we ask which party they will vote for", that is not marketing and we have very clear legal advice that it is not," he said. So it is not covered

by the Telephone Preference Service." He said the party always asked people if they would be happy to be contacted again and if they said no," they were not rung again. A Conservative spokeswoman said the party stuck to the rules when it rang TPS subscribers. She said: ""We do apply TPS but in line with the law. We would not do things that are not allowed in the law."" A spokesman for the Information Commissioner's Office said it would be classed as marketing if political parties telephoned people to encourage them to vote for them. But the rules did allow polling organisations to telephone people about their voting intentions if they recorded them only as part of a bigger set of statistics", not person by person. ""If a political party was doing that than it may be that also would not be marketing", he said. The spokesman said it might be considered unsolicited marketing if a party recorded voting preferences with a view to marketing information in the future. The spokesman said there was no yes or no"" answer and the area was ""pretty grey"". He added: ""If someone complained", then we would investigate that. Political parties are aware of the regulations. At the last by-elections," we reminded them."" Lib Dem chairman Matthew Taylor has now written to the watchdog saying: ""The advice we have received on several previous occasions is that such phone calls are illegal."" He says evidence from local Lib Dem parties around the country suggests there are ""significant"" numbers of such calls. ""I hope you can therefore take swift and efficient action to ensure that this ceases", he tells the commissioner. Mr Taylor argues there should be new guidelines so all parties can act in the same way if the watchdog believes the rules allow parties to ring TPS numbers about voting intentions and later urge those people to vote for them.

politics 089.txt Tory leader quits legal position David M cLetchie has resigned from his post as a partner in a legal firm following criticism over his dual role. The Scottish Conservative leader had insisted that his legal work with Tods Murray did not influence the causes he supports. But on Friday he said: I have tendered my resignation as a partner with immediate effect." Mr McLetchie had received advice from Holyrood officials about what details he needed to declare. Labour said he had ""cleverly"" not asked about paid advocacy. A Tory spokesman ""totally refuted"" any wrongdoing. Mr McLetchie received advice from the clerk to the standards committee after concern over him signing a parliamentary motion questioning expansion plans for Edinburgh Airport. The MSP had been a partner for Tods Murray which has a client opposing the development. Mr McLetchie did not have a complaint made against him", but when concerns were raised he sought guidance from the standards committee to clarify his position. He was advised to exercise judgement to avoid the perception of a conflict and said he had done nothing wrong. Explaining his reason for quitting the post," Mr McLetchie said: ""I have been greatly concerned by the recent publicity surrounding my association with Tods Murray. ""However", I have no wish to see a similar situation arise again. ""To avoid any misconceptions in the future and be mindful of the good name of Tods Murray and the confidentiality to which its clients are entitled", I have brought forward the date of my retirement from the firm which would otherwise have happened later this year. ""I am proud to have been a part of Tods Murray for the last 29 years and wish it well in the future." Labour MSP Christine May had said Mr McLetchie was ""very clever"" to ask the clerk to consider his conduct in respect of section 5 of the code. ""He was almost bound to get the answer he wanted from this enquiry since he stands accused of breaching section 6", the section on paid advocacy," she said. Section 5 of the members interest order legally obliges MSPs to declare registrable interests before taking part in related parliamentary proceedings where the interest would prejudice or give the appearance of prejudicing their ability to participate in a disinterested manner"". However," MSPs' Code of Conduct

ct ""recognises a wider definition"" of parliamentary proceedings", including a non-statutory requirement to make a declaration in relation to written notices, such as motions. But a letter from Holyrood's Chamber Office chief Ken Hughes also made clear that Mr McLetchie did not need to list any of the clients for whom he worked as a solicitor. Commenting on Mr McLetchie's decision to stand down," a Scottish Labour Party spokesman said: ""This should mean Mr McLetchie doesn't breach the paid advocacy rules in future. ""However it doesn't change the fact that there should be a full investigation into whether he has done this in the past."" Scottish National Party Holyrood leader Nicola Sturgeon accused Mr McLetchie of failing to properly serve his constituents. Ms Sturgeon said: ""I think this whole episode has been very damaging for Mr McLetchie and I'm sure he will be reflecting on it."" She added that she thought that the Tories were an irrelevant party so she would not ""lose any sleep over it"". Peter Misselbrook," executive partner of Tods Murray said Mr McLetchie had been considering retirement later in the year. He added: ""David has decided that this announcement should be made now and we fully understand and appreciate his reasons for doing so."""

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politics 090.txt MSPs hear renewed climate warning Climate change could be completely out of control within several decades", the Scottish Environment Protection Agency is warning a committee of MSPs. Experts are giving evidence on the subject to the Scottish Parliament's environment committee. Officials believe nuclear energy and wind farms may be better options than trying to tackle global warming. Solutions suggested by conservationists include reducing internal UK air travel and boosting electric trains. The evidence is part of the committee's inquiry into the impact of climate change in Scotland. Sepa is attempting to curb global warming gases," as pollution from transport emissions increases. Ecologists are warning MSPs that Scotland may have to accept ""significant intrusion"" from wind farms. It is likely also that nuclear power will be needed for possibly several decades. Sepa predict that the two methods will remain as energy sources until climate change is under control. Experts studying the seas off Scotland's west coast have already forecast more devastating weather of the type which caused havoc across the country last month. They predicted that damaging storms will become more frequent. Researchers from the University of the Highlands and Islands and Southampton have been looking at wave heights in the Atlantic over the last nine years. The project was conducted jointly by the Environmental Research Institute in Thurso", which is part of the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) Millennium Institute network, and the Southampton Oceanography Centre. Scientists carried out a series of studies, including the use of satellites to assess wave heights in the seas around the west coast and the Hebrides.

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politics 091.txt Vouchers 'to cut winter deaths' Pensioners are being promised energy savings by the Liberal Democrats", as snow and cold temperatures continue. The party says the plans could save the average pensioner £100 every year and cut winter deaths. The government gives £200 for winter fuel to households with people over 60," or £300 where people are over 80. The Tories promise to keep the payments. The Lib Dems would allow people to swap these winter fuel payments for discounts on home insulation. Shadow local government secretary Ed Davey said: ""The current scheme has helped some older people"," but this new Liberal Democrat approach will go much further to end the scandal of tens of thousands of old people dying from the winter cold every year

r. "" The vouchers are designed to let pensioners choose from a list of approved energy supplies who would compete for business by offering discounts on home insulation schemes. The plan would boost energy conservation", says the party - and insulation could save £100 every year for pensioner households," so using the money more ""intelligently"" than at present.

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, "politics 092.txt New 'yob' targets to be unveiled Fifty new areas getting special help to fight anti-social behaviour in England and Wales will be named on Thursday. Ten areas have already had access to special prosecutors and local experts and the government is now expanding the crackdown to more towns and cities. Details of how many anti-social behaviour orders (Asbos) were used in the last year are also being published. Labour sees nuisance behaviour as a key election issue but critics claim the record is at best patchy. A year ago", ministers launched their anti-social behaviour plan and Thursday's figures offer a progress check. They will say that in the past year more than 2,600 anti-social behaviour orders were issued by the courts - more than double the total used in the previous four years. Police have also closed 150 crack houses and issued more than 400 dispersal orders," breaking up groups of youths in public places. The 50 new pilot areas to get special attention will also receive extra government funding. Exeter and Cardiff are among cities who have voiced interest in being involved. Prime Minister Tony Blair is also expected to announce new measures to strengthen the use of Asbos and fixed penalty notices. There are still concerns that some areas of the country are not using the powers properly. He is expected to say that the new figures were heartening but he would not rest until similar action was taken in all areas of the country where it was needed. ""We have not defeated this problem by any means", but shown together what can be done," he will say. Mr Blair this week defended the shake-up of the licensing laws, saying it was right to focus on troublemakers rather than treating everybody as a potential drunken nuisance. Ministers also boast of record police numbers and are speeding up plans to put in place 25,000 community support officers (CSOs). But researchers from Leeds University warned that CSOs could undermine traditional bonds between police officers and communities. More work needed to be done on clarifying the role of different agencies and how they linked together before CSOs, they argued in a the study. Critics of the government say it has announced more than 20 initiatives to tackle nuisance behaviour when the real focus should be on good policing. Home Office Minister Hazel Blears also revealed this week that about a third"" of Asbos were breached - with some people jailed and others not.

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, "politics 093.txt Kennedy calls for Iraq exit plans Tony Blair should set out a proper exit strategy from Iraq in the wake of next Sunday's elections in the country", Lib Dem leader Charles Kennedy has said. In a speech focusing on issues arising from the re-election of George W Bush," Mr Kennedy said Iraq had become a ""crucible of militant terrorism"". He wants to see a phased withdrawal of UK troops ""as soon as the situation allows""," he said in London. Any exit strategy must ""augment and support"" the democratic process. ""There are some who are of the opinion that the mere presence of British and American troops in Iraq feeds the insurgency", he said. There is some truth in that, especially after the initial mistakes that were made - the heavy-handedness of operations like Fallujah," and the well-publicised instances of abuse

at the hands of coalition forces." Mr Kennedy pointed out that the Netherlands", Portugal and the Czech Republic, which all have troops operating in the southern sector of Iraq," have announced their imminent withdrawal ""regardless of the situation on the ground"". He accused Mr Blair's government of ""being less than straightforward"" over its plans. ""Next week the prime minister should make a statement regarding the elections in Iraq", Mr Kennedy said during his City of London speech. He should set out a proper exit strategy, including the phased withdrawal of British troops," as the security situation allows." Mr Kennedy also argued that British troops deployed in Iraq should be replaced with forces from other countries - ""especially Islamic countries"".

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"politics 094.txt McConnell in 'drunk' remark row Scotland's first minister has told a group of high school pupils that it is okay to get drunk ""once in a while"". Jack McConnell was speaking to more than 100 secondary pupils from schools in the Highlands about the problems of binge drinking and drink promotions. He has been criticised by the SNP for encouraging young people to get drunk. But the Scottish Executive has insisted Mr McConnell was speaking about adults and his comments were ""a recognition that people will get drunk"". The first minister's comments came in a question and answer session at Glenurquhart High School in Inverness", attended by pupils from a number of secondary schools. A Highland councillor who was at the event has also defended Mr McConnell. Margaret Davidson, the independent member for the Loch Ness West, said the first minister was speaking in a very general way and she was sure he was speaking about adults at the time. When one pupil asked Mr McConnell how the executive proposed to tackle under-age drinking," began his response with the quip: ""I'm sure there's no under-age drinking in the Highlands."" He went on to speak about the evils of binge drinking and railed against irresponsible drinks promotions. He said: ""I hope I'm not going to be seen as preaching to anybody here but the really serious problem at the moment is binge drinking and the impact it has on people's health and their ability to control what's happening round about them."" Mr McConnell said he regularly saw reports on the effects of binge drinking sprees which ended in assaults or even rapes", and on the health consequences of binge drinking. ""The one thing we are going to do something really serious about is binge drinking and irresponsible drinks promotions that can help lead to that", he said. Far too many pub chains in particular are selling far too much booze far too cheaply and encouraging people to drink it far too quickly. ""We are going to clamp down on that and make those promotions illegal in the hope that people can enjoy a drink sensibly over the course of an evening."" He added: ""By all means get drunk once in a while - but do not get into a situation where people are being encouraged to get completely incapable just to save some money and drink more quickly."" SNP Holyrood leader Nicola Sturgeon said: ""This is an incredible gaffe by Jack McConnell. ""We all know that under-age drinking is an issue in Scotland but it is quite staggering that any politician", particularly the First Minister," should encourage young people to get drunk. ""The first minister should withdraw these remarks immediately."" But an executive spokeswoman insisted Mr McConnell had made the remark with adults", not youngsters," in mind. ""He was talking in the context of adults binge drinking and irresponsible drinks promotions - which are for the over-18s", she said. It was just a recognition that people will get drunk," but that binge drinking and drinks promotions that encourage it are not acceptable.""

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"politics 095.txt Brown hits back in Blair rift row Gordo

n Brown has criticised a union leader who said conflict between himself and Tony Blair was harming the workings of government. Jonathan Baume", of the top civil servants' union," spoke of ""competing agendas"" between Mr Brown and Mr Blair. But the chancellor said Mr Baume was never at meetings between himself and the prime minister so could not judge. He said the union leader was trying to block civil service reform which threatened his members' jobs. It suited the purpose of Mr Baume's union", the First Division Association, to suggest there were two agendas battling against each other because the union was trying to resist the planned reforms, Mr Brown told BBC Radio 4's Today programme. Under the plans, unveiled in the Gershon report, some 84,"000 civil servants jobs will be axed or changed and the savings ploughed back into frontline services. Mr Brown said: ""To be honest I don't think you can rely on his [Mr Baume's] judgement on this matter when it comes to the decisions that the government are making.

""Mr Blair and I are making exactly the same decisions on civil service reforms. We are determined to go on with the Gershon reforms."" He also said that as Mr Baume was never present at meetings between himself and the prime minister", he was not in a position to judge. On Wednesday, ahead of the Chancellor's pre-Budget report," Mr Baume told BBC News there were sometimes ""conflicting and competing agendas for government"" between Number 10 and the Treasury. What the chancellor wanted was ""not by any means what Alan Milburn and the prime minister want to see""", Mr Baume said. ""Government departments get their money from the Treasury on the basis of public service agreements they sign up to," but at the same time the prime minister also has an agenda and that's not necessarily the same as the Treasury's and the prime minister is of course a very powerful figure in any government. ""He also sends instructions and messages and directions to departments about how he would like each secretary of state and each department to implement a policy agenda. ""The problem is that on many occasions these two don't add up and individual cabinet ministers as well as departments have to make sense of this battle." Number 10 said ministers were interested in governing and not a ""soap opera"" about Mr Blair and Mr Brown. Tory shadow chancellor Oliver Letwin said: ""The battle Royal that the top civil servants are now reporting on between the chancellor and Tony Blair is preventing them both from getting on with the business of getting taxpayers value for money.""

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politics 096.txt Tories 'would cut number of MPs' The Conservative Party would cut the number of MPs by about one-fifth if they were elected", Tory leader Michael Howard has said. The plan forms part of the party's ""smaller government bill""", to be unveiled later this week. Mr Howard told the Sunday Times the party would also reduce the number of government special advisers. And he said a referendum would be held in Wales to decide whether or not to scrap the Welsh Assembly. The changes would all take place within five years of the Conservatives winning a general election, Mr Howard told the paper. The precise number of MPs to go would depend on the result of the Welsh referendum, but it would probably mean a reduction of around 120 from the current total of 659. If Wales decided to keep its assembly it would stand to lose more MPs. Mr Howard said as both parties planned to cut the number of civil servants at Whitehall - Labour by more than 80,000 and the Tories by almost 100,"000 - they should accept a similar drop in their own numbers. ""It is all very well saying government departments should be reduced", but what about ministers," Parliament and special advisers?"" he said. Shadow leader of the Commons Oliver Heald said: ""This will be part of our aim to reduce unnecessary and costly interference in people's lives by reducing the size and role of the State""". Mr Howard said the plan would also even out the ""great unfairness"" of there being pr

oportionately more Scottish and Welsh MPs at Westminster than those from England. The average size of an English constituency was 70",000 people, Mr Howard said. In Northern Ireland it was just over 66,000, in Wales just over 59,000 and in Scotland 53,"000. The number of Welsh MPs would be set at an amount that was ""consistent and fair in terms of representation with the rest of the United Kingdom"" if the assembly was scrapped. Mr Howard said the changes should be carried out quickly and could even be implemented by the election after next. ""You have got to have a big bang. We don't want this like the House of Lords reform," getting to one stage and then not having the next stage.""

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"politics 097.txt UK plan to deport terror suspects Deals are being sought to allow the UK to deport terror suspects to their home countries without risk of them being tortured or sentenced to death. Home Secretary Charles Clarke told the Times he hoped agreement with several countries could be reached. The move follows a Law Lords judgement that the detention of 12 men at Belmarsh prison", London, and Woodhill, Milton Keynes, was unlawful. The 12 affected by the ruling are from Algeria, Tunisia," Egypt and Jordan. The government was told that using anti-terror legislation brought in after 11 September to hold the men indefinitely without charge broke human rights laws. Mr Clarke told The Times: ""I think we should be prosecuting much more energetically our ability to deport the individuals concerned to the countries from which they come." He said it was a route that was being pursued in collaboration with Foreign Secretary Jack Straw ""in a very positive way"". Mr Clarke said that he was seeking ""memorandums of understanding"" between overseas governments and Britain to ensure suspects would not be subjected to the death penalty on their return. However", he added: ""I do not think the solution to the Law Lords' judgement for this government is in deportations", but they will help. ""There are other strands that we have to do." But the Liberal Democrat's shadow home secretary", Mark Oaten," accused Mr Clarke of avoiding the main issue with the Belmarsh detainees. ""The critical issue that the home secretary is dodging at this stage is to deal with the very principle", to deal with how we tackle this problem in the future, he told BBC News. And I do want him to grasp those issues and that means looking at how we can actually secure convictions in this country allowing, for example, intercept communications, telephone tapping to be included," Mr Oaten said. Deportation may tackle this initial problem but I want to see a wider debate urgently about how we can actually get trials and convictions in this country." "Unless we get that", the Liberal Democrats will vote against this measure when it comes for renewal in March." The BBC's home affairs correspondent", Daniel Sandford, said it appeared Mr Clarke was putting more emphasis on the possibility of deportation than his predecessor," David Blunkett. But he said reaching an understanding with some of the detainees' home countries could be difficult. ""Some of these people are accused of very", very serious crimes in their home countries so it's not an easy agreement to get and I think for some of these suspects it won't be the solution." Daniel Sandford said ministers may try to put forward other solutions - such as allowing more secret evidence to be put into normal criminal trials or developing a more secret trials process - in the next few weeks. ""The government may try and deport some of them and then those that are left see if they can work out some way of putting them on trial", he said.

politics 098.txt Ministers deny care sums 'wrong' Ministers have insisted they are committed to free personal care for the elderly despite research suggesting the cost of the policy was under-estimated. A report by the Fraser of Allander Institute says the decision to push ahead with the flags

hip policy was based on flawed research. Deputy Health Minister Rhona Brankin has pledged to study the research. SNP Holyrood leader Nicola Sturgeon said the public needed reassurance that the care programme was secure. The rise in costs stems from a series of mistakes in the research used by the care development group"" of Scottish Executive experts who prepared the original costings", according to findings published in the Quarterly Economic Commentary of Strathclyde University's Fraser of Allander Institute. ""Dubious"" assumptions about improving health expectancy could drive the cost of the policy up by another £130m by 2022", the report warned. It was carried out by husband and wife economist team Jim and Margaret Cuthbert. But Ms Brankin told BBC Radio Scotland: ""We don't think we got our sums wrong. ""Obviously we will examine the findings of this new report", along with figures from our own research that we have already commissioned. ""We will look in great detail at any contribution to this", because we need to be sure we can provide free personal care and nursing care for our older people into the future. ""And we are absolutely committed to doing that." But the Scottish National Party called on ministers to reassure people that enough funding is in place to support the free personal care policy. Ms Sturgeon said that while she had no reason to doubt the executive's support for the policy", there were questions which needed to be answered and, if necessary," sums redone. She said: ""Serious concerns have been raised and there are questions which need to be answered by the Scottish Executive. ""We need to know that the money is there", not just for this year or next year, but into the future so that older people, and those who are looking forward to older age," can rest assured that their personal care needs will be met."

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"politics 099.txt Blair stresses prosperity goals Tony Blair says his party's next manifesto will be ""unremittingly New Labour"" and aimed at producing ""personal prosperity for all"". The prime minister is trying to draw a line under speculation over the state of his relationship with Gordon Brown with the speech in Chatham", Kent. He is saying that prosperity means both individual wealth and ensuring ""radically improved"" public services. He is also claiming Labour is more ideologically united than ever. Mr Brown is currently touring Africa after a week of facing questions about reports of his splits with Downing Street. With the election widely predicted for May", angry Labour MPs this week warned Mr Blair and Mr Brown about the dangers of disunity. Now Mr Blair is trying to put the focus on the substance of Labour's platform for a third term in government. Labour made low inflation," unemployment and mortgage rates the centrepiece of a new poster campaign this week. And on Thursday Mr Blair is saying: ""I want to talk about the central purpose of New Labour - which is to increase personal prosperity and well-being", not just for a few but for all. ""By prosperity I mean both the income and wealth of individuals and their families", and the opportunity and security available to them through radically improved public services and a reformed welfare state."" The Tories are trying to capitalise on the apparent feud at the top of government. On Wednesday they unveiled a poster which pictured the prime minister and Mr Brown under the words ""How can they fight crime when they are fighting each other?"" Michael Howard and frontbencher John Redwood on Thursday launched new plans to abolish hundreds of quangos. They say government is spending too much and lower taxes are needed to make Britain more competitive. The Liberal Democrats have also claimed infighting its obstructing good government. The latest speculation about relations between New Labour's two most powerful figures came after the publication of a new book", Brown's Britain by Robert Preston. In it he alleges that Mr Blair told Mr Brown in 2003 he would step down as prime minister before the com

ing general election. The book claims the premier went back on his pledge after support from Cabinet allies and suspicion that Mr Brown was manoeuvring against him. Mr Peston's book claimed that Mr Brown told Mr Blair: ""There is nothing you could ever say to me now that I could ever believe." On Wednesday Mr Blair directly denied Mr Brown made that quote", and before he left for Africa on Tuesday the chancellor told reporters: ""Of course I trust the prime minister.""  
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politics 100.txt Guantanamo man 'suing government' A British terror suspect held in Guantanamo Bay for 33 months plans to sue the government", it is reported. Martin Mubanga claimed in the Observer that an MI6 officer played a key role in consigning him to the US camp in Cuba, following his arrest in Zambia. Mr Mubanga, 32, from Wembley, London," said he was brutally interrogated and daubed with urine at the camp. The home secretary said he would not be launching an investigation and that the media reports were not ""well informed""". Mr Mubanga", who has dual British and Zambian nationality, was one of four Britons who were released from the US camp in January. He said he was sent there after being interrogated by a British man who said he was from MI6, shortly after his arrest in Zambia in March 2002. Mr Mubanga said he had been in Afghanistan and Pakistan to study Islam. But he said he was unable to return to the UK because he had lost his British passport," and was travelling on his Zambian passport instead. Mr Mubanga said the ""MI6 agent"" told him the passport had been found in a cave in Afghanistan along with documents listing Jewish groups in New York and suggested he had been on an al-Qaeda reconnaissance mission. Mr Mubanga said the man", and an American female defence official, tried to recruit him as an agent," but he refused and within three weeks was told he would be sent to Guantanamo Bay. His lawyer Louise Christian said: ""'We are hoping to issue proceedings for the misfeasance of officials who colluded with the Americans in effectively kidnapping him and taking him to Guantanamo.' And Menzies Campbell", the Liberal Democrats' foreign affairs spokesman," said it was vital to establish whether ministers approved Mr Mubanga's transfer to Guantanamo. But a Foreign Office spokesman said he could not comment on the activities of British intelligence or security agencies. And Home Secretary Charles Clarke told BBC One's Breakfast with Frost: ""I'm not organising a specific investigation into it."" Mr Mubanga is the first of the four detainees freed last month to give a media interview. He told the Observer his worst moment was when he was told he would be released last March", only to be confined and told he would be there for many more years. He claimed he was stripped of his clothes and matted and forced to remain in an empty metal box, naked except for boxer shorts. And he said an interrogator used a mop to daub him with his own urine while he was chained hand and foot. Mr Mubanga, who insists he does not feel bitter," said: ""I've lost three years of my life,"" because I was a Muslim. He added: ""The authorities wanted to break me but they strengthened me. They've made me what I am - even if I'm not quite sure yet who that person is." The US government denied the claims", saying it condemned and prohibited torture. In a statement," it said: ""The Department of Defense has no doubt that Mr Mubanga was properly detained as an enemy combatant under the laws of war. ""He was detained to prevent him from fighting against the US and our allies in the war on terror." But Fair Trials Abroad director Stephen Jakobi said there were similarities between Mr Mubanga's account and those of other Guantanamo detainees. He said: ""The pattern is the same. The real problem is the concentration camp conditions in Guantanamo. ""Is [Charles Clarke] really pretending this is all made up?"" Mr Mubanga and the three other freed British detainees were released without charge by UK police on their return from Cuba.

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"politics 101.txt Council tax rise 'reasonable' Welsh cou  
ncils should set their taxes at ""reasonable levels"" after being given an aver  
age funding increase of 6%," says the assembly government. Finance Minister S  
ue Essex said it was a ""good deal"" for local government. The £3.2bn settlemen  
t includes the ""full"" £7.4m from the UK Treasury announced by Chancellor Gord  
on Brown. But opposition parties said rebanding of council taxes would mean ste  
ep rises. In addition," £13.4m will come from the business support grant - a s  
cheme which enables local authorities to keep part of business rates. She said  
where spending rises were kept to around 5% she was ""confident that councils w  
ill be able to set council taxes at reasonable levels."" The Welsh Local Govern  
ment Association (WLGA) had said on the eve of the announcement said that ""sig  
nificant"" cuts to services may still be unavoidable. After the announcement WL  
GA finance spokesman Bob Wellington", of Torfaen," said it was vital that rises  
were minimised. ""A limited amount of money has come available but this is not t  
he answer to our problems," said Mr Wellington. It is vital that we start now  
to plan for future years and accept that resources will continue to reduce whil  
e pressures on services increase." On Monday", a delegation of north Wales co  
uncils visited Ms Essex to lobby for increased funds. Ms Essex said: ""I have l  
istened to the views of local government and council tax payers and recognise t  
he funding pressures and the concerns they have about council tax rises. ""I ha  
ve met a large number of local authorities in recent weeks and I am aware of th  
e pressures on them to provide local services and keep down the level of counci  
l tax," particularly for those people to are moving up a band due to the reval  
uation of domestic properties." She said council taxes could be kept at reason  
able levels," ""even for those people who have moved up a band"". The settlem  
ent includes a rise in the grant to help councils with the most deprived commun  
ities and a 16.4% rise in capital expenditure support. Ms Essex said: ""This is  
a good deal for local government," which will allow the well-managed councils  
of Wales to develop their services and charge reasonable levels of council tax.  
It is now a matter for council leaders to manage their budgets at a local leve  
l." Plaid Cymru's local government spokesman Dai Lloyd called the announcement  
""hugely disappointing"". He said: ""Wales and its local authorities have been  
short changed yet again. This is not whinging as the Labour Assembly Government  
so often claims - it is anger." ""This will mean either a massive hike in coun  
cil tax", massive cuts in services provided by councils," or both." Mike German  
n", leader of the Liberal Democrats in the assembly," claimed that one in three  
homes were still likely to face council tax rises due to rebanding. Mr German s  
aid: ""I know from my discussions with Welsh Liberal Democrat council leaders t  
hat they are doing their utmost to keep council tax to a minimum. But the rando  
m redistribution effect of rebanding...will create a great deal of difficult  
y." Conservative local government spokesman Glyn Davies said that for the mini  
ster to claim that the majority of council tax payers in Wales should see very  
little change ""is taking spin to the very verge of deception"". He added: ""Ar  
ound a third of Welsh households have been re-valued upwards by at least one ba  
nd and inevitably face increases into double figures.""  
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"politics 102.txt Blunkett row should end - Blair Prime M  
inister Tony Blair said it was time to draw a line under the controversy surrou  
nding David Blunkett. The Tories and the Lib Dems have called for a second inq  
uiry into the fast-tracking of a visa application for Mr Blunkett's ex-lover's  
nanny. Sir Alan Budd found a ""chain of events"" linked Mr Blunkett to Leoncia

Casalme's indefinite leave to remain application. At the end of his Middle East trip", Mr Blair said he still admired Mr Blunkett and thought his integrity was intact. On Tuesday Sir Alan said the application for leave to remain in the UK made by Kimberly Quinn's nanny was processed in 52 days, 120 days faster than the average. But he could not find evidence to show whether Mr Blunkett's intervention was intended to give special help for his then lover's nanny - or if he was raising the case as an example of poor departmental performance. In his first comments since Sir Alan's announcement," Mr Blair told BBC News he had not yet read the report in detail. But told BBC News: ""As far as I'm concerned", we have drawn a line under that."" Asked if Mr Blunkett could return to front-line politics at some point", he replied: ""I have made my admiration for David very clear and it remains. ""He's been a tremendous colleague", he's done a great job for us," first as home secretary then as education secretary. The future is something we will have to approach in the future."" The prime minister shrugged off claims from Conservative leader Michael Howard that he led a ""grubby government""". He said Mr Blunkett's integrity remained intact: ""He was the person first of all who asked for this inquiry to be set up. He accepted that what he originally thought had happened had not happened", he said. ""But I think Sir Alan Budd also accepted there wasn't some conspiracy or cover-up and I just think a line should be drawn under now and we should move on.""" Earlier", Mr Howard said: ""There does need to be another inquiry", a judge-led inquiry. There were so many questions that weren't answered."" There was ""deceit at the heart of government"" which was not limited to the visa affair", he argued. Lib Dem home affairs spokesman Mark Oaten also said there was ""a strong case for a judge-led judicial review""". He said: ""Next time it happens it may not be about a nanny and their visa. It may be about something even more important than that."" Mr Blunkett quit as home secretary last week after being told in advance of Sir Alan's findings. In a statement", the ex-home secretary said he accepted the inquiry's findings. He said he had told the truth throughout and had raised the nanny case as an example of unacceptable backlogs in the system.

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"politics 103.txt Minimum rate for foster parents Foster carers are to be guaranteed a minimum allowance to help cover their costs", the government has announced. Payment levels vary from area to area, with some carers getting just £50 a week for clothes, food and other costs. Minister for Children, Young People and Families Margaret Hodge said new plans will ensure fosterers' allowances would be as fair as possible. However local authorities, which set and pay the allowances, are concerned about how the extra cash will be found. About 50,"000 children live with foster families in the UK and carers have said they need more money to make ends meet. Ms Hodge said: ""Foster carers must not be out of pocket when meeting the costs of caring for a looked after child - a crucial role in society. ""We need to make sure that arrangements for paying foster carers are as fair and transparent as possible. ""Our proposal for a national minimum rate shows we are serious about creating a better deal for foster carers and about encouraging more people to come forward and consider fostering as a worthwhile and rewarding opportunity."" The government is seeking to amend the Children Bill", which passes through the Commons next week," to establish a national minimum payment. Fostering Network executive director Robert Tapsfield criticised the existing system. ""There is just no logic to a system which values children differently depending on where they live. ""And with a shortage of over 8",000 foster carers in England," it's not a sustainable situation to expect carers to fund foster care from their own pockets."" The charity recommends a weekly payment of £108.49 for looking after a baby. In a survey", i

t discovered that rates paid by neighbouring authorities could vary by as much as £100 per week. The Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS) said it agreed in principle with the government's plans. Tony Hunter, the organisation's president," said: ""There are many devils and lots of details hidden within the Government's proposals. ""But ADSS fully supports proper remuneration for valued foster carers and looks forward to working with ministers", local government and the fostering organisations themselves in order to make sure a sensible and practicable policy emerges.""

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"politics 104.txt Royal couple watch nation's mood Prince Charles and Camilla Parker Bowles are awaiting the nation's reaction after announcing they are to be married on 8 April. Mrs Parker Bowles will take the title HRH Duchess of Cornwall after a civil ceremony to be held at Windsor Castle. A Daily Telegraph poll of 1",313 people suggests two-thirds of Britons support the couple's decision to marry. But only 40% think Mrs Parker Bowles should become Princess Consort as planned after Charles becomes king. Some 47% believe she should have no title, while 7% think she should become queen. The poll also found that the majority of Britons would prefer the monarchy to miss a generation, with the Queen handing the throne to her grandson Prince William, 22, on her death or abdication. On Thursday night, Prince Charles, 56, and Mrs Parker Bowles, 57, hosted a dinner at Windsor Castle," their first public appearance since announcing their engagement. Mrs Parker Bowles said the prince went down on one knee to propose and added: ""I'm just coming down to earth."" She displayed her diamond engagement ring - a Royal Family heirloom - to reporters. Charles said he and his wife-to-be were ""absolutely delighted""". Their marriage will end years of speculation on a relationship which dates back to 1970. The Queen and Duke of Edinburgh said the news had made them ""very happy""". Princes William and Harry said they are ""very happy"" and wish the couple ""all the luck in the future""". The wedding will be a civil ceremony followed by a service of prayer and dedication in St George's Chapel at which the Archbishop of Canterbury", Dr Rowan Williams, will preside. The marriage is likely to be a sensitive issue because Mrs Parker Bowles is divorced and her former husband is still alive. If he became king," Charles would be the supreme governor of the Church of England and some Anglicans remain opposed to the remarriage of divorcees. ""His divorce from Diana and the disappointment the country felt over how Diana had been treated... opened up a sense of disillusionment with [Prince Charles]", said Ros Coward, who wrote the authorised biography of Diana, princess of Wales. The Archbishop of Canterbury said: I am pleased that Prince Charles and Mrs Camilla Parker Bowles have decided to take this important step." Tony Blair said he was ""delighted"" for the couple and offered his congratulations", as did Conservative leader Michael Howard and Liberal Democrat leader Charles Kennedy. Australia's Prime Minister John Howard also offered his congratulations," adding that their decision to marry was a ""sensible and a good thing""". Mrs Parker Bowles has joined the prince at numerous engagements in recent years - mostly at evening events for The Prince's Trust. Clarence House staff were at pains to point out that she attended these events in a private capacity.

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"politics 105.txt Muslim police stops 'more likely' UK Muslims should accept that people of Islamic appearance are more likely to be stopped and searched by police", a Home Office minister has said. Hazel Blears said innocent Muslims would be targeted because of the search for Islamic extremists. Qualifications for religious leaders to enter the UK could also be made to

ugher," she told a Commons inquiry. Her comments have been described as ""irresponsible"" and ""outrageous"" by the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC).  
""The threat is most likely to come from those people associated with an extreme form of Islam", or who are falsely hiding behind Islam," the Salford MP told the Commons home affairs committee. It means that some of our counter-terrorism powers will be disproportionately experienced by the Muslim community." "It was a reality that should be recognised", she said. ""If a threat is from a particular place then our action is going to be targeted at that area", she added. On ministers of religions, such as imams, she said faith groups would be asked what other qualifications and skills, such as civic knowledge and ability to engage the community, should be demanded. Last year, ministers introduced a requirement that ministers should speak English to a certain level. IHRC chairman Massoud Shadjareh accused Ms Bleas of playing an Islamophobia card"" in the run-up to a general election. ""She is demonising and alienating our community", he said. It is a legitimisation for a backlash and for racists to have an onslaught on our community. ""This sort of comment is just music to the ears of racists." "Later", the prime minister's official spokesman urged people to put Ms Bleas' comments into context. The minister had been saying she understood there was a perception that stop and search was aimed at one community, but that was not what was happening," the spokesman said. ""What is happening is that those powers are aimed at those who are suspected of carrying out or planning certain activity who happen to come from one community. ""It is not aimed at a particular community", it is not police policy to aim these powers at a particular community," he added. Statistics showed that of the 17 people found guilty of terrorist acts in the UK since the 11 September attacks, only four of the 12 whose ethnic backgrounds were known were Muslim, he added. Figures published last week showed that people from ethnic minorities were increasingly likely to be targeted by police stop and search tactics. Figures showed that, for 2003/2004, Asians were 1.9 times more likely to be stopped and searched, compared with 1.7 times more likely in the previous year. Separate figures on police searches in England and Wales carried out under the Terrorism Act 2000 showed that ethnic minorities were more likely to be targeted. Muslim groups have repeatedly claimed that their communities are being victimised under terror laws. In 2003/2004, 12.5% searches under the laws were on Asian people, even though they make up 4.7% of the population. Last July, the police were accused of Islamophobia by Muslim groups after stop and search figures showed the numbers of Asians targeted had risen by 300% since the introduction of anti-terror laws.

politics 106.txt Howard attacks cost of asylum Michael Howard has launched an attack on the cost of Britain's chaotic"" asylum system under Tony Blair. The Tory leader said English local authorities have spent more than £3bn - or £140 per household - on asylum since Labour won power in 1997. Mr Howard is expected to tell activists in Kent that voters' tolerance and desire to help others are being abused. Other parties and refugee agencies have already attacked Tory plans for annual limits on numbers. Mr Howard said Britain should take its fair share of the world's ""genuine refugees"". ""The anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz - where my grandmother was murdered along with over a million others - has reminded all of us that we have a moral responsibility to those fleeing persecution", he was due to say. But if we are to fulfil responsibility," we have to get a grip of the system. ""Fair play matters. People want a government that upholds the rules - not one that turns a blind eye when they are bent and abused", he said. And let's be clear. Our asylum system is being abused - and with it Britain's generosity." "Earlier this week", Mr Howard said his party's plans to cut immigration were not racist, arguing they would make the asylum system fairer for genuine refugees. If elected," his party w

ould institute an annual limit on asylum and all claims would be processed overseas. That prompted some charities to say the plans would put refugees' lives at risk if they were turned away once quotas were filled. ""If we have a moral responsibility towards people fleeing persecution", then these policies will not provide a safe haven," said Hannah Ward of the Refugee Council. If people turn up in the UK asking for help they will be turned away. Michael Howard's policy effectively means there is no safe haven in the UK. ""When it comes to costs", then perhaps we should start with how decisions are made on asylum seekers. So many of them are shown to be wrong - one in five decisions that are appealed are successfully overturned," rising to half for some nationalities. ""We need good quality decision-making on asylum applications because it is delays in the system which cost so much." Tony Blair said Labour would set out workable plans for tackling immigration abuse in the next few weeks and attacked the Tory plans. ""By cutting the number of front-line immigration staff at our borders", they will actually make the problem worse," said Mr Blair. Liberal Democrat chairman Matthew Taylor said there needed to be a quick, fair and firm asylum system. But he said it was absolutely disgusting"" to propose a system which could turn away genuine refugees. The Conservatives say there is little risk of this happening as demand for asylum will be considered when quotas are set. On Monday", Mr Howard said: ""It's not racist", as some people tend to claim," to talk about controlling immigration far from it.""

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"politics 107.txt Brown outlines third term vision Gordon Brown has outlined what he thinks should be the key themes of New Labour's next general election bid. He said ensuring every child in Britain had the best start in life could be a legacy to match the NHS's creation. The chancellor has previously planned the party's election strategy but this time the role will be filled by Alan Milburn - a key ally of Tony Blair. The premier insisted Mr Brown will have a key role in Labour's campaign", and praised his handling of the economy. Writing in the Guardian newspaper," Mr Brown outlined his view of the direction New Labour should be taking. ""As our manifesto and our programme for the coming decade should make clear", Labour's ambition is not simply tackling idleness but delivering full employment; not just attacking ignorance, disease and squalor but promoting lifelong education," good health and sustainable communities." BBC political editor Andrew Marr said that Mr Brown's article was ""a warning shot"" to Mr Blair not to try and cut him out of the manifesto writing process. ""It was", as always, coded and careful... but entirely deliberate," was Mr Marr's assessment. The prime minister was asked about Mr Brown's article and about his election role when he appeared on BBC Radio 4's Today programme. Mr Blair said a decision had yet to be taken over how the election would be run but the chancellor's role would be central"". Mr Blair argued that under New Labour the country had changed for the better and that was ""in part"" because of Mr Brown's management of the economy. And he pledged childcare would be a ""centrepiece"" of Labour's manifesto. He also predicted the next general election will be a ""tough", "tough fight"" for New Labour. But the prime minister insisted he did not know what date the poll would take place despite speculation about 5 May. Mr Blair said he was taking ""nothing for granted"" ahead of the vote - warning that the Tory strategy was to win power via the back door by hinting they were aiming to cut Labour's majority instead of hoping for an outright win.

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"politics 108.txt 'Super union' merger plan touted Two of

Britain's big trade unions could merge to form a ""super union"" of two million members. The move by Amicus and the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) would be seen as a bid to carry more weight with ministers and employers. Amicus has 1.2 million members and the TGWU has 800",000. Any merger would have to be approved by the unions' executives and their membership. It is understood meetings will be held on Wednesday about the proposal. Along with the GMB and Unison, the TGWU and Amicus worked closely together in the last year to hammer out a 56-point deal with Labour's leadership over equality at work, holidays and pensions - the Warwick Agreement. Both unions are remaining tight-lipped about the merger rumours," but one insider pointed out to the BBC News website that ""nobody is denying suggestions a merger could be on the agenda"" when the two unions' executives hold their meetings on Wednesday. Amicus's executive was due to meet in any case although the TGWU is holding specially scheduled talks.

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politics 109.txt UK firms 'embracing e-commerce' UK firms are embracing internet trading opportunities as never before", e-commerce minister Mike O'Brien says. A government-commissioned study ranked the UK third in its world index of use of information and communication technology (ICT). The report suggests 69% of UK firms are now using broadband and that 30% of micro businesses are trading online. Mr O'Brien said UK businesses were sprinting forward in ICT use, but that there were more challenges ahead. The report, carried out independently by consultants Booz Allen Hamilton and HI Europe, placed the UK third behind Sweden and Ireland for business use of ICT. It showed British business brought greater maturity to their ICT use, by using broadband in increased numbers," bringing ICT into their business plans and using new technologies such as voice activated programmes and desktop video conferences. Mr O'Brien said: ""The increase in the proportion of business connected by broadband shows that UK companies are embracing the opportunities that ICT can bring. ""It is particularly encouraging to see that small businesses are beginning to narrow the digital divide that appeared to have opened up in recent years." The government would play its part in ""cultivating an environment where information and communication technologies can flourish""", Mr O'Brien said. The ""clear message"" the report sends is that effective use of ICT can bring real improvements in business performance for all business. ""However", we are not at the finishing line yet and many challenges remain if the UK is to reach its aim of becoming a world-leading e-economy," he added. The International Benchmarking Study was based on 8,000 telephone interviews with businesses, of which more than 2,700 were UK businesses. It is the eighth in a series of examining the adoption and deployment of ICT in the world's most industrialised nations.

politics 110.txt UK heading wrong way - Howard Tony Blair has had the chance to tackle the problems facing Britain and has failed, Michael Howard has said. Britain is heading in the wrong direction""", the Conservative leader said in his New Year message. Mr Blair's government was a ""bossy", interfering government that takes decisions that should be made by individuals, he added. But Labour's campaign spokesman Fraser Kemp responded: Britain is working," don't let the Tories wreck it again"". Mr Howard also paid tribute to the nation's character for its generous response to the Asian quake disaster. The catastrophe was overshadowing the hopes for the future at this usually positive time of the year", Mr Howard said. ""We watched the scenes of destruction with a sense of disbelief. The scale", the speed," the ferocity of what happened on Boxing Day is difficult to grasp. ""Yet Britain's response has shone a light on our nation's character. The last week has shown that the warm"," caring hear

t of Britain beats as strong as ever." He went on to reflect on the values that most Britons hold dear". Looking ahead to the coming general election," he pledged to "turn these beliefs into reality" and set out the choices he says are facing Britain. "How much tax do people want to pay? Who will give taxpayers value for money", the clean hospitals and good," disciplined schools they want? "Who can be trusted to get a grip on the disorder on our streets and the chaos in our immigration system?" Mr Blair has failed to tackle these problems", he claimed," saying he has the "wrong solution" to them. "The result is big government and higher taxes eroding incentives", undermining enterprise and denying people choice. "Worst of all", it is a government that has wasted people's money and failed to tackle the problems families face today." The Tories", he said," can cut crime and improve public services without asking people to pay more taxes. "We can have progress without losing what makes Britain great - its tolerance", the respect for the rule of law," the ability of everyone to fulfil their potential. "We simply need to change direction. The election will give Britain the chance to change." This is the record Mr Blair will have to defend in the coming months", he said," urging voters to hold him to account. But Labour spokesman Mr Kemp said: "It would be more appropriate for this message to come out on 1 April"," not 1 January." "Let us never forget that when Michael Howard was in government Britain suffered mass unemployment", 15% interest rates, record home repossession," and the introduction of the poll tax. "With Labour Britain is working. Rather than alluding to false promises Michael Howard should be starting 2005 with an apology to the British people for the misery that the government", of which he was a member, inflicted upon the country.

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"politics 111.txt Kilroy launches 'Veritas' party Ex-BBC chat show host and East Midlands MEP Robert Kilroy-Silk has said he wants to "change the face of British politics" as he launched his new party. Mr Kilroy-Silk", who recently quit the UK Independence Party,"said "our country" was being "stolen from us" by mass immigration. He told a London news conference that Veritas - Latin for "truth" - would avoid the old parties' "lies and spin". UKIP leader Roger Knapman says he was glad to see the back of Mr Kilroy-Silk. Mr Kilroy-Silk promised a "firm but fair" policy on immigration and said they hoped to contest most seats at the forthcoming general election. He said Veritas would also announce detailed policies on crime", tax, pensions, health and defence over the next few weeks. And he announced the party would be holding a leadership election. On Thursday he is due to announce which constituency he will run in at the next general election - that will come amid speculation he has his sights set on Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon's Ashfield seat. He was joined in the new venture by one of UKIP's two London Assembly members, Damien Hockney who is now Veritas' deputy leader. UKIP's chairman Petrina Holdsworth has said the group will just be a parody of the party the men have left. Mr Kilroy-Silk announced his decision to quit UKIP at a public meeting in Hinckley," Leicestershire last week. It came after months of tension as he vied unsuccessfully for the leadership of that party. He said he was ashamed to be a member of a UKIP whose leadership had "gone AWOL" after the great opportunity offered by its third place at last June's European elections. "While UKIP has turned its back on the British people", I shall not," he said. I will be standing at the next general election. I shall be leading a vigorous campaign for the causes I believe in. "And", unlike the old parties, we shall be honest," open and straight." Mr Hockney also left UKIP saying Mr Kilroy-Silk would "deliver better" as the leader of a Eurosceptic party. A spokesman for UKIP called on Mr Hockney

to quit the London Assembly. The party asserts that Mr Hockney ""has a moral obligation", if not a legal one"" to stand down. Its leader", Roger Knapman," has said he is glad to see the back of Mr Kilroy-Silk. ""He has remarkable ability to influence people but", sadly, after the [European] election it became clear that he was more interested in the Robert Kilroy-Silk Party than the UK Independence Party so it was nice knowing him, now 'goodbye', " he said. UKIP officials also argue Mr Kilroy-Silk has not been straightforward"" in attacking the party he once wanted to lead. This is just what the Europhiles pray for. As the main Eurosceptic party", UKIP should try to resolve its differences with Kilroy to show a united front and give the UK public a serious political voice against Europe. Having multiple parties with the same view point just splits the vote further. Thank goodness that Kilroy-Silk has gone - now UKIP at least has a chance in the election! It is very sad to see the cause of Britain regaining its proper relationship with Europe damaged by this split within UKIP. Robert Kilroy-Silk could have a lot to offer. Instead we have a split party and a damaged cause. Under the present electoral system, people must work together, and small parties have no hope of representation. Last summer, UKIP achieved a major advance, partly and only partly due to Kilroy-Silk. It is a great shame this has been dissipated in in-fighting. UKIP has a wide platform of policies, not just withdrawal from the EU. This Kilroy-Silk conveniently ignores in the comments surrounding the launch of his own party. Neither the English Democrats nor the New Party were interested in letting him join them and take over their leadership speaks volumes. Veritas is the beginning of the end for Kilroy-Silk. If he believes in truth and democracy then he and the two assembly members should resign and force a by-elections to stand on their own platform rather than this backdoor approach to politics of being elected for one party then defecting to another. So UKIP was good enough for him to lead, not good enough for him to follow! Interesting that a party committed to plain speaking should have a Latin name! Every opinion poll points to an overwhelming anti-Europe feeling in this country. Kilroy-Silk could be on the verge of something huge if he can broaden his appeal beyond this one issue. He is an extremely able communicator with years of political experience. We wants quality schools, top hospitals, clean and efficient public transport, punishments that fit the crime, limited asylum, a purge on bureaucracy and less taxes. It needs courage and honesty, two qualities sadly lacking in our politicians. Kilroy-Silk may just have those very qualities. Recruit the right colleagues, Robert, and your time may have come! Well if you cannot get enough limelight being an ordinary MP then go out and start up your own Party. It's all flash and no real policy here Let's hope this is the start of both UKIP and Kilroy-Silk slipping into obscurity. Veritas? The name will do it. But perhaps I am wrong for surely all modern schoolchildren will understand it since they do still learn Latin in the classroom do they not? The whole essence of what RKS represents is Euroscepticism, so explain to me how the too-twee label of Veritas symbolises that?

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"politics 112.txt Blair 'damaged' by Blunkett row A majority of voters (68%) believe the prime minister has been damaged by the row over David Blunkett's involvement in a visa application", a poll suggests. But nearly half those surveyed said Mr Blunkett should return to Cabinet if Labour won the next election. Some 63% of respondents in the Sunday Times poll thought his former lover - Kimberly Quinn - acted vindictively and 61% that he had been right to resign. YouGov polled a weighted sample of 1,981 voters online on 16-18 December. Mr Blunkett resigned as Home Secretary on Wednesday after an inquiry uncovered an e-mail showing a visa application by Mrs Quinn's former nanny had b

een speeded up. Sir Alan Budd's inquiry also found Mr Blunkett's account of events had been wrong. Almost a quarter (21%) of those polled for the Sunday Times said he should return to the Cabinet straight after the election. One in four said he should be back in the Government's top ranks within a year or two while 39% opposed a comeback. Three-quarters said Mr Blunkett was right to go to court for the right to see Mrs Quinn's son - whom he says he fathered - and just 14% voiced sympathy for Mrs Quinn. A total of 53% of those polled said they had sympathy for Mr Blunkett, with 40% saying they did not. Forty-three per cent thought Mr Blunkett had done a good job as home secretary and 17% disagreed. Meanwhile, 32% said Mr Blair was a good prime minister and 38% disagreed. A majority, 52%, said Chancellor Gordon Brown had done a good job and just 16% disagreed. A second poll for the Independent on Sunday found that support for all political parties remained largely unchanged after the Blunkett controversy. Labour led the Conservatives by 39% to 34% with the Liberal Democrats on 19%. CommunicateResearch interviewed 401 people before David Blunkett's resignation and 601 afterwards. Some 82% said Mr Blunkett had set a good example by wanting to take responsibility for the child he says is his, but 42% backed his legal action compared to 45% who thought it was unbecoming. Thirty per cent said the affair showed Mr Blunkett could not be trusted as a minister while 63% disagreed.

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"politics 113.txt MP's shock at long lost daughter Labour  
MP Stephen Pound has told of his shock and his joy on learning he fathered a daughter when he was ""out of control"" during the ""wild"" 1960s. Lucy", 36," tracked down Mr Pound after her birth mother told her he was known as ""Precious"" at school. Despite being told he was a ""nutter who died at sea"" she found a reference to Mr Pound on Friends Reunited. Lucy's mother kept her pregnancy secret and had her adopted at four weeks. Mr Pound found out about it last year. That happened when Lucy wrote to his Parliamentary office saying she believed he was her father. Mr Pound", who is now married with two other teenage children," said: ""I was a nutter and I was a sailor but I wasn't dead."" He said his first reaction was to wonder if he was victim of a ""set-up"" but he then realised all the dates fitted. ""It was a pretty horrible thing with a pretty happy ending. I felt guilt in the marrow of my bones", said the Ealing North MP. I don't blame Lucy's mother. I was pretty much out of control. I was 18 when she was conceived. It was a different time - it was pretty wild." Mr Pound says he rang Lucy as soon as he got her letter", they met up and have been in contact ever since. Describing that first meeting at London's King Cross station," he said: ""The earth went from under my feet ... We were walking across the Euston Road and I took her arm to take her across and there was an immediate connection. ""We were finishing each other sentences." Lucy", who was adopted by a family from Essex, wants to remain anonymous for the sake of her adoptive father and her children. Mr Pound said his wife Maggie had been fully supportive and their two children Emily, 16, and Pelham, 14 were pleased to have an older sister.

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"politics 114.txt Green fear for transport ballot The Green Party is concerned thousands of residents may not be able to vote in Edinburgh's transport referendum. Edinburgh City Council is to ballot constituents on proposals to introduce congestion charging in the capital. But Green MSP Mark Ballard fears people not on the council's edited electoral register may miss out. Local authorities can only send ballot papers to those on the edited list over non-statutory matters", such as the transport referendum. Therefore, residents who have exercised their right to have their details left off the list could

miss the chance to vote. However," there is still time for those who are not on the list to contact the council and make sure they are sent ballot forms ahead of February's voting deadline. Mr Ballard said: ""This vote will set the future of transport in Edinburgh for decades to come. ""It is therefore vital that as many residents as possible in Edinburgh City and the surrounding areas", are registered to vote in the ballot. ""Many people are not aware that they may miss out on their chance to have a say. ""Everyone involved in this debate - both for and against - wants the ballot to be as fair and representative as possible", and that means encouraging people to take part." The ballot will ask residents to vote for or against the council's proposed congestion charge scheme and a host of transport improvements to be funded by it. The outcome of the referendum will be known next month after the ballot forms are sent out and returned to the council. Towards the end of February", the council will meet to decide whether to proceed with an application to Scottish ministers for approval for its planned congestion charging scheme and the other parts of its transport package.

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"politics 115.txt New drink limit 'would cut toll' More lives than previously thought could be saved by cutting drink-drive limits by a third", a report says. University College London research claims cutting the limit from 80mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood to 50mg would save 65 lives a year. The findings are being published by the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety as MPs are due to vote on the government's Road Safety Bill. The bill includes changes to speeding fines but not to the drink-drive limit. The research, carried out by transport expert professor Richard Allsop, says cutting the limit would also lead to 230 fewer serious injuries on the UK's roads compared with 2003. He estimates that this would save the country £119m a year. A previous estimate, contained in a 1998 Department of Transport Document," suggested such a move could save 50 lives a year. The findings are based on the assumption that drivers who currently keep below the legal limit would continue to do so were it to be lowered and that those who tend to exceed the limit slightly would also lower their drinking. Professor Allsop said: ""Reducing the limit from 80mg to 50mg can be expected to save around 65 lives a year or around half of those who die in accidents where the driver's BAC [blood alcohol content] is within 30mg of the current limit. ""Only about one in 50 of those driving during weekend evenings and nights will need to moderate their drinking to achieve this and fewer still at other times." Ministers do not support a lower limit", saying it is not clear it would have a major impact on drink drive casualties. They believe educating drivers is more important. The AA Motoring Trust said it was not sure what affect dropping the limit would have on drivers' attitudes to drink-driving. Road safety head Andrew Howard said: ""It remains to be seen whether the social disapproval of the drinking driver will stay at the current rate if the alcohol limit is cut. ""Parliamentarians need to consider this carefully. Britons police themselves by consensus much more effectively than they do by weight of enforcement alone." Liberal Democrat transport spokesman John Thurso said drink-driving remained a ""major killer""", with figures showing a worrying rise in the number of accidents involving drivers who had been drinking. He said there had been a 29% drop in the number of drivers being breathalysed since 1997, which he said the government needed to address if it wanted to reduce the danger caused by drink-driving. The Road Safety Bill, which gets its second reading on Tuesday, would allow the results of roadside breath tests to be used in court - currently a blood test is needed. It also includes plans for a staggered speeding fines and points system, penalising drivers who exceed lim

its by a wide margin more than those who are caught going just over. These have been criticised by road safety campaigners, including Labour backbencher Gwyneth Dunwoody, who says it will reduce the incentive for drivers to stay within the limits in residential areas, leading to more road casualties. In an article for the Times newspaper, Ms Dunwoody, who chairs the Transport Select Committee, says: ""Slight increases to low car speeds increase hugely the risks to pedestrians and cyclists. ""It is quite simple: if you hit someone at 30mph", they have a 50 per cent chance of survival. If you are going at 40mph," nine times out of ten they will die.""

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"politics 116.txt CSA 'could close'"," says minister Ministers would not rule out scrapping the Child Support Agency if it failed to improve"," Work and Pensions Secretary Alan Johnson has warned. But he said replacing the controversial CSA would be ""the nuclear option"". A report by the Commons work and pensions committee called for the agency to be wound up unless it improved its service within weeks. Chairman Sir Archy Kirkwood said: ""If the agency cannot be rescued"," then it must be replaced."" The committee reached its conclusions after it found that nearly 250",000 cases have yet to be processed. It warned that it could be five years before the CSA was ""fit for purpose""", describing it as ""a failing organisation"" and ""in crisis"" with parents facing payment delays and inaccurate maintenance calculations. The report urged the CSA to draw up contingency plans", including the ""abandonment option""", to be presented to Parliament by Easter, in case the CS2 computer system could not be made to work. And responding to calls for the agency to be scrapped," Mr Johnson told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: ""I certainly wouldn't rule out the nuclear option of moving to a completely new system. ""But I think the select committee would agree with me we would only do that when we were absolutely convinced that this system just isn't going to work."" The MPs launched their inquiry into the CSA's performance after it became clear that", despite the introduction of a simpler system of calculating maintenance payments for new cases in 2003," a backlog of claims was building up. The MPs found the £456m system from American IT giant EDS was ""nowhere near being fully functional and the number of dissatisfied"" disenchanted and angry customers continues to escalate"". Faced with the committee's criticism", the government has suspended its plan to cut the agency's staff by 25%. The CSA has been surrounded in controversy since its introduction in 1993 to assess and enforce child support payments by absent parents. It is currently chasing outstanding payments of more than £720m," while a further £947m has been designated as ""unrecoverable""". Michelle", a mother of twins," said she had not received a penny of the £57 a week she should be receiving from her ex-partner and had faced an ""on-going battle"" with the CSA. Her forms have twice been lost in the post", she said. ""I don't receive correspondence", I don't receive phone calls, I have to chase them all the time," she said. Theresa May, Tory shadow work and pensions secretary, said: We have got to find a way that's going to ensure those payments get through to the people who are due them."" The agency's former chief executive Doug Smith quit last autumn claiming he was ""seriously disappointed"" with its performance. The committee said the National Audit Office should investigate why the EDS system had gone so badly wrong. It blamed the agency's senior management for a ""magnitude of problems"" within the agency", including for an apparent lack of training of frontline staff.

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"politics 117.txt Boothroyd calls for Lords speaker Betty

Boothroyd has said the House of Lords needs its own Speaker and that peers should lead the way on reforming the upper chamber. Baroness Boothroyd", who was the first woman to be Commons Speaker," said she believed Tony Blair initiated reforms without a clear outcome in mind. ""Now we have to take care of it ourselves and make the best of it", she told the BBC's Breakfast with Frost. In 1999 Labour removed all but 92 of the Lords' 750 hereditary peers. That was billed as the first stage of reform of the institution. The lord chancellor hinted further reforms could be unveiled in the next Labour manifesto. I think we need to look very carefully at the relationship between the Lords and the Commons, Lord Falconer told BBC1's Breakfast With Frost. How it interacts with the Commons is a very," very important issue. ""We need to address the issue in the manifesto"," but you will have to wait for when the manifesto comes." The lord chancellor currently has the role of House of Lords speaker. He is also head of the judiciary and a member of the Cabinet as constitutional affairs secretary. Lady Boothroyd said she believed it was unacceptable for the lord chancellor to have the role of Speaker. ""I would really like to see a Speaker of the House of Lords", she said. I don't go for the idea of somebody - a lord chancellor - who is head of the judiciary," a senior Cabinet minister and Speaker of the Lords. ""I want somebody there who is going to look after that House and do a job there.

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"politics 118.txt Bid to cut court witness stress New targets to reduce the stress to victims and witnesses giving evidence in courts in England and Wales have been announced by the lord chancellor. Lord Falconer wants all crown courts and 90% of magistrates' courts to have facilities to keep witnesses separate from defendants within four years. More video links will also be made available so that witnesses do not have to enter courtrooms. It is part of a five-year plan to help build confidence in the justice system. Ministers say the strategy is aimed at re-balancing the court system towards victims", and increasing the number of offenders brought to justice. Launching the Department for Constitutional Affairs' plan," Lord Falconer said: ""One of the top priorities will be a better deal for victims. ""The needs and safety of victims will be at the heart of the way trials are managed. ""Courts", judges, magistrates, prosecutors, police and victim support - all working together to ensure the rights of victims are put first," without compromising the rights of the defendant." He went on: ""Giving evidence is a nerve-wracking experience", especially when you're a victim. ""Yet with a will and with support it can be done." Lord Falconer told BBC Radio 4's Today programme it was impossible for some elderly people to go to court to give evidence. Other witnesses could be intimidated by sitting alongside defendants outside courts. ""You are never going to get rid of some element of the trauma of giving evidence", he said. But you can make people believe that the courts understand the problem," it's not some kind of alien place where they go where they are not thinking about them." The plan comes as the lord chancellor also considers allowing cameras into courts for the first time since 1925", as long as they were used for cases that did not involve witnesses. Another feature of the strategy is constitutional reform, with a government bill to set up a supreme court and a judicial appointments commission returning to the House of Lords on Tuesday. Ministers had proposed getting rid of the title of lord chancellor, but the Lords have over-ruled this. Lord Falconer said it was right for the highest court to be completely distinct from Parliament. The person in charge of the court system should not also be speaker of the House of Lords, he said, and should be the best person chosen from either House of Parliament. What they did, not what they were called, was the critical issue, he added.

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"politics 119.txt Lord Scarman", 93, "dies peacefully Distinguished lawyer Lord Scarman", who conducted the inquiry into the 1981 Brixton riots, has died aged 93. The peer enjoyed a celebrated judicial career, serving as Law Commission chairman in its first seven years. He also chaired the 1969 tribunal set up to investigate civil disturbances in Northern Ireland. Paying tribute," the Lord Chancellor Lord Falconer said Lord Scarman was one of the ""great advocates of our generation"". ""His legacy from his decisions in the Lords and the Court of Appeal is substantial. ""His work in the wake of the Brixton riots and his commitment to the vulnerable and dispossessed was second to none. ""A great judge",, a great lawyer and a great man." Lord Scarman's nephew George Ritchie said the peer", who passed away peacefully on Wednesday," would be ""sadly missed"".. The Lord Chief Justice", Lord Woolf, who is the most senior judge in England and Wales," said it was Lord Scarman's ""pioneering work"" which paved the way for the Human Rights Act 1998. ""He was a lawyer and a judge who had a remarkable insight into human nature", and an exceptional sensitivity to the needs of a healthy society, he said. He was, personally," totally charming and he will be remembered with great affection and admiration by all who came into contact with him." Dame Elizabeth Butler-Sloss", the president of the Family Justice Division," said Lord Scarman was a ""good and humane judge"" and one of the greatest figures of the late 20th century. Lord Scarman will be remembered for the public inquiry he led into a string of race riots which began in Brixton when racial tensions rose after a police crackdown on street robbery. During the following three days of disturbances that spread to the Midlands", Merseyside, Bristol and Leeds," nearly 400 people were injured and buildings and vehicles were set alight. The inquiry famously settled on the so-called ""rotten apples"" theory", which argued that only a few police officers were racist, saying most were not. It spawned new law enforcement practices and led to the creation of the Police Complaints Authority. Trevor Phillips, chair of the Commission for Racial Equality," praised Lord Scarman's ""ability to listen"".  
He said: ""When Lord Scarman toured the streets of Brixton his presence was electrifying. ""A community which had been systematically ignored by everyone else was suddenly embraced by the epitome of the English establishment. ""His great quality was the ability to listen to young people of all backgrounds", many of whose language he could barely understand," genuinely to hear what they had to say and to talk to them as human beings. ""He never lost the special combination of wisdom",, humanity and the spark of radicalism that marked his watershed report into the Brixton riots.""  
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"politics 120.txt Tory leader urges Harry apology Prince Harry should personally make clear how sorry he is about wearing a Nazi uniform to a friend's fancy dress party", says Tory leader Michael Howard. Mr Howard, whose grandmother died in Auschwitz," said many people would be offended by the prince's actions Clarence House has issued a statement saying the prince has apologised and realised it had been a poor costume. Number 10 said an error was made but now Harry had apologised the matter should be left to the palace. That was a message repeated by Home Secretary Charles Clarke who said the matter should now be left to lie. But Lib Dem leader Charles Kennedy said Harry was in a privileged position and said he should apologise in person. ""There is a reservoir of goodwill for Prince Harry", and Prince William with him, in this country," but I think he needs to remember that it can't last forever."" He added that Sandhurst would probably be good for Harry as it would teach him some self discipline.

scipline. Former Labour MP Lord Janner", who is a high profile member of Britain's Jewish community," branded Harry's action's ""stupid and evil"". He told ITV: ""The time has come for him to make a public apology. It is about common decency", of respect to the people who fought the Nazis," to the families of those who were killed by the Nazis and to people who suffered during the Holocaust." He added: ""I would send him in the army as fast as possible. I hope that would teach him not to behave like that."" A photograph of Prince Harry wearing a swastika armband and German desert uniform at the party appears in Thursday's Sun newspaper under the headline: ""Harry the Nazi."" Mr Howard acknowledged the prince's apology and said he had no doubt the prince's father and family would have much to say to him privately about the incident. But he told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: ""It might be appropriate to tell us himself just how contrite he is."" Mr Howard declined to say what form the statement should take. But former Buckingham Palace press spokesman Dicky Arbiter said the prince should make a personal", broadcast apology. Mr Clarke said he recognised people's concerns about the costume but argued: ""He has apologised and I think we should leave the matter there.""

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"politics 121.txt NHS waiting time target is cut Hospital waiting times for patients in Wales are to be cut", but not to the same extent as those in England. Welsh Health Minister Jane Hutt said no patient would wait more than 12 months for an outpatient appointment by March 2006, against a current target of 18 months. But she said the target for an inpatient appointment would remain at 12 months for March 2006. The announcement came as new monthly waiting figures showed a drop. This current inpatient target was set when the assembly government extended its second offer guarantee scheme, which gives patients the option of having their treatment outside Wales. Details about funding to resource the new targets are expected in the New Year. In England, the current target for inpatients - seeing a consultant to having an operation - is six months. Dr Richard Lewis, Welsh secretary of the British Medical Association (BMA)," welcomed the new targets ""to make further and faster progress on waiting lists"" . ""However", much remains to be done on waiting lists and waiting times because Wales still lags a long way behind England," he said. Capacity must be built into the system with sustained investment to ensure that Welsh patients don't receive a worse service than patients over the border." Health analyst Tony Beddow", from the Welsh Institute for Health and Social Care," called the new targets ""reasonably impressive""". On Wednesday", Ms Hutt also announced £26 4m for health services will be spent reducing waiting times," improving key areas and modernising staff pay structures in Wales. Ms Hutt said major achievements had been made in cutting ""unacceptably long waits for treatment over the past year""". ""We are turning the corner on long waits in Wales. Now we need to see those reductions in long waiters being improved again", she said. She added the targets intended to ensure no-one waits more than a year for treatment or to see a consultant. But let us not forget two thirds of those waiting for treatment now are waiting less than six months," and these targets affect the small minority of patients in Wales that are waiting far too long." Rhodri Glyn Thomas", Plaid Cymru health spokesman said: ""It's exactly the same target she set in 1999", with the qualification that it's dependent on a second offer. It's a failed target," from a failed minister..with a failed policy." For the Welsh Liberal Democrats", Kirsty Williams called the new target ""hugely unambitious""". ""It leaves patients in Wales still waiting two years before they're treated." Conservative health spokesman Jonathan Morgan said: ""We're spending more money but waiting lists have gone through the roof. ""The Audit Commission has

said that the money is not being spent efficiently or effectively", " and that's quite a criticism." " Meanwhile", the latest monthly waiting list figures showed the total number of people waiting more than 18 months as an inpatient in Wales has fallen by 9.8%. Statistics to the end of November showed a decline since October from 785 to 708. The number waiting over 12 months also fell from 7,613 to 6,630," or 12.9%. Ms Hutt said they were ""excellent figures"". There are 305",775 people on a waiting list of some kind, down from 311,764 last month.

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"politics 122.txt Tories plan migrant health checks Non-European Union citizens wanting to work in the UK will have to undergo tests for Tuberculosis and HIV", under plans unveiled by the Conservatives. A positive test for TB would mean visa applications being turned down," while HIV would be dealt with case by case. Leader Michael Howard said the checks on new arrivals would help protect public health and the NHS. Labour said many tests were already done. The Lib Dems warned both parties against ""pandering to prejudice"".  
The proposals", which would be brought in if the Conservatives won the General Election, would not apply to people coming to the UK for less than six months unless they intended to work in health or childcare or teaching. Mr Howard said the plans were based on policies already in action in Canada," New Zealand and Australia. ""It's very important that we should safeguard the good standards of public health that Britain enjoys", he told BBC Radio 4's Today programme. Government figures suggest TB in England has increased by 25% over the past 10 years. Nearly two thirds of people with TB are born abroad," said Mr Howard. I don't think a responsible government can stand aside and do nothing in the face of this problem." But Mr Howard said the plans would not affect asylum applicants' claims. The proposals include: - People coming to the UK from outside the EU for between six and 12 months from a ""high incidence TB country"" will have to undergo a chest X-ray. - People coming to settle in the UK permanently from outside the EU will have to ""demonstrate they have an acceptable standard of health"". - They will also have to show they are unlikely to be a danger to public health and are unlikely to ""impose significant costs or demands"" on the NHS. - The tests will include a health check", chest X-rays for TB (except for children and pregnant women) and tests for hepatitis and HIV for over 16-year-olds. Only the discovery of TB will mean people will be automatically denied a visa," other conditions will be dealt with on a ""case by case basis"".  
There is already some screening in place. Last year 185",000 people were tested for TB at Heathrow and Gatwick airports, only about 200 were found to be infected. And Dr John Moore-Gillon, of the British Lung Foundation," said: ""TB is not simply imported", we are seeing a rise in many sections of the UK-born population as well." The government says the Tories are ""a bit late"" to the issue. Immigration minister Des Browne quoted its five-year plan for immigration and asylum"," as saying: ""We are implementing our existing powers by targeted health screening for TB in high-risk areas at the entry clearance stage. ""Those who are diagnosed would then need to seek treatment at home before being allowed to enter the UK." Meanwhile Mark Oaten", Liberal Democrat home affairs spokesman," said: ""This is another worrying step in the war of words over asylum and immigration between Labour and the Conservatives. ""Michael Howard knows perfectly well what bigger game he is playing," and history proves it is a very dangerous one." Lisa Power", head of policy at Aids charity the Terrence Higgins Trust said the policy was prejudice-based rather than evidence-based. ""In fact", it would be more likely to drive people with health conditions to falsify tests while others gain entry by simple dint of their EU status," she said.

politics 123.txt MPs issued with Blackberry threat MPs wi

ll be thrown out of the Commons if they use Blackberries in the chamber Speaker Michael Martin has ruled. The £200 handheld computers can be used as a phone, pager or to send e-mails. The devices gained new prominence this week after Alastair Campbell used his to accidentally send an expletive-laden message to a Newsham journalist. Mr Martin revealed some MPs had been using their Blackberries during debates and he also cautioned members against using hidden earpieces. The use of electronic devices in the Commons chamber has long been frowned on. The sound of a mobile phone or a pager can result in a strong rebuke from either the Speaker or his deputies. The Speaker chairs debates in the Commons and is charged with ensuring order in the chamber and enforcing rules and conventions of the House. He or she is always an MP chosen by colleagues who, once nominated, gives up all party political allegiances.

politics 124.txt Wales 'must learn health lessons' The new health minister for Wales says there are lessons to learn from England in tackling waiting lists. Dr Brian Gibbons, on his first full day in the job after Jane Hutt was sacked, admitted big challenges"" but insisted the ""essentials"" were in place. But both Plaid Cymru and the Liberal Democrats said Dr Gibbons needed to change policy. Meanwhile Ms Hutt defended her record", saying waiting times and lists were ""only 10% of the health agenda. Dr Gibbons", who was a GP in Blaengwynfi, in the Upper Afan Valley, before becoming AM for Aberavon," said NHS staff wanted a period of consolidation after ""tremendous change and reform"". One of the biggest problems which had faced Ms Hutt during her five-and-a-half years as the assembly's first health minister was the length of waiting lists in Wales. In November the British Medical Association said NHS staff were ""weeping with despair"" as figures showed 311",000 people were waiting for treatment in Wales, up by 2,400 on the previous month. In the same month lists in England were at their lowest for 17 years, with 856,"600 people waiting for treatment. Dr Gibbons told Radio Wales: ""There is no doubt that", in managing waiting lists, England has done a lot of very very useful work," and we do need to learn from that." But he said the NHS in Wales also needed to create a healthier population rather than respond only to ill health", and a balanced view of priorities was important. ""We do need a consistent across-the-board approach", recognising the patients' experience of how they use the service is going to be, at the end of the day," the main test of how the service is working." He said NHS staff wanted a period of consolidation after ""tremendous change and reform"". Later", Dr Gibbons praised the work of Ms Hutt," saying he ""agreed with everything she's done"" to change the health service in Wales. Dr Gibbons said he accepted there was a problem", but his job now was to build on the foundations put in place by his predecessor. He also acknowledged that until the waiting list issue was sorted out," the rest of the assembly government's health policy would be overshadowed. Opposition members and some Labour MPs had long called for Ms Hutt's removal after sustained criticism over extended hospital waiting times. First Minister Rhodri Morgan told BBC Wales he had agreed with Ms Hutt in 2003 that she would not be health minister in the run-up to the 2007 elections. ""She's been doing the job for five years and eight months and", apart from Nye Bevan himself, (architect of the NHS)," I don't think anybody has ever done the job for so long." Mr Morgan said he had only told Ms Hutt of the reshuffle on Monday morning", and said the NHS in Wales was Dr Gibbons' ""baby"" now. In response to Dr Gibbons' comments", Ieuan Wyn Jones, leader of the Plaid Cymru group in the assembly," said: ""It is apparent that this reshuffle by the first minister was just changing the deckchairs on a sinking Titanic."" Kirsy Williams", for the Lib Dems," added: ""If the underlying policy is going to continue", then changing the minister will serve no purpose, other than to deflect flak from Labour's MPs," she said. Meanwhile Ms Hutt said she hoped that the pe

ople of Wales would benefit from my investment of the past five years and eight months"" Asked about waiting lists"," she said that waiting times and lists were ""only 10% of the health agenda"" and that the Welsh Assembly Government had ""turned the corner"" on the issue.

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"politics 125.txt UKIP candidate suspended Eurosceptic party UKIP have suspended a candidate for allegedly suggesting the criminally insane should be killed. John Houston",54, was due to stand in the East Kilbride seat in Lanarkshire at the next election. But he was suspended after his reported views, including the return of the British Empire, were sent to two Scottish newspapers. UKIP spokesman Mark Croucher said those who selected Mr Houston knew nothing of his views. The episode comes at a difficult time for UKIP," soon after the high-profile departure of MEP Robert Kilroy-Silk. Mr Houston is alleged to have said that the organs of the criminally insane should be ""made available to law-abiding members of the community"" and proposed the legalisation of drugs and the sex trade. The document reportedly said: ""We're looking for the resurrection of the British Empire. ""The problems for the human race - environmental and others - can only be dealt with on a global scale", and that calls for a radical alliance of the English-speaking nations," which they are uniquely able to do." Mr Croucher said the main issue would be that Mr Houston's reported views had been presented as UKIP policy", which they were not. He said they might have been submissions to a committee working on the party's manifesto," but would not have been matched to Mr Houston when he was standing to become a candidate. He told BBC News: ""He appears to have said these things. We have suspended him as a member and as a candidate. ""By all accounts none of this was mentioned at his selection meeting. ""It is simply a distraction from the task in hand", the EU constitution," not individual idiocies." Mr Houston was quoted in the Herald newspaper saying: ""I feel UKIP have over-reacted and overshot the runway." Peter Nielson", who is UKIP Scotland chairman," said he had suspended Mr Houston on Friday night. ""He will remain suspended while the matter is being investigated and then we will decide if and what further action will be taken." He said that any evidence would be looked into and Mr Houston may be interviewed by the party. He added: ""I can't comment too much at the moment"," I have one version from him but I haven't seen the papers yet.""

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"politics 126.txt End Bush 'denial' Blair tells EU Tony Blair is urging European leaders to wake up from their ""state of denial"" over President Bush's re-election. ""America has spoken. The rest of the world should listen",, the prime minister said in an interview with The Times newspaper, published on Friday. Mr Blair is at a summit in Brussels, where Iraq and Europe and justice and immigration plans are on the agenda. French President Jacques Chirac reacted to his warning by saying Europe instead needed to reinforce its own unity. Mr Blair has probably been closer to President Bush than any other European leader. He said some people were in a sort of state of denial"" about the US election result but predicted a more ""receptive mood"" would emerge soon. America needed to listen to the world too",, he said. ""The fact is that President Bush is there for four years. He is there because the American people have chosen him",, he argued. He also made clear he intended to take seriously what he perceives as his role in bringing the two continents together. Britain was uniquely placed"" to make out the common ground because of its strong alliance with the US", he suggested. He admitted he had gone to bed at 2230GMT, well before the American polls closed," thinking Mr Kerry might have won. He woke up at

0530GMT to discover Mr Bush had won but declined to say if he was pleased with the eventual result. His words about President Bush met a cool reception from Jacques Chirac. The French president told reporters: ""Europe today has more than ever the need", the necessity," to reinforce itself and its dynamism and unity. ""That is the goal of the constitution in a world that is more multi-polar than ever." Mr Chirac will miss an address to the summit from Iraqi interim leader Iyad Allawi", who this week criticised nations which took a ""spectator"" role to Iraq's reconstruction. Mr Chirac denied there was any snub - he is going to a memorial service for the United Arab Emirates' late leader and says he would be happy to meet Mr Allawi. He also signed a communiqué; stressing the EU's commitment to securing a stable and unified Iraq. The EU also confirmed a new \$21m aid package. The communiqué; congratulated President Bush on his victory and stressed the importance of good transatlantic relations. The summit is also expected to agree changes to streamline European asylum and immigration decisions. Mr Blair recently said the UK would only participate in EU-wide measures where it was in UK interests but the Tories say he is surrendering a key veto. The meeting will also assess progress on the economic reform plans agreed in Lisbon in 2000 to make Europe more competitive.

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politics 127.txt Brown to outline presidency goals Next year will be ""make or break"" for development in poorer countries Gordon Brown will say as he sets out UK goals for its EU and G8 presidencies. The chancellor is due to outline a series of key targets the government will be judged on in 2005. They will include doubling aid from donor countries and eliminating debt owed by the poorest nations. Mr Brown also wants other G8 nations to match his target for overseas aid - spending 0.7% of national income. He also wants the richer countries to do more to help the development of vaccines for Aids and malaria. The chancellor is travelling to America next week as part of his persuasion drive over the issue. He told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: ""We need more resources allied to progress on trade and progress on debt relief if we are going to make an impact on the problems of ill health", of illiteracy, of poverty," particularly in Africa but right through the developing countries." His proposals were effectively a new ""Marshall Plan"" for the world", including an international finance facility, which would issue bonds in an attempt to double global aid cash to \$100bn a year. Agreement in the Doha development talks could also give developing nations the trading ability they needed, he argued. The European Union's Common Agricultural Policy had caused aggravated trade problems, he said, but there was now an agreement to end export subsidies. Mr Brown said much had been achieved on issues such as debt relief in the last seven years. But with 30,000 children were dying unnecessarily every day more was needed," including 100% debt relief multilaterally. ""That is why next year is a test", he said. If after five years of making promises the world is not prepared to honour them," then people will be justified in saying they promised but they did not produce results." The Catholic aid agency Cafod will host Mr Brown's speech on Wednesday. Cafod wants Britain to use its influence to pressure countries like the US to make firm commitments to tackle global poverty. Mr Brown said America too needed to take more action but defended President George Bush for guaranteeing resources to countries which introduced reforms to tackle corruption. Oxfam's Paying the Price report this week said 45 million children will die needlessly before 2015 and aid budgets are half their 1960 levels. The charity's director", Barbara Stocking," said: ""2005 offers the chance for an historic breakthrough"," but unless world leaders act now the year will end in shameful failure." The report said the G8 of top industrialised nations had agreed in 1970 to

spend 0.7% of their incomes on aid. But 34 years later none of the organisations members had reached this target and many had not yet set a timetable. Mr Blair", " who has described Africa as a ""scar"" on the world's conscience", " has already said tackling world poverty would be one his G8 priorities along with climate change and the Aids epidemic. But Band Aid founder Bob Geldof in July said he was sick of hearing ""guff"" about scars on the world. It was pathetic that Britain was the 4th richest country in the world but only the 11th most generous aid donor", he added. Conservative shadow international development secretary Alan Duncan accused Mr Brown of missing his target on providing anti-retroviral drug treatment to three million Africans by 2005. Instead, only 500,000 people would benefit," he said. ""There's no point in him demanding praise and adulation for setting a whole new raft of targets when he has so woefully failed to meet the ones he already has", " added Mr Duncan.

politics 128.txt Brown shrugs off economy fears Gordon Brown is to freeze petrol duty increases, fund a £1bn package to avoid big council tax rises and boost childcare and maternity leave. In an upbeat pre-Budget report, he slightly increased borrowing but insisted economic targets would be met. The chancellor also hailed the longest period of growth in UK industrial history"" but denied he was ""gloating"". But Oliver Letwin", for the Tories, attacked government red tape and debt," dubbing Mr Brown ""Sir Wastealot""". The shadow chancellor said Mr Brown's ""golden rule"" had ""turned to dross in his hands"" and said he was borrowing to spend", not invest," with predicted debt over the coming years totalling £170bn. Mr Letwin told MPs: ""The tide is going out on the chancellor's credibility. He is spending", borrowing and taxing so much because he is not getting value for taxpayer's money." " Vincent Cable", for the Liberal Democrats," accused Mr Brown of ducking tough choices. He said: ""Last week the prime minister gave us the politics of fear; this week the chancellor has offered the economics of complacency. ""There are serious challenges ahead from the falling dollar and from the rapid downturn in the UK housing market and rising personal debt. But they have not been confronted." " Mr Brown rejected the Lib Dem's call to open up the government's books to the National Audit Office", " saying decisions on tax and spending should be made by ministers. Some economists say his forecasts on public finances are wishful thinking. BBC economic editor Evan Davis said the figures were plausible but also a gamble. Mr Brown's insistence he was not ""gloating"" was a pointed rebuttal of a warning from new European Commissioner Peter Mandelson. In his speech", he set out a 10-year childcare strategy for if Labour wins the next election. It includes a £285m cash injection to extend paid maternity leave from six months to nine, with parents able to transfer leave from the mother to the father. He also promised to increase free nursery education for three and four-year-olds to 15 hours from April 2007. And funds would be provided to keep schools open from 0800 to 1800GMT to look after children while their parents were at work. Taken together," the measures would create a ""welfare state that is truly family-friendly for the first time in its history""", said Mr Brown. He also announced a cash hand-out for older pensioners, with payments of £50 for the over-70s as part of the winter fuel allowance. In a move ministers say should keep council tax rises below 5% next year," the chancellor said he was providing an extra £1bn for local councils. The money is expected to come from government departments such as health and education. Mr Brown said he was set to meet his two fiscal rules - to borrow only to invest and keep debt ""low and sustainable"" - both in this economic cycle and the next. Borrowing figures for 2003/4 are £35bn - £2.5bn less than the £37.5bn predicted in March's budget", as already announced by the Office for National Statistics. Borrowing is tipped to fall to £31bn by 2005/06 - but that is still £2bn more than Mr Brown predicted in his March budget. Inflat

ion would be 1.75% next year and 2% in the years to follow, Mr Brown forecast. He also pledged an extra £105m for security and counter-terrorism. Business groups have welcomed efforts to improve competitiveness and invest more in skills and innovation. But there worries about the costs of more family-friendly working. Simon Sweetman, from the Federation of Small Businesses," said: ""The proposals on maternity leave have clearly been made with a general election in mind and with little thought to the impact on small employers.""

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"/..... politics 129.txt UK troops on Ivory Coast standby Downing Street has confirmed British troops are on standby in case they need to help evacuate several hundred UK citizens from Ivory Coast. The news came as it emerged France had begun evacuating its hostages after days of anti-French demonstrations. Trouble flared after nine French peacekeepers were killed and President Jacques Chirac ordered the destruction of the Ivory Coast's air force. A company of 100-120 UK troops is understood to have been put on standby. They are ready to fly out and secure the route from the embassy to the airport if called upon. Prime Minister Tony Blair's official spokesman said: ""There are British nationals in Ivory Coast and as you can imagine we are making the usual contingency plans in case the situation deteriorates further," but that's all I can say at this stage." He added the situation would be monitored carefully in case evacuation became necessary. France has played a lead role in international peacekeeping in Ivory Coast - a former colony - after President Laurent Gbagbo broke an 18-month ceasefire with rebels bombing their positions and killing the nine French soldiers. The decision to destroy the African nation's small air force prompted riots against French and other foreign nationals. The Spanish have already put their forces on standby to evacuate their nationals if necessary.

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"/..... politics 130.txt Blair told to double overseas aid Tony Blair is being urged to use all his negotiating powers to end poor countries' debt and double aid. Some 45 million children will die needlessly before 2015 and aid budgets are half their 1960 levels", Oxfam says in a report, "Paying the Price. The call comes as the prime minister prepares to assume the presidency of the G8 of top industrialised nations. ""As rich countries get richer", they're giving less and less. This scandal must stop," Oxfam's Barbara Stocking said. The world's poorest children are paying for rich countries' policies in aid and debt with their lives. ""2005 offers the chance for an historic breakthrough", but unless world leaders act now the year will end in shameful failure, the charity's director added. The report said: For rich countries, providing aid to help to end global poverty is an obligation and a matter of justice," not an act of charity." It also points out that in 1970 the G8 of top industrialised nations agreed to spend 0.7% of their incomes on aid. But 34 years later none of the organisations members have reached this target and many have not yet set a timetable", the report says. It argues that the price of not investing in poor countries' sustainable development will be felt across the world. The report said: ""Global poverty threatens our shared prosperity and security. ""Environmental crises and natural disasters", disease and drug trafficking know no national borders. Poverty heightens the likelihood of conflict and unrest. ""New threats to the peace and security of rich nations arise from poverty and gross inequalities. ""Criminal and terrorist networks are more likely to operate where state institutions are weak." Both the prime minister and Chancellor Gordon Brown have called for urgent action to fight world poverty. Mr Blair", who has de

scribed Africa as a ""scar"" on the world's conscience", has already said tackling world poverty would be one his G8 priorities along with climate change and the Aids epidemic. Mr Brown has also pledged to write off the debt owed to Britain by the world's poor nations. A spokeswoman for the Department for International Development said: ""The government had made a clear commitment to reaching 0.7% of gross national income for overseas development aid by 2013. ""If Britain's proposal for an International Finance Facility were adopted", the objective of 0.7% could be achieved earlier," by 2008-09. ""These additional resources will be used to increase UK bilateral aid to Africa to at least £1.25bn a year by 2008 and spend at least £1.5bn on HIV/Aids related work over the next three years.""

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"politics 131.txt Peace demo appeal rejected Peace protesters have lost a landmark appeal over police actions in stopping an anti-war demonstration days after the start of the Iraq war. They had appealed against a High Court decision that it was not unlawful for police to forcibly turn protesters away near RAF Fairford", Glos, in 2003. The police had also sought to overturn a breach of human rights ruling arising from the same case. Sitting on Wednesday, three Appeal Court judges dismissed both appeals. They were challenging decisions by two judges in the High Court in February this year. It followed action by police, when three coachloads of people were searched and detained on the way to RAF Fairford and forced to return to London under police escort. The demonstrators appealed against a finding by Lord Justice May and Mr Justice Harrison that it was not unlawful for the police to turn the passengers away. The police were urging Lord Chief Justice and Lord Justices Clarke and Rix to overturn the ruling that they had breached the protesters' human rights by detaining them in the coaches. Craig Mackey, assistant chief constable of Gloucestershire Police," said: ""We have always considered that our responses were proportionate and all our decisions on the day were based on intelligence."" He said no one on the coaches accepted responsibility for items found on the coaches including body armour", a smoke bomb and five shields. ""Given these circumstances", and the fact that RAF Fairford, and other military installations in the UK, had been the scene of increasingly destructive disorder in the weeks preceding this incident," the police commander on the ground made the decision to turn back the coaches. ""From day one we have vigorously defended this decision", which was made out of a genuine concern that if the coaches were allowed to proceed it would have resulted in disorder and criminal damage at RAF Fairford." Fairford Coach Action", representing more than 80 people who appealed against the police actions, say they are prepared to take their case to the European Court of Human Rights. Their action is supported by Amnesty International and Liberty.

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"politics 132.txt Retirement age could be scrapped The ""myth that ageing is a barrier"" to contributing to society needs to be ""exploded""", the work and pensions minister has said. This was why the government was considering scrapping the retirement age entirely," Alan Johnson said. It was also committed to ""stamping out"" age discrimination and would outlaw it", he told a conference on ageing. All three parties have been wooing older voters with both the Tories and Lib Dems pledging higher pensions. Mr Johnson told Age Concern's Age Agenda in London the government was ""seriously considering"" introducing pensions based on residency rather than national insurance contributions. This idea has been adopted by the Lib Dems as policy", while the Tories have pledged to boost pensions by restoring the link between earnings and pension

ns. Mr Johnson's speech comes after he last week unveiled plans to find a consensus on how to reform the country's pension system. This would be based on a series of principles including tackling pensioner poverty and fairer pensions for women," he said. Speaking at the London conference he said: ""Generalised stereotypes of people past state pension age as dependant", "incapable and vulnerable are a particularly pernicious form of age discrimination"". The government wanted to tackle this by moving to a culture where retirement ages were ""increasingly consigned to the past""." "We're sweeping them away entirely for people under 65", "and we're giving those above that age a right to request to work past 65 which their employers will have to engage with seriously. ""And the review in 2011", which will look at whether it is time to sweep retirement ages away entirely," is to be tied to evidence ... showing that retirement ages are increasingly outmoded"". Mr Johnson said his department had a long-term aspiration of moving towards an 80% employment rate. This would involve an extra one million older people joining the work force", he said.

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"politics 133.txt Jowell rejects 'Las Vegas' jibe The Secretary of State for Culture", Media and Sport, Tessa Jowell," has hit out at critics of the Gambling Bill. She told the Guardian newspaper there would be no ""Las Vegas-style"" super-casinos", "as rumoured in the press. Meanwhile Labour backbencher Stephen Pound labelled casino-related regeneration schemes ""a pile of pants"". The MP for Ealing North claimed the legislation would encourage a mafioso-like culture of vice and corruption", "in an interview on BBC Radio 4. ""You look at some of the people who are involved...they aren't in there to regenerate Blackpool. They are in it to fill their boots", Mr Pound told the Today programme. I just really think that we have made a terrible mistake here. And over all of it hangs the shadow of the men in the chalk-stripe suits with names that rhyme with spaghetti," he said. Ms Jowell complained of the scale of misrepresentation"" in the media over the bill in her interview with the newspaper", "her first since the bill was launched. The culture secretary said a four year consultation period had produced a consensus on the need to ""protect children and the vulnerable"" in a swiftly changing sector. Ms Jowell insisted: ""We have a good track record for extracting planning gain in this country", "for instance in social housing." "And continued: ""We can be proud to have one of the lowest rates of problem gambling in the world. I intend to keep it that way." "Ms Jowell will set out her position when the Bill is debated in the Commons on Monday. In prime minister's questions last week Tony Blair assured Parliament that 90% of the bill was about tightening up the regulation of the gambling industry.

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"politics 134.txt Ban on hunting comes into force Fox hunting with dogs is now illegal in England and Wales after a ban on the activity came into force overnight. The law faces a stiff test this weekend", "with the Countryside Alliance saying many hunts will be out in force. Chief police officers spokesman Nigel Yeo said he expected most people would obey the law - by dragging hunting or chasing foxes then shooting them. He said police would challenge the ""one or two isolated hunts"" which are threatening to break the law. But Simon Hart of the Countryside Alliance has questioned how police will ensure there are no violations. ""The definitions of legal and illegal hunting are so blurred that the police are being asked to make impossible judgements. ""You can hunt a rat", but not a mouse, a rabbit but not a hare, an artificial scent, but not a real one," he said. The Attorney General, Lord Goldsmith, has so far iss

ued no instructions to police on how they should deal with hunters who violate the law. He said he will consult the Director of Public Prosecutions and the police in the near future"" to decide what measures to take with regards to hunting prosecutions. He has rejected a ""blanket policy"" of not enforcing the ban until the House of Lords has considered its legality. John Cooper", a barrister and chairman of the League Against Cruel Sports," said the anti-hunting lobby expects the authorities to prosecute wherever there is clear evidence of illegal hunting practices. He said police had ""acknowledged their duty to investigate allegations of hunting offences"". The Beaufort Hunt had one pack out on Thursday and has promised a hunt this weekend. Under the new law hunters have a number of legal options available to them. As well as being able to mount a hunt for an artificial scent", "it will still be legal for the hunts to ""flush out"" foxes", "as long as they shoot their quarry rather than set the hounds on them. ""We are not going away. We will keep these hounds going", we will keep this community going and in the end we will come back and hunt when hunting is legal again," hunt master, Captain Ian Farquhar, said. But Tony Banks, Labour MP for West Ham, said the issue would soon disappear, and that people in a few years time will be wondering what it was all about"". He said had the government not prevaricated since 1997 in introducing the ban", "hunting with dogs would have passed into history like other former country pursuits such as otter hunting and badger baiting. ""Let the election decide this because the Conservatives have made clear that if they get elected into government they will restore hunting", "he said.

politics 135.txt Blair says UK tsunami aid to soar Tony Blair has predicted the British Government will eventually give hundreds of millions"" of pounds in aid to countries hit by the tsunami. The prime minister was speaking publicly for the first time since returning from his holiday in Egypt. Mr Blair insisted he had been ""intimately involved"" in ""all decisions at all times"" despite being abroad. He was speaking before the UK joins a three-minute silence at noon across the EU for the estimated 150",000 dead. The Foreign Office says 41 Britons are now confirmed to have died in the Tsunami which struck south Asia on Boxing Day, with 158 others missing. Asked about criticism that he did not cut short his holiday," Mr Blair told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: ""I don't think this is a situation in which the British people need me to articulate what they feel. ""I think they feel - as we all do - shock", horror," and absolute solidarity with those people who have lost their lives." The important thing was action and not words", he said," adding that of the £50m given by the government so far only ""six or seven million"" had been spent. It would become easier in the coming weeks to assess just how much money would have to be put in. ""My estimate is we will need to spend from government several hundred million pounds. So we will far and away more than match the generosity of the British people", "he said. Asked whether he had not returned to work immediately because he was under doctors orders to rest, Mr Blair said there was also a story he had been away for plastic surgery. As you can see unfortunately I am still looking the same as I always did", "he joked. The prime minister took personal charge of the UK's response on Tuesday, chairing a meeting of the emergency committee of ministers that has convened daily since Boxing Day. He also spoke on the telephone to US President George Bush, and the presidents of Sri Lanka and Indonesia. Chancellor Gordon Brown earlier backed a plan to freeze the foreign debts of all the affected nations. Mr Brown, who was not at the Downing Street meeting, says he has been in intensive talks"" with other G8 finance ministers. Germany proposed a freeze last week and Canada has begun its own moratorium. The chancellor said the plan would initially save the most affected countries about \$3bn (£1.58bn) in repayments. Tory leader Michael Howard also backed

the proposals but said ministers had been ""playing catch-up"" with public donations. Foreign Secretary Jack Straw is to visit Thailand and Indonesia this week. During his trip", Mr Straw will represent the G8 at the international conference called in Jakarta, Indonesia on Thursday. On Friday, he will visit the Thai beach resort of Phuket, where British families are still searching for relatives. International Development Secretary Hilary Benn will also visit Aceh in Indonesia, as well as Sri Lanka. The British public has now pledged £76m in aid with emergency supplies from the British government starting to arrive in the region on three RAF flights in a joint operation with Scandinavian countries. Two ships - the Royal Fleet Auxiliary ship Diligence and frigate HMS Chatham - have arrived in the disaster area. A second Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessel, the Bay leaf, is also being sent. UK charities have also begun chartering planes to deliver aid. - A BBC News Special: Asia Remembered, including the three-minutes silence, will be shown on BBC One and BBC News 24 from 1130 to 1215 GMT on Wednesday.

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"politics 136.txt Straw attacked on China arms Moves to lift the European Union's ban on arms exports to China have been condemned by human rights groups and the Conservatives. The 15 year embargo was imposed in the aftermath of China's crackdown on protesters in Tiananmen Square in 1989. UK Foreign Secretary Jack Straw", who will hold talks in Beijing on Thursday, said an EU arms code was more effective than the current ban. But Human Rights Watch says the EU is putting commerce above abuse concerns. In December, the EU pledged to work towards lifting the ban but said it was not ready to do so yet. Germany and France have repeatedly called for the embargo to be lifted. Britain has been more cautious but Mr Straw last week said he also wanted it to end, despite US objections. He expects it to be lifted over the next six months, a prediction which has alarmed critics. Brad Adams, from Human Rights Watch," said: ""This is a huge political signal from Europe that they are willing to forget about Tiananmen Square. ""There are still thousands of people who are unaccounted for." Mr Straw said it was wrong to put China under the same embargo as countries such as Zimbabwe and Burma. The scope of the embargo was very narrow and did not have any force of law behind it", he told BBC Radio 4's World At One. In the UK, more export licences were refused under the existing European Union arms code than under the embargo," he said. And only two of the licences denied under the embargo would have been granted under the code. ""The code of conduct is much more effective", it's a more powerful tool of and we intend to strengthen it as a pre-condition of lifting the embargo with China," he said. Mr Straw denied the decision would suggest to China that Tiananmen Square had been forgotten. The level of human rights was a key criteria under the EU arms exports code, he said. Human rights groups say the code of conduct is not legally binding - but Mr Straw said it would be given legal force by the laws of many EU countries. Conservative shadow foreign secretary Michael Ancram said the move would be profoundly wrong"". The decision could undermine Nato as it severely damaged relations with the US", which is opposed to ending the ban. Mr Ancram argued: ""What the British Government is doing is giving in to French and German pressure", especially the French," who see vast contracts available to them if the embargo is lifted... ""It gives the wrong signals to China", who are simply not prepared to accept that what happened at Tiananmen Square was wrong." Mr Straw's China trip is part of regular high-level meetings with Beijing ministers. He will meet Chinese counterpart Minister Li Zhaoxing to discuss developing relations between their two countries", Hong Kong and China's part in the talks on North Korea.

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"politics 137.txt Defiant hunts put ban to the test Thous  
ands of hunt supporters have been out on the first day of hunting in England an  
d Wales after the ban on hunting with dogs came into force. The Countryside Al  
liance called on hunt supporters to meet as normal", but vowed to stay within t  
he law. Although hunting with dogs is now a criminal offence, exercising hound  
s, chasing a scent trail and flushing out foxes to be shot are still legal. One  
anti-hunt protester was taken to hospital after a violent clash in Kent. The m  
an suffered facial injuries after an incident involving a group of men at the e  
nd of the East Kent Hunt, near Ashford. In Wiltshire, police arrested four men  
under the new law suspected of hunting with dogs. The group, from South Wales a  
nd Ireland, have been released on bail but police say they may face prosecution  
under new poaching laws. It is believed more than 270 hunts went out on Saturd  
ay, just one day after the ban came in. They were greeted by big crowds in man  
y areas of the country, with actor Jeremy Irons and former minister Kate Hoey a  
mong the supporters. Anti-hunt groups - such as the League Against Cruel Sports  
- deployed 100 monitors at hunts to check for illegal activity. Mike Hobday, f  
rom the league," said video evidence of the law being broken was to be passed o  
nto police. ""Our evidence suggests that most hunts did operate within the la  
w"," many meeting and promptly going home and others peacefully exercising thei  
r hounds or drag hunting. ""However"," we have received reports of what we beli  
eve is clearly illegal activity by a number of hunts across Britain." BBC corr  
espondent Simon Hall at Postbridge on Dartmoor in the West Country said 2",000  
people had turned out to welcome the hunt. And the BBC's Sarah Mukherjee, with  
the Beaufort Hunt in Badminton, Gloucestershire said several hundred people had  
gathered on foot to see the hunt, with 150 on horseback. Tom Heap, BBC rural af  
fairs correspondent, said it appeared that hunstman had, for now, been sticking  
to the new rules. And while there was big turnout in support of the hunts on Sa  
turday, he said it remains to be seen if the level of backing can be maintaine  
d. Before riding out with the hunt," former minister Kate Hoey told crowds:  
""We will prevail and this law will have to be overturned."" Judith Moritz", in  
Melton Mowbray, said anti-hunt activists were out to monitor the four hunts ope  
rating in that part of Leicestershire," but were outnumbered by large crowds of  
followers. The Countryside Alliance said the meets would show the new law was  
""impossibly difficult to determine"" and open to different interpretations. C  
hief executive Simon Hart said: ""There has been hunting in England for 700 yea  
rs. This [ban] may take two or three years", perhaps two or three months," to u  
npick. ""It will be nothing more than a temporary break in normal service"," as  
broadcasters say." Conservative family spokeswoman Theresa May said if the par  
ty was in government again it would make sure the law was repealed. Suffolk Chi  
ef Constable Alastair McWhirter", the Association of Chief Police Officers' spo  
kesman on rural policing, told the BBC the law would be enforced," although the  
police would not break up hunts. The Attorney General Lord Goldsmith has so far  
not issued any instructions to police on how they should deal with any hunters  
who do violate the law. He said he would consult the director of public prosecu  
tions and the police ""in the near future"" to decide what measures to take on  
hunting prosecutions.

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"politics 138.txt EU fraud clampdown urged EU member stat  
es are failing to report fraud and irregularities in EU funds on a consistent b  
asis", the UK's public spending watchdog has said. The National Audit Office s  
aid although the latest figures showed reported fraud was falling, the EU still

had no common definition of fraud. It also expressed concern that, for the 10th year," the European Court of Auditors had qualified the EU accounts. The NAO urged the government to push for improvements in reporting fraud. It said member states needed to be more accountable on how money was spent. The report said: ""Member states still do not report fraud and other irregularities to the European Anti-Fraud Office on a consistent basis. ""As the court has now qualified its opinion on the Community accounts for a decade", it is essential for all the authorities involved to contribute to the strengthening of the audit of EU revenue and expenditure and improving accountability for the financial management and use of EU resources." It said there were 922 cases of reported fraud or irregularities in EU funds in the UK in 2003", worth £38.5m (52m euros), up from 831 cases worth £35.7m in 2002. At the same time, reported fraud throughout the EU dropped from 10,276 cases worth £808m to 8,177 cases worth £644m. Edward Leigh, chairman of the Commons public accounts committee," said Britain had to set an example when it assumed the EU presidency. ""Any fraud in other member states is potentially fraud against the UK taxpayer", given that we are the second largest net contributor to the Community," he said. Departments responsible for administering EU funds need to make sure that they're doing everything possible to weed out improper spending. ""The government must take the opportunity afforded by the UK presidency of the EU to press the Commission and other member states to take an equally robust stance against fraud and irregularity", and raise overall standards of financial management." A spokesman for the European Anti-Fraud Office said the organisation agreed with the NAO's assessment of fraud reporting. ""The quality of reporting does differ from member state to member state", and there is room for improvement," spokesman Jorg Wojahn said. He added that there is generally good co-operation with member states and the anti-fraud office on specific cases of fraud, with the statistics studied by NAO providing a good overview for planning strategic ways of detecting fraud"".

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"politics 139.txt Straw praises Kashmir moves The UK has welcomed the decision by India and Pakistan to open a bus link across the cease fire line dividing the disputed region of Kashmir. Foreign Secretary Jack Straw", touring South East Asian countries," praised the ""spirit of cooperation"" in achieving the breakthrough. Media reports in both countries describe the deal as a major step in the ongoing peace process. Mr Straw said he hoped the agreement would make a difference to Kashmiris. The bus service was one of several announcements made after a meeting of foreign ministers of both countries in Islamabad on Wednesday. Kashmiri politicians on both sides of the Line of Control which divides the region welcomed the move. In a statement", Mr Straw said the bus service between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad ""will be able to reunite families that have been divided for decades"". ""This will make a real difference to the lives of Kashmiris on both sides of the Line of Control", he said. I warmly applaud the efforts of both India and Pakistan to make this happen. ""This spirit of cooperation will", I hope," lead to many more measures that will benefit all in the region." On Thursday Mr Straw was in India visiting Sikhism's holiest shrine", the Golden Temple in Amritsar where he tried his hand at making Indian bread or roti. He is due to take part in talks with the Indian government on Friday. A second bus service linking the Pakistani city of Lahore with Amritsar in India was also announced as well as a rail link between Rajasthan state and Pakistan's Sindh province. Both sides agreed to begin talks on reducing the risk of nuclear accidents and also said they planned to reopen their respective consulates in Karachi and Mumbai (Bombay). The mountainous region of Kashmir has been a flashpoint between the two nuclear powers for more than 50 years.

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"politics 140.txt UK helps raped Rwandan women Britain is to give a £4m grant to help women survivors of the Rwandan genocide who were raped and often deliberately infected with HIV/Aids. An estimated 25",000 girls and women were raped during the 1994 genocide. About 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were killed by Hutu militias after the assassination of an ethnic Hutu leader. The five-year Department for International Development funding will enable more survivors to have access to anti-retroviral treatment. The plight of the infected women was overshadowed for a long time. It was overshadowed by Rwanda's emergence from the 100 days of slaughter, during which time the mass killings took place, and the women's fate was largely a taboo subject. But many of the women were widowed and they now not only have their own children to care for but, in many cases, orphans too. As the women die, the number of Rwanda's orphans rises. Until recently, very few of the women have had access to anti-retroviral treatment. That is now starting to change. This funding is intended to make anti-retrovirals and other care available for some 2,500 women. Mary Kayite si Blewitt, founder of the Survivors Fund (SURF), one of the organisations through which the funds are being channelled, said it was a recognition, before it was too late, that the survivors should be a priority for help.

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"politics 141.txt Howard denies split over ID cards Michael Howard has denied his shadow cabinet was split over its decision to back controversial Labour plans to introduce ID cards. The Tory leader said his front bench team had reached a ""collective view"" after holding a ""good discussion"" but admitted it was ""not an easy issue"". He had decided to support the plans as the police said they would help fight terror", crime and illegal immigration. The Lib Dems have pledged to oppose the bill when it is debated next Monday. Tory sources say senior party figures had argued vociferously against the ID card scheme. Among those reported to have serious reservations over the strategy were senior shadow cabinet members David Davis, Oliver Letwin and Tim Yeo. But Mr Howard denied Mr Yeo, his transport and environment spokesman," said the plans ""stink"". He also said he was confident shadow home secretary Mr Davis would ""set out the position very clearly"" when he stands up to debate the matter next week. Mr Howard said the police had said ID cards could ""help them foil a terror bomb plot in which people could lose their lives"". He added: ""When the police say that you have to take them seriously"". He acknowledged there were ""good libertarian arguments"" against the cards", but said the shadow Cabinet had weighed up all the ""conflicting interests"" before reaching its decision. ""I don't pretend that it is an easy decision but at the end of the day a decision has to be taken." He also denied he was afraid of looking ""soft"" on the issue", compared to Labour. The Conservatives announced their support for the government plans on Monday evening. Sources within the party told the BBC Mr Howard had always been in favour of ID cards," and tried to introduce them when he was Home Secretary. But the Tories insisted they would hold ministers to account over the precise purpose of the scheme. They said they would also press Labour over whether objectives could be met and whether the Home Office would be able to deliver them. And they pledged to assess the cost effectiveness of ID cards and whether people's privacy would be properly protected. ""It is important to remember that this bill will take a decade to come into full effect," a spokesman said. Lib Dem home affairs spokesman Mark Oaten has branded the ID scheme a waste of money and deeply flawed"". He said: ""This has all the signs of Michael Howard overruling colleagues' concerns over ID cards."" The ch

airman of the Bar Council", " Guy Mansfield QC warned there was a real risk that people on the ""margins of society"" would be driven into the hands of extremists. ""What is going to happen to young Asian men when there has been a bomb gone off somewhere? They are going to be stopped. If they haven't [ID cards] they are going to be detained." Tory ex-minister Douglas Hogg said he opposed the plans for ID cards branding them a ""regressive"" step which would intrude into the lives of ordinary citizens without any counterbalancing benefits. He predicted ultimately carrying the cards would become compulsory and that would lead to large numbers of Britain's ethnic minorities being stopped by police.

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"politics 142.txt EU referendum question unveiled The question to be asked in the referendum on the EU Constitution has been unveiled by the government. It will be: ""Should the United Kingdom approve the treaty establishing a constitution for the European Union?"" The constitution will be incorporated into UK law if there is a yes vote in the referendum", expected in 2006. Critics say the constitution is a further step towards a federal Europe," but advocates say it ensures effective operation of the enlarged 25-state EU.

""If we reject this treaty", Britain will be isolated and weak in Europe," said Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, who along with the rest of the Cabinet, will back a yes"" vote. Patriots by definition wanted the UK to be prosperous at home and strong and influential abroad", Mr Straw said. ""Our role as a leading member of the EU is a crucial part of securing that." Conservative shadow foreign secretary Michael Ancram said the referendum question ""seems straightforward"". But he accused the government of trying to confuse the issue by putting the EU referendum question in the same bill as the ratification of the constitution", when they should be treated as ""two separate issues"". Despite this ""underhand trick", the referendum bill stood no chance of becoming law before the election," he added. This is Tony Blair's cheap gesture to the pro-constitution lobby while he runs scared of a debate on Europe he knows he cannot win." Neil O'Brien", director of anti-constitution group Vote No," said: ""The reality is that the government doesn't want to discuss the EU constitution ahead of the election because they know it is extremely unpopular with voters and with business."" The UK Independence Party said: ""If the government believes that a No vote would mean that we should leave the European Union," they should just ask us if we want to leave the EU. Then we can be out of it and better off much sooner." Liberal Democrat leader Charles Kennedy", who backs the constitution," said he expected the referendum would come in the first half of next year. He told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: ""The sooner we get on with this," the better." He said the question sounded ""very neutral"" and ""balanced," adding it would enable the argument to be enjoined fairly and squarely on both sides"". Green MEP Caroline Lucas welcomed Tony Blair's ""courage in keeping his word"" on holding a referendum. But she added: ""This treaty is a flawed document that will make the EU less accountable", less sustainable," and less just." Mr Blair signed the constitution at a ceremony in Rome in November", but had already made it clear the issue would be put to voters in a referendum. That promise came after sustained pressure from opposition parties. Jack Straw," who argues the constitution reflected a ""British vision for Europe"" and gives ""national governments a stronger grip""", has said the referendum could be held in spring 2006. But in an interview with the Financial Times, Mr Blair refused to be pinned down to that date," saying Britain would hold a poll ""some time in 2006 but when", "I don't know"". The paper said the prime minister ""claimed ignorance"" of when other countries were planning to hold their referendums.

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..... "politics 143.txt Malik rejects all-black MP lists A call for ethnic minority shortlists to boost the number of black and Asian MPs has been rejected by one of Labour's most senior Asians. Shahid Malik", who is on Labour's ruling NEC, accepted people's frustration but said there should be targets not lists to boost representation of minorities. Just 13 of Britain's 659 MPs are from ethnic minority groups, he added. Commission for racial equality chief Trevor Phillips argued on Sunday the time had come for such shortlists. That came after it emerged that one of Britain's most ethnically diverse constituency, West Ham, was to get a women-only shortlist for the next election following an NEC ruling. Mr Phillips said changes to the race relations legislation might allow political parties to reserve seats for under-represented groups. For example in West Ham," this might allow only women and minorities to seek to be candidates. ""If we get to the other side of the general election and find that minorities are not represented", we have to say that after 20 or 30 years of talking about this, we cannot go on the same way," he said. He added: It would be terribly disappointing if in the least white constituency [West Ham] in the whole of Europe we didn't have a minority candidate." Appearng on BBC Radio 4's Today programme", Mr Malik, who is himself running for the seat of Dewsbury," acknowledged that so far women-only shortlists had failed to deliver a boost in the number of ethnic minority candidates. But he argued: ""I do think that there currently things that parties can do and which they aren't doing... for example setting targets to ensure that existing democratic structures are more reflective." Labour MP Diane Abbott", who backs Mr Phillips' proposal of shortlists, said she had been elected along with three other ethnic minority MPs - Keith Vaz," Paul Boateng and Bernie Grant - in 1987 but it took another 10 years before another black woman was able to win a seat. That was a rate of progress Ms Abbott described as ""painful"". ""I am a little older than Shahid and served on the National Executive Committee in the 1990s - I was the first black person on the NEC ... crossing our fingers and hoping we are going to get more black and Asian MP hasn't worked", she said. The shortlist strategy works for women and I believe that it can be made to work for black and Asian people." On Tuesday Labour chairman Ian McCartney said his party was ""ambitious"" to improve black and Asian representation. ""We haven't ruled out all-black shortlists and welcome a debate in the party about this", he said.

politics 144.txt MP attacked by muggers in Kenya An MP has had more than £600 and his passport stolen after being mugged by six men in a park in Kenya. Quentin Davies, the MP for Grantham and Stamford, was attacked in a notoriously dangerous park in the capital, Nairobi. He was not hurt in the mugging on Saturday evening. Several people are being questioned over the attack. He was in Kenya before travelling to Sudan with the Parliamentary committee. Local police were said to be surprised"" he was in the area. Mr Davies",60," said the mugging occurred 100 yards from the Nairobi Serena Hotel and equally close to the Anglican Cathedral in the centre of the city at dusk. He said in a statement: ""It was a frightening experience. ""Six men managed to steal up on me and grab me from behind. ""I knew I had to stay very calm and passive - you cannot fight six men"". He had to spend an extra 24 hours in Nairobi before rejoining the rest of the House of Commons International Development Committee in Dafur after the mugging. ""Naturally", I was afraid they would use a knife or gun, though they never produced any weapon," he said. Two of them held me from behind and two others held my legs and another one expertly rifled all my pockets." .....

"politics 145.txt Candidate resigns over BNP link A prospective candidate for the UK Independence Party (UKIP) has resigned after admitting a ""brief attachment"" to the British National Party(BNP). Nicholas Betts-Green", who had been selected to fight the Suffolk Coastal seat," quit after reports in a newspaper that he attended a BNP meeting. The former teacher confirmed he had attended the meeting but said that was the only contact he had with the group. Mr Betts-Green resigned after being questioned by the party's leadership. A UKIP spokesman said Mr Betts-Green's resignation followed disclosures in the East Anglian Daily Times last month about his attendance at a BNP meeting. ""He did once attend a BNP meeting. He did not like what he saw and heard and will take no further part of it"" the spokesman added. A meeting of Suffolk Coastal UKIP members is due to be held next week to discuss a replacement. Mr Betts-Green, of Woodbridge, Suffolk, has also resigned as UKIP's branch chairman.

politics 146.txt 'Nuclear dumpsite' plan attacked Plans to allow foreign nuclear waste to be permanently stored in the UK have been branded deeply irresponsible"" by the Liberal Democrats. The government has confirmed intermediate level waste (ILW) that was to have been shipped back to its home countries will now be stored in the UK. The cash raised will go towards the UK's nuclear clean-up programme. But Lib Dem Norman Baker accused ministers of turning Britain into a ""nuclear dumpsite"". Under current contracts", British Nuclear Fuels should return all but low level waste, but none has ever been sent back. In future, only highly-radioactive waste will be sent back to its country of origin, normally Germany or Japan, under armed guard. Intermediate waste from countries such as Japan, Germany, Spain, Italy, Switzerland and Sweden will be stored permanently in the UK. At the moment, this waste is stored at Sellafield, in Cumbria, in the form of glass bricks, untreated liquid waste or solid material in drums. In a statement," the Department of Trade and Industry said the new policy meant there would be a ""sixfold reduction in the number of waste shipments to overseas countries"". And it said highly-radioactive waste would be returned to its home country sooner", ensuring there would be no overall increase in radioactivity. Trade Secretary Patricia Hewitt said the new arrangements, revealed in a Commons written statement, would raise up to £680m for Britain's nuclear clean-up programme, under the new Nuclear Decommissioning Agency. But the move has been criticised by environmental groups and the Liberal Democrats. Mr Baker, the Lib Dem environment spokesman," said: ""I have been warning for months that this would happen and raised it with government several times. But now our worst fears have been confirmed. ""Once again Britain's environmental and health needs are being ignored in policies driven by the Treasury and DTI. ""This is a terrible attempt to offload some of the £48bn cost of cleaning up nuclear sites. ""The Energy Act was supposed to help Britain clean up," but in order to pay for it we are becoming a nuclear dumpsite. ""The nuclear industry is an economic", social and environmental millstone that hangs around Britain's neck.""

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"politics 147.txt Labour accused of broken pledge Labour has already broken its pre-election promise on immigration before the ink has dried on its new pledge card",, the Tories have claimed. Home Secretary Charles Clarke has been quoted as telling Labour members he wants more migrants to come to the UK. Tory co-chairman Liam Fox said the comments were at odds with Tony Blair's prediction of a net cut in immigration. But Mr Clarke accused him of trying to score ""cheap political points"" by muddling immigration with asylum. London's Evening Standard quoted Mr Clarke telling Labour activists at a question and answer session in Gateshead that he wanted Britain to offer refuge for th

ose fleeing tyranny. ""That's not only a moral duty and a legal duty", but something which is part of the essence of this country, he said. We want more migration," more people come to study and to work. ""We want more people coming to look for refuge." Mr Blair's was asked last Wednesday if the government's new immigration plans", including a point system for economic migrants," would reduce net migration. The prime minister told MPs: ""The abusers will be weeded out", and as a result of the end of chain migration [where families have an automatic right to settle]," the numbers will probably fall." On Monday", Dr Fox told reporters: ""The prime minister has broken his word so many times in the past but now his promises do not even last a week. ""The Labour Party election pledges", even when they are so incredibly vague," do not even last four days." The Tories want quotas for economic migrants and refugees and on Tuesday will outline more details of their plans for health checks on migrants. Mr Clarke dismissed the latest Tory attack. ""This is simply a scurrilous attempt by the Tories to score cheap political points", he said. The Tories are purposely mixing together two separate issues of immigration and asylum." Mr Clarke said he had made clear the UK would welcome genuine economic migrants for key jobs on a strict points based system. And only asylum seekers genuinely fleeing death or persecution would be admitted. ""Under our plans we expect unfounded applications to continue to fall", he added. Earlier, Dr Fox accused Mr Blair and other Cabinet ministers of telling lies about Tory policies and then attacking the lies. He told BBC Radio: If you are willing to lie about the reasons for going to war," I guess you are going to lie about anything at all." The latest pre-election spats come after Mr Blair told Labour members the Tories offered a ""hard right agenda"" which would take Britain backwards. Lib Dem leader Charles Kennedy accelerating Lib Dem election preparations this week as he visits Manchester, Liverpool, Leicester, Somerset, Basingstoke, Shrewsbury, Dorset and Torbay.

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"politics 148.txt Labour trio 'had vote-rig factory' Three Labour councillors in Birmingham were caught operating a ""vote-rigging factory""", an Election Court has heard. Police found the trio handling unsealed postal ballots in a deserted warehouse in the city during a late-night raid in June 2004, the hearing was told. The votes were later counted towards that month's English local elections. The men, elected to the Aston ward, deny collecting votes fraudulently. The judge presiding has indicated the whole postal voting system is under scrutiny. Deputy High Court Judge Richard Mawrey, QC told the hearing at the Birmingham and Midlands Institute the case could have potentially serious consequences for any forthcoming General Election. The special Election Court, the first in living memory to hear allegations of vote-rigging, opened in Birmingham last month. The case against Muhammad Afzal, Mohammed Islam and Mohammed Kazi is being brought by local Liberal Democrat supporters. They claim the trio benefited from the widespread misuse of postal votes during the 10 June election. Ravi Sukul, counsel for the petitioners," accused the three men of being ""deeply involved"" in illegal practices. Witnesses saw them carrying several bags from their campaign office", which the men drove to a warehouse on an industrial estate off Birch Road East," the court was told. The police were alerted and called to the premises. Mr Sukul said: ""When (the officers) arrived there", in the middle of the night," they saw a large room with a 10ft long table and six Asian men present. ""Hundreds of documents and unsealed envelopes were scattered all over the table."" The police officers left the warehouse", but were later ordered back to seize the documents. ""When the officers left", all the envelopes and papers were scattered, Mr Sukul said. (When they went) back to make the seizure," every one of these 275 yellow ballot papers were placed

neatly in envelope A and sealed. The house was in order." " Interrupting Mr Sulk in his opening", " Mr Mawrey said: " "What you are saying is", " these men were operating a vote-forging factory on an industrial estate." " The court heard how documents were taken by police to the elections office next morning", where they were mixed in with other ballots. The case against the men follows a hearing into postal fraud allegations made against three other Birmingham councillors in the Bordesley Green ward, claims which are denied. Mr Mawrey is due to deliver a judgment in their case once the Aston petition has been heard. Mr Afzal, Mr Islam and Mr Kazi deny conspiring to commit election fraud to deceive the returning officer. The case continues.

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"politics 149.txt Blair returns from peace mission Prime Minister Tony Blair has arrived back from his diplomatic mission to the Middle East to try to resurrect the peace process. Mr Blair held talks with his Israeli counterpart", Ariel Sharon, and the Palestinian leader, Mahmoud Abbas. He confirmed that a renewed drive to reform the Palestinian Authority and address security issues would come at a London conference in March. Mr Blair also made a surprise trip to Iraq this week. The Israelis described the meeting as important but said they would not need to attend. Mr Blair briefly visited the tomb of Yasser Arafat in Ramallah - the first world leader to do so. He nodded briefly towards the tomb, rather than lay a wreath, in what Palestinian officials said was a compromise gesture agreed at the last minute. The BBC's Paul Reynolds says the London conference will be a limited measure to shore up the leadership of Mahmoud Abbas, also known as Abu Mazen, who is expected to win the Palestinian presidential election on 9 January. At a news conference following talks with Mr Blair," Mr Abbas said the British prime minister was " "in a unique position to help us progress in our peaceful pursuit" ". He added: " "Your endeavour to hold a conference in London is another example of your deep commitment to this purpose." " In an interview with the BBC's political editor Andrew Marr," Mr Blair said getting progress between Israelis and Palestinians would be " "tough", " but at least we have got the first step" ". Mr Blair acknowledged some people believed he was too close to the Israelis", but said the Israelis were entitled to expect Palestinians to give up terrorism. He argued that Mr Sharon was committed to the internationally-agreed roadmap peace plan and said his bid to disengage from Gaza had to be part of the peace process, not the end of it. Earlier," Mr Sharon again said he had not seen " "the slightest step" " the Palestinians were working to end terror attacks - though he acknowledged Palestinian leaders were in the middle of an election campaign that could be hampering their efforts. Before visiting Israel", Mr Blair made a surprise visit to Iraq, where he met leaders in Baghdad during his first trip to the city. He was briefed on preparations for the national poll, which is scheduled for next month but is threatened by a deadly campaign of insurgent violence. He also flew to Basra in southern Iraq where British forces are stationed.

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"politics 150.txt Galloway plea for hostage release Ex-Labour MP George Galloway has appealed for the release of aid worker Margaret Hassan", kidnapped in Iraq. Mrs Hassan, 59, who led Care International operations in Iraq, was abducted in Baghdad on 19 October. Mr Galloway was expelled from the Labour party because of his staunch opposition to the war on Iraq. He denied an earlier report that he planned to make a direct appeal to the kidnappers via the Al-Jazeera Arabic television channel. Speaking in London on Saturday at the first annual delegate conference of his newly-founded party, the Respect Coal

ition," he said: ""I have deliberately not involved myself before in any of these situations. ""But this woman has been a prominent opponent of both the war and the preceding years of sanctions. ""I am prepared to do anything I can to help save her life." A spokesman later said Mr Galloway had friends in common with Ms Hassan", who he described as a prominent anti-war activist," and that he was ""willing to do anything - go to Iraq or be an intermediary or anything that's necessary"". Since her abduction", several videos of Mrs Hassan have been broadcast by Al-Jazeera. The latest footage showed Mrs Hassan asking for British troops to be pulled out of Iraq. She also urged Care International, the aid agency she works for, to close its office in Baghdad, and appealed for Iraqi women prisoners to be freed. Care has since closed down all its operations in Iraq.

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"politics 151.txt Guantanamo four questioned The four Britons freed from US custody in Guantanamo Bay are expected to be allowed a visit by one relative. Moazzam Begg", Martin Mubanga, Feroz Abbasi and Richard Belmar were held for three years, accused of al-Qaeda links. Mr Begg's father, Azmat," said he had been told he could see his son for 20 minutes and would say he was ""a hero"". The men are being held at London's Paddington Green police station", where they are expected to be questioned by UK anti-terror officers. But Louise Christian, the lawyer representing Mr Abbasi and Mr Mubanga, said the families would be reunited with the men away from the station. Before being driven by police from Birmingham to London, Azmat Begg said he was concerned for his son Moazzam's mental state and was looking forward to giving him a hug. As Azmat Begg arrived at the London police station, there appeared to be some confusion as to the visiting arrangements. Police have said they have a duty to investigate the men," who were arrested on their return to the UK. But Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir John Stevens said evidence obtained by MI5 while the four were in Cuba was ""absolutely"" inadmissible in UK courts. In an interview with the Independent", Sir John said his officers would have to find other evidence before the suspects could be tried in the UK. He told the newspaper: ""If an admission is made", it is a totally different ball game... it could be used as evidence. ""The options are: if there is enough evidence they will be charged. If not they will be released as soon as possible."" The men have been allowed to meet their lawyers. Louise Christian said that after being ""tortured and abused"" at Guantanamo Bay", the men's arrest was unfair and inappropriate. She told BBC News she remained very concerned about their psychological state. Gareth Peirce, lawyer for Mr Begg," said she was shocked at the condition of the men and appalled that the authorities felt the need to detain them. Washington has claimed all four were ""enemy combatants"" who trained at camps run by al-Qaeda. The Pentagon says they were freed after the UK government promised they would not be a threat to the national security of the US or any of its allies. The detainees were immediately arrested under Section 41 of the Terrorism Act 2000 when they landed at RAF Northolt", west London, on Tuesday. Massoud Shadjareh, from the Muslim Safety Forum," said: ""What sort of homecoming is this? They are innocent people."" The Muslim Council of Britain urged that the men should receive counselling and medical help. ""We want these men to be returned into the arms of their waiting family", said Iqbal Sacranie, secretary general of the council.

"politics 152.txt Minister defends hunting ban law The law banning hunting with dogs in England and Wales is enforceable and very clear"", Alun Michael has said. The rural affairs minister said it would become obvious if people flouted the law, which came into force on Friday," and pretended they were not. Some 270 hunts met legally on Saturday killing a total of 91

foxes - only four were accidentally killed by hounds. But anti-hunt campaigners said there had been widespread intimidation of activists monitoring hunts. Countryside Alliance chairman John Jackson said that Saturday had been a ""massive demonstration by the rural community of support for hunting"". People had turned out ""to show en masse that the Hunting Act was a bad law""", he said adding that foxes and other animals had been killed ""legally"" as far as he was aware. Although hunting with dogs is now a criminal offence", exercising hounds, chasing a scent trail and flushing out foxes to be shot are still legal. Addressing claims that the new law was unenforceable," Mr Michael told BBC Radio 4's Today Programme: ""There has been a lot of spin about this by those that support hunting. ""The reality is that the law is very clear. You can't chase wild mammals with a pack of dogs", whether the wild mammal is a fox or a deer. ""If people do so and pretend they're not it's going to become very clear. You can't hunt accidentally."" Mr Michael also denied the hunting ban had led to a breakdown of trust between the government and rural communities. He said most people living in the countryside were more concerned with issues like the economy", the health service and their children's future than hunting. But the League Against Cruel Sports claimed the new act had been broken even though the numbers of foxes killed had fallen. Thousands of hunt supporters turned out at 270 hunts across England and Wales on the first day of the ban, with anti-hunt groups sending out 100 monitors to check the law was not being broken. There were only four arrests - over alleged hunting of hares in Wiltshire - although it was not clear whether they were made under the Hunting Act. They have been released on bail but police say they may face prosecution under new poaching laws. But Penny Little, who monitored the Bicester Hunt in Oxfordshire," said she had witnessed ""gratuitous", spiteful killing of foxes"". If people tried to ""run circles around this law"" the only outcome would be that it was tightened up", she said. Mike Hobday, from the League Against Cruel Sports, said video evidence of the law being broken would be passed onto police. He said intimidation seemed to have been widespread and called on hunts to do more to stop their supporters intimidating anti-hunt activists videoing hunts. But Mr Jackson, who had been at the Bicester Hunt in Oxfordshire, denied there was any intimidation.

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"politics 153.txt Clarke to unveil immigration plan New controls on economic migrants and tighter border patrols will be part of government plans unveiled on Monday. Home Secretary Charles Clarke wants to introduce a points system for economic migrants and increase deportations of failed asylum seekers. Tony Blair has said people are right to be concerned about abuses of the system but there is no ""magic bullet""". The Tories say Labour is acting too late while the Lib Dems say the plans may not produce an efficient system. The government's new five-year plan is designed to show how Labour would reform immigration and asylum controls if it wins the election", expected to be held in May. Ministers deny they have been spurred into action by Tory campaigning or because the prime minister is worried too little has been done. Instead," they say the plans are part of an ""evolving"" process aimed at winning public confidence. Mr Clarke is expected to announce an end to the automatic right to settle for immigrants' families", and the introduction of fingerprinting for all visa applicants. The prime minister on Sunday said immigration would be ""toughened up"" to ensure only those immigrants with skills the UK really needs will be granted work permits. But he rejected the Tories' call for a quota on economic migrants", saying no ""arbitrary figure"" could reflect the UK's needs. Mr Blair told BBC Radio 4's Westminster Hour: ""We should cut the number or increase it depending on the country's needs... ""The public are worried about this", th

ey are worried rightly," because there are abuses of the immigration and asylum system." But he defended the UK's current regime", saying all systems around the world were subject to abuse. Tory proposals to cap the number of asylum seekers and process all claims abroad would not work," argued Mr Blair. He said: ""We will not be... pretending there is some simple easy way of processing Britain's asylum seekers in some other country", because no such other country exists." Conservative shadow home secretary David Davis said the government had failed to remove 250",000 failed asylum seekers from the UK and limits on economic migrants had been a ""shambles""." "What we are seeing today is a rather panicky response from the government after eight years of failure", he said. Liberal Democrat home affairs spokesman Mark Oaten said Labour was right to reject the Tories' idea of quotas on asylum. But he said it was yet to be seen if Mr Clarke could deliver a fair and efficient asylum system"".

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politics 154.txt Mayor will not retract Nazi jibe London mayor Ken Livingstone has again refused to retract a Nazi insult made to a Jewish reporter. Labour's Mr Livingstone", who says he is ""standing by"" his remarks", had accused an Evening Standard journalist of being like a ""concentration camp guard"". At his weekly press conference on Tuesday he said his comments were not racist and refused to apologise. He said to media representatives: ""If you think they are racist", I think you are wrong." The mayor said his comments would not affect the 2012 Olympic bid and added that his determination to stand up for what he believed in may impress bid chiefs", who arrived in London on Tuesday. ""I think it is important that the IOC (International Olympic Committee) members realise that when we get the games...they have a mayor who is not going to panic", change course or get in a great flap but will deliver the games on time and to budget," he said. On Tuesday, the mayor said he would be making a full written response to the chairman of the assembly. Two motions were passed by the London Assembly, which is made up of 25 members elected to examine the mayor's activities, on Monday asking him to apologise and withdraw his comments. The mayor said he had recounted to the assembly a number of examples of intrusion by journalists"" into his", and his family's private life. ""I don't suggest for one minute that has anything to do with the Holocaust which was uniquely the most evil chapter in history. ""But when reporters say to me I'm only doing this because it's my job... that's the same abdication of moral responsibility at the thin end of the wedge that in its most extreme and horrific version ends up with others being prepared to stand as a concentration camp guard. ""We are responsible for our own choices in this life", I always have been and so have reporters." An official complaint has been made to local government watchdogs by the Board of Deputies of British Jews", demanding an investigation by the Standards Board of England. It has the power to suspend or bar him from office but Mr Livingstone said: ""There must have been 20 instances like this over the last 24 years. ""I have never in response to any of that modified a policy I believed to be right or modified a position I believed to be right and I don't intend to now. ""Because if I do that effectively you have power over your policies and position to the editors of papers." On tape Mr Livingstone", who once worked as a freelance restaurant critic on the paper," is heard asking reporter Oliver Finegold if he is a ""German war criminal""". Mr Finegold replies: ""No", I'm Jewish," I wasn't a German war criminal. I'm quite offended by that." The mayor then says: ""Ah right", well you might be, but actually you are just like a concentration camp guard, you are just doing it because you are paid to," aren't you?""

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..... "politics 155.txt Pakistani women 'must not hide' Hiding women away in the home hidden behind veils is a backward view of Islam", " President Musharraf of Pakistan has said during a visit to Britain. He was speaking to the BBC's Newsnight programme a few hours before visiting the Pakistani community in Manchester. ""My wife is travelling around. She is very religious but she is very moderate", " said General Musharraf. It comes after Pakistan's High Commissioner to Britain said some Pakistanis should integrate more. Dr Maleeha Lodhi said people could not expect others to listen to their grievances if they isolated themselves. Gen Musharraf told the BBC: Some people think that the women should be confined to their houses and put veils on and all that and they should not move out - absolutely wrong." " The Pakistani president was also asked whether he thought the war on terror had made the world less safe. ""Yes", absolutely. And I would add that unfortunately we are not addressing the core problems, so therefore we can never address it in its totality," he said. We are fighting it in its immediate context but we are not fighting it in its strategic long-term context. ""It is the political disputes and we need to resolve them", " and also the issue of illiteracy and poverty. This combined are breeding grounds of extremism and terrorism." " On Monday the Pakistani president met Prime Minister Tony Blair at 10 Downing Street", on his first official visit to London. He is due to visit the Pakistani community in Manchester on Tuesday afternoon. The Mirror newspaper said on Tuesday it had been handed a sensitive dossier outlining the details of Gen Musharraf's visit to Britain. The paper said the document had been found in a London street by a member of the public. It said the dossier contained details about his movements and also confidential police radio channels, call signs and codes. Speaking in London on Monday," Gen Musharraf said al-Qaeda was ""on the run"" in Pakistan. But standing next to Mr Blair he added that it was crucial to tackle the ""core of what creates terrorists", what creates an extremist," militant environment which then leads on to terrorism"". ""That is the resolution of political disputes." " Mr Blair said the two leaders had talked about Afghanistan", the wider war on terror," the situation in the Middle East and the ongoing dispute over Kashmir. ""We agreed that in Afghanistan there is some cause for optimism about the progress that has been made there", said Mr Blair. In respect of Iraq, we agreed that whatever the issues of the past," the important thing now is to see the strategy through and ensure that Iraq is capable of becoming a stable and democratic state." "

..... "politics 156.txt Visa row mandarin made Sir John The top civil servant at the centre of the David Blunkett visa affair has been knighted in the New Year Honours. Sir John Gieve was Home Office permanent secretary during the saga which ended with Mr Blunkett quitting. He and other civil servants were criticised for failing to recall how the visa for Mr Blunkett's ex-lover's nanny came to be fast-tracked. The outgoing head of the troubled Child Support Agency Doug Smith also earns an honour in the New Year's list. Mr Smith", 57, whose retirement was announced by Work and Pensions Secretary Alan Smith in November, is made a Commander of the Order of Bath. Both men were giving evidence to a Commons committee on the computer difficulties facing the agency, which left thousands of single parents without any maintenance payments, when the announcement was made. The knighting of Sir John, 54, " will be received with astonishment by opposition politicians. The Liberal Democrats said it ""beggared belief"" he and fellow officials could not remember how Leoncia Casalme's application for indefinite leave to remain went from Mr Blunkett's office to the head of the Immigration and Nationality Department. Meanwhile", " the Conservatives a

ccused officials of a ""collective failure"" of memory. But Sir Alan Budd", who led an inquiry into the affair, said he had no reason to believe anyone involved had deliberately withheld information. Downing Street defended the decision to honour both men," with a spokesperson saying: ""You have to look at their whole career."" Sir John was made permanent secretary in April 2001 following a Civil Service career which dates back to 1974. He has also worked in the Treasury and the Department of Employment. A Department for Work and Pensions spokesman said of Mr Smith's honour: ""The award reflects all that he has achieved in a Civil Service career", principally in the Inland Revenue," spanning over 40 years - not just his role as chief executive of the Child Support Agency. ""In his career he has personally led a number of successful major change programmes." Mr Smith is set to stay on at the CSA until March. Less controversial will be the knighthoods for Derek Wanless and Mike Tomlinson", who undertook major government reviews on health and education respectively. Former NatWest chief executive Mr Wanless,57, has delivered not one but two major reports on the NHS. Ex-chief inspector of schools Mr Tomlinson,62, has recommended replacing A-Levels and GCSEs with a new diploma system in a shake-up of the exams system.

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"politics 157.txt Kilroy-Silk attacked with slurry Euro M  
P Robert Kilroy-Silk has had a bucket of farm slurry thrown over him by a protester in Manchester. The UK Independence Party member was arriving for a BBC radio show when the attacker emerged from behind a bush. Fellow guest Ruth Kelly MP was also hit by the slurry. Mr Kilroy-Silk said the man", who later disappeared," claimed he was ""doing it in the name of Islam"". In January", Mr Kilroy-Silk quit his BBC One show for remarks he made about Arabs," who he called ""suicide bombers"". Mr Kilroy-Silk had already been taken off air by BBC bosses for the comments", in which he also described Arabs as ""limb-amputators" , women repressors"". The remarks prompted outrage among Muslim groups. The slurry attack took place on Friday as Mr Kilroy-Silk and Ms Kelly", a Cabinet Office minister and Bolton West MP, arrived at Manchester High School for Girls for the recording of BBC Radio 4's Any Questions. The police were called but the attacker had disappeared by the time officers arrived. They are treating the incident as assault. The programme's host, Jonathan Dimbleby," later told the audience the MEP had been covered from ""head to toe"". Mr Kilroy-Silk was still able appear to appear on the show after being loaned a change of clothes. He told reporters he was ""very angry"" and planned to press charges if his attacker was caught. He said the man shouted: ""You've offended my religion" , I'm doing this in the name of Islam." "As I started to turn round a guy tipped a bucket of farmyard muck over me and then threw the rest of it over me and the car", Mr Kilroy-Silk said. I was totally covered, it was all through my clothes," and it sank to high heaven. It went all inside the car and splattered Ruth Kelly." "A BBC spokesman said: ""He took his seat as Jonathan Dimbleby was introducing the show. Fortunately someone at the school had a change of clothes to let him have." "Greater Manchester Police said people near Mr Kilroy-Silk had also been hit by the waste. Officers took statements at the scene", but no arrests have been made. Police say the suspect ran off after towards Wilmslow Road after committing the offence but is believed to have been driving a red Vauxhall Corsa earlier. The suspect is described as white, aged 30 to 40, with a ginger beard. Police want to hear from anyone who has any information. Mr Kilroy-Silk, an MEP for the East Midlands, resigned the UK Independence Party whip in the European Parliament in October, after criticising UKIP and stating his ambition to be leader. However," he remains a member of the party. He said on Friday he hoped to be elected party leader before Christmas. ""I think that is sufficient time for

us to put in process what is necessary... in time for us to fight and have a significant impact upon the General Election." But a UKIP spokesman said that would be impossible under the party's constitution", which requires 70 days before any leadership ballot can take place.

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"politics 158.txt Petrol duties frozen"," Brown says Chancellor Gordon Brown has announced a freeze on fuel duty in his pre-budget speech to the Commons on Thursday. Mr Brown told the House that government policy is to raise fuel duty at least in line with inflation each year to fulfil environmental commitments. But this financial year"," because of ""volatility in the oil market""", he said the duty would be frozen. During 2000 many motorists campaigned against the rises but environmentalists believe less duty means more pollution. He said: ""It is our policy that each year fuel duties should rise at least in line with inflation as we seek to meet our targets for reducing polluting emissions and fund our public services. ""But this financial year because of the sustained volatility in the oil market I propose to match the freeze in car vehicle licence duty with a continuation on the freeze on the main road fuel duties."" The RAC welcomed the news"," calling it an ""early Christmas present"" for motorists. But the organisation urged drivers to continue to shop around to get the best price for petrol. Environmental group Transport 2000 said the freeze sends the wrong message to motorists. ""We are concerned that although Britain leads the world in rhetoric about climate change it often fails in practical action", said a spokesman. In 2000 the People's Fuel Lobby caused chaos by blocking roads with slow-moving convoys after Mr Brown threatened to raise fuel taxes. The chancellor did not raise duty that year, but despite threats of more protests in 2003, he added 1.28p per litre.

politics 159.txt Howard unveils election platform The Conservatives would stand up for the forgotten majority""", Michael Howard pledged as he unveiled the first part of the Tory election manifesto. The Tory leader argued there was a mass of people whom he says feel let down by Tony Blair and who share Tory values. In the foreword to the manifesto, he promises to focus on restoring order," trying to lower taxes and giving power back to the people. Labour says the document offers only a return to a ""failed Tory past""". The Liberal Democrats say the Conservatives cannot win what they predict will be a three-party contest. Campaigning activity is accelerating ahead of the general election", which is widely tipped for May but could be any time before June 2006. Labour on Monday postponed a launch of election posters because of the Asian tsunami disaster. Mr Howard published the introduction to the Tory manifesto. Other chapters will follow in coming weeks. In a speech in Northamptonshire," he said the ""forgotten majority"" made up the backbone of Britain. They were people who were saving for their first home or their retirement"," working hard and accepting their responsibilities. He says in the manifesto foreword: ""They have been forgotten"," neglected and taken for granted by Mr Blair." Saying Britain must change direction"," Mr Howard argues government is too big and cannot continue ""down the path of ever rising taxes""". He promises to ensure front line professionals"," parents and patients make the key decisions rather than Whitehall ""bureaucrats""". And he says the Tories would get a grip on crime"," immigration and disorder. ""The decline of responsibility and the proliferation of so-called 'human rights' have left us in a moral quagmire", unable to get a grip on rising crime and disorder," he says. Mr Howard says he will produce a Timetable for Action so people can hold him to account but on issues like taxation he has so far only published options, not specific plans. Mr Howard told BBC News: I'm determined to lower taxes but I'm also determined not to make any p

romises I can't keep." "The Tories were unveiling material months ahead of the expected election because they needed time to make voters aware of their policies," he said. He was asked if Tory support for the government on Iraq and identity cards had given the Lib Dems the chance to portray themselves as the opposition to Labour. Mr Howard argued the only test for his policies was whether they were best for Britain. It had nothing to do with putting "clear blue water" between himself and his opponents. Labour's election slogan will be: "'Britain's working', 'don't let the Tories wreck it again'". Campaign coordinator Alan Milburn accused the Tories of "'launching Thatcherism in instalments'" while Labour helped the hard working majority of families. Lib Dem president Simon Hughes said his party had set out its election stance in September. "'The Liberal Democrats will ask the British people for support this year as the party with the policies best able to deliver freedom and fairness and to restore trust,'" he said.

politics 160.txt Lawyer attacks anti-terror laws A senior barrister who has resigned in protest over the government's anti-terror laws says the current system is giving Britain a bad name. Ian MacDonald QC quit when the government failed to recognise a House of Lords ruling that detaining terror suspects indefinitely is unlawful. He was part of a 19-strong panel who have special security clearance to act for suspected terrorists. Five more barristers are now reported to be threatening to resign. Mr MacDonald told BBC News: The reason why I am resigning is because I fundamentally disagree with locking people up without any trial for an indefinite period on reasonable suspicion. "'The current legal system is certainly having a very adverse effect on the Muslim community in Britain and the whole Asian community. 'I think it is giving Britain a bad name internationally'". Under the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act introduced by the government in 2001 in response to the 11 September attacks, foreign nationals suspected of involvement in terrorism who cannot be deported can be held indefinitely without trial. But Mr MacDonald believes that detainees currently being held should be entitled to a trial by jury. "'My own view is we need to have a full return to trial by jury,' a proper criminal trial with proper accusations. "'As far as I'm concerned,' the government have to start all over again and rethink their whole strategy for dealing with this.'" he added. The Attorney General Lord Goldsmith will receive a letter of resignation from Mr MacDonald on Monday. According to the Independent, his resignation is expected to be followed by those of five other barristers - Nicholas Blake QC, Andrew Nicol QC, Manjit Singh Gill QC, Rick Scannell and Tom de la Mare. They are all believed to be carefully considering their positions on the panel of Special Advocates who represent detainees before the Special Immigration Appeals Commission (SIAC) - a secure court without a jury, which tries terror suspects. Mr MacDonald said he had "'no idea'" whether further resignations would follow. But Barry Hugill, a spokesman for the campaign group Liberty, told Radio 4's Today programme that more lawyers may go. "'I can assure that there is a distinct possibility that more lawyers may be resigning', he said. They are now in a situation where everything they have been trained to believe in, the right to trial by jury, has been abandoned and that is what gives some of them sleepless nights.'" Helena Kennedy, a Labour peer and a human rights lawyer, said the Special Advocates' main concern was that once they had seen any special intelligence they were not allowed to speak to the detainees. "'When this whole procedure was being considered immediately after 11 September there was a great deal of argument particularly in the House of Lords about whether there really was a process that could be considered a judicial review', she said. Without that you are having detention with no habeus corpus and really a blot, as Ian McDonald has said, on our legal landscape," something really quite shocking with regard

d to the rule of the law."

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"politics 161.txt Turkey deal 'to help world peace' A deal bringing Turkey a step closer to EU membership is of "fundamental importance" to the peace and security of the world", Tony Blair has said. The deal, struck at the European Council last week," also proved claims of a clash between Muslims and Christians were "wrong""," Mr Blair said. It represented the achievement of an "historic British objective""," he added. Tory leader Michael Howard said the deal laid to rest any suggestion the EU was "anti-Islamic". Turkey's involvement with the EU would provide an "invaluable bridge" between Europe and the rest of the world", Mr Howard added. But the Tory leader argued that the EU constitution was not designed to take in a country as large as Turkey. Mr Blair has been a leading advocate of Turkish membership despite controversy surrounding the idea. He insisted that the Turkish leadership had made great advances in improving its human rights records. The deal to open formal talks with Ankara came despite an EU demand for Turkey to recognise Cyprus. It was agreed the issue can be tackled at a later date but Turkish premier Recep Erdogan had to accept negotiations did not guarantee his country full EU membership. The internationally recognised southern part of Cyprus is an EU member, but Turkey, which occupies northern Cyprus, had previously insisted it would not bow to demands to recognise the country," calling the issue a "red line"". It could take up to 15 years before Turkey is able to join", and entry cannot be guaranteed. If it joins, Turkey may have to accept restrictions to limit migration by its citizens. The EU has also announced that it will start accession talks with Croatia in April 2005. However, talks will begin only if the country co-operates fully with the UN war crimes tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

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"politics 162.txt Protect whistleblowers", TUC says The government should change the law to give more protection to employees who raise health and safety concerns about their workplaces", the TUC has said. It said data from employment tribunals suggested 1,500 "safety whistleblowers" had lost their jobs since 1999. Some firms found it cheaper to sack a worker than to improve buildings or change working conditions", it said. The Health and Safety Executive said it was trying to get workers more involved in helping to make workplaces safer. The TUC figures were drawn from unfair dismissal cases at tribunals where health and safety were the main issue. Safety representatives were often ignored when raising concerns because there was no legal duty to respond," claimed the union organisation. General secretary Brendan Barber said: "It shouldn't be a firing offence to object to unsafe work. "Workers should not be placed in the situation where they are forced to choose between risking their job or risking their personal health and safety." Mr Barber", who said the "problem is far worse than official statistics show""," called for a legal system that "protects safety whistleblowers". He added that workers who are not in a union", as well as casual and migrant workers," "stand little chance of redress." Rory O'Neill", editor of union-backed Hazards magazine, which conducted the research," said: "Giving union safety reps more rights in more workplaces is the ultimate win-win. "Death and injuries at work increased last year", for the second time since the turn of the century. "It would be a fatal mistake not to take full advantage of the union safety effect." The TUC has called on the government to appoint "roving" safety reps and to increase spending on health and safety work inspections. The Health and Safety Executive had said that it had launched an initiative to make factories and offices safer", with more w

orker involvement.

"politics 163.txt Kinnock to urge reform in Lords Neil Kinnock has said his acceptance of a seat in the House of Lords will allow him to help "achieve further progress with substantial democratic reform." On the BBC's Breakfast with Frost it was put to Mr Kinnock that he had once referred to Lords members as "brigands", muggers," bribers and gangsters". But the outgoing European Commissioner said his comments - made some 26 years ago - needed to be put in context. He said advocates for reform needed to be inside the Lords to vote for it. "It was pointed out to me that if the additional democratic reform is going to take place it is going to require advocates in the Lords and people there willing to vote for it." Mr Kinnock added that the second factor behind his acceptance of the peerage was his appointment as chairman of the British Council. "History demonstrates that it's immensely useful for the British Council to have its chairman in the House of Lords and that was a conclusive factor." Mr Kinnock said he thought about the decision for "quite a long time" because he had long had reservations about the Lords. But he added: "The process of reform has developed substantially but not sufficiently," and consequently I did take all these factors into consideration because it's not a decision to be made glibly." The former Labour leader said he would probably take the title of Lord Kinnock of Bedwellty - his first constituency for which he was selected in 1969.

"politics 164.txt McConnell details Scots wave toll At least three people from Scotland died in the tsunami disaster and a further three are on the missing list", the first minister has told MSPs. The figures came out during a statement by Jack McConnell to the Scottish Parliament on Wednesday. He formally expressed Scotland's sympathy for the victims of the Indian Ocean tidal wave which killed 150,000. Mr McConnell went on to promise that Scotland would play its part in the reconstruction effort. He said the provisional figures on the dead and lost had been provided by the police. Mr McConnell said the tragedy should persuade everyone to step up the fight against global poverty and change the world for the better. He said he was proud of the generous response of people in Scotland to the disaster appeal," which is expected soon to top £20m. The first minister also praised Scottish Water for immediately flying bottled water and five large generators to the disaster zone. The Scottish Executive has seconded 11 staff to the aid agencies. But he said Scotland was "in it for the long term" with help planned for fishing communities", for children's services, and for the aid charities. He said 2005 must be the year that Scotland showed clearly it cared for what happened to people elsewhere in the world, whether in Asia or in Africa. Mr McConnell went on to signal that the executive would play its part in the Make Poverty History campaign being mounted by a variety of aid charities, trade unions and churches in the run-up to the G8 summit in Gleneagles in July. Edinburgh architect, Dominic Stephenson, became the first Scot to be confirmed as a victim of the Asian tsunami. The 27-year-old was holidaying on the Thai island of Koh Phi Phi with Eileen Lee, 24. She is still missing.

"politics 165.txt Police urge pub closure power New powers are needed to close disorderly pubs", bars and clubs for up to a week or even

permanently, police chiefs have told MPs. Association of Chief Police Officers president Chris Fox said the current 24-hour closure power did not have enough impact on bad landlords. Mr Fox's comments follow the controversy over plans to allow pubs to open around the clock. He rejected critics' calls for the law change to be delayed. Instead, the new Licensing Act could help reduce drunken disorder - but only if it was properly planned, he argued. Acpo made its call for stronger closure powers in a paper for the Commons home affairs select committee. After the meeting," Mr Fox said being able to close premises for only 24 hours did not necessarily make an impact. ""If it's 12.30 on a Saturday morning and you close for 24 hours there's not a lot of pain for the premises because they probably wouldn't open on Sunday anyway. ""This is about getting through to the management that they can't run a disorderly house without facing some immediate sanctions." Under Acpo's proposal", the closure orders would be used only with the agreement of the local licensing authority. The new licensing laws will give police greater powers to close pubs and clubs - but only for 24-hour periods. Mr Fox said the drinks industry was currently not regulating itself. ""It's making money at the cost of human misery and the public purse", and the strategic planning process has been less than useless," he said. Mr Fox said the new laws, due to start being phased in next month, could help if food outlets, public transport and public toilets could cope with late-night drinkers. Staggering it (closing hours) will be a solution if the infrastructure is there", if the premises are properly managed and people aren't being served rolling drunk and underage and then tossed out into the street," he said. We have the problem from 11pm to 2am in any event. We have to get a grip on the underlying causes of this." Acpo wants pubs and clubs which cause extra work for police and hospitals to have to pay towards the costs. Home Secretary Charles Clarke is currently looking at the idea of a levy on the drinks industry to pay for the cost of extra policing. The licensing changes have sparked concern among some MPs", councils and some senior police officers who fear they could exacerbate drinking problems. Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell on Tuesday said it was not her job to bow to the campaign against the changes. It was the status quo, not the new laws, which were causing current binge drinking problems," she told BBC Two's Newsnight. Leaked documents have suggested ex-Home Secretary David Blunkett branded new opening hours as a ""leap in the dark"". But Ms Jowell insisted his concerns had been met. The police's job against alcohol-related crime would be made easier if all pubs did not close at the same time", she added.

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"politics 166.txt Blunkett tells of love and pain David Blunkett has spoken of his love for married publisher Kimberly Quinn for the first time. The home secretary described how it affected his friends and personal life", but said he was a great believer in personal responsibility. Mr Blunkett is taking legal action to gain access to Mrs Quinn's two-year-old son. She denies he is Mr Blunkett's. The interview with BBC Radio Sheffield was made before allegations he fast-tracked a visa for Mrs Quinn's nanny. The allegations, which he has denied, are being investigated by Sir Alan Budd. Mr Blunkett talked about how he fell in love - but that she resisted his desire to go public. In an apparent reference to his court action to gain access to her son, he says he was a great believer in responsibility and consequences," even when they were painful. Mr Blunkett told BBC Radio Sheffield: ""I fell in love with someone and they wouldn't go public and things started to go very badly wrong in the summer"," and then the News of the World picked up the story. ""I tried for three years to make something work. ""I haven't spoken about it and I don't intend to. Even in the biography that's being written about me I've ensured that there's a

s little as possible." BBC political correspondent Carole Walker said the timing of the broadcast was unlikely to help his efforts to show that he is content rating on getting on with the job of home secretary. Shadow home secretary David Davis says Mr Blunkett should quit if he is found to have influenced the visa process even indirectly. Reports have claimed Mr Blunkett chaired a meeting to discuss delays in the visa system after he learned of nanny Leoncia Casalme's wait. The Home Office has said it would be up to Sir Alan's inquiry to decide if any such meeting was relevant. Home Office minister Fiona Mactaggart said she hoped Mr Blunkett would survive in his job. "I work with him every day and I have always been surprised by how focused he is on the job in hand", on working to deal with things," she said. She told BBC One's Breakfast with Frost programme: He is just really down for the job and I hope he does (survive).""

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"politics 167.txt Housing plans criticised by MPs ""Irreversible environmental damage"" will be caused by government plans to build more than one million homes in south-east England", MPs have warned. ""Sustainable communities"" were being promoted without a real understanding of what ""sustainable"" means", the Environmental Audit Committee said. It said issues like energy needs and transport were not properly addressed. Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott said the report was completed before new initiatives were announced. He said: ""We are working across government", especially with our colleagues at Defra, to create cleaner, safer and greener communities," while protecting and enhancing the environment." The report said there was far too little attention paid to many environmental issues", including water, even though supplies in parts of the South East are already too low. Regulations designed to ensure energy-efficient buildings are too lax, and builders routinely flout them anyway, it said. Financing for improving transport was around one-twentieth of what would be required. The report was a stinging rebuke for the government and especially John Prescott's department, BBC environment correspondent Richard Black said. Chairman of the Environmental Audit Committee Peter Ainsworth MP," said: ""The government's housing policy is an alarming example of disjointed thinking in an areas where joined-up policy is crucial. ""I accept the need to improve housing supply but", as things stand, the principal beneficiary of housing growth will be property developers," with the environment we all depend on being the principal loser." Points raised in the report included: - No proposals to further increase housing supply should be taken forward without strong supporting evidence. - The government should recognise shortcomings of the Treasury's Barker Review", which said 140,"000 new homes a year were needed in Britain. - The government should consider a ""national spatial framework"" for England such as those already in place in Scotland and Wales. - The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister should maximise brown field development and housing densities. - Measures to encourage improved energy efficiency for existing homes should be considered - including reduced stamp duty for homes that achieve set standards and a clear timetable for achieving zero-emissions homes. - The government should make clear how it intends to measure its success at creating sustainable communities. Conservative local government spokeswoman Caroline Spelman said: ""There is now growing evidence that John Prescott's buildings programme is environmentally unsustainable", leaving a concrete scar across the face of rural England." "

"politics 168.txt MPs' murder sentence concern Murder sentences should not be reduced automatically simply because of a guilty plea", s

ays a new MPs' report. The influential Commons home affairs committee was responding to sentencing guidelines issued this summer. The MPs also call for tougher sentences for crimes committed under the influence of drink or drugs. They say the influence of drugs and alcohol should be introduced as an aggravating factor when judges and magistrates sentence offenders. Committee chairman John De nham said drugs of alcohol were sometimes used as an excuse. ""The committee believes that these arguments should be rejected by sentencers and that being under their influence should instead be an aggravating factor." At present judges", when sentencing murderers to the mandatory life sentence, can reduce the tariff - the minimum term they must serve - if the defendant pleads guilty. But although they are spared the ordeal of a trial many murder victims' relatives are unhappy. In July this year Amanda Champion's killer, James Ford, pleaded guilty to her murder and was jailed for at least 15 years - it would have been longer had he denied the charge. Amanda's uncle, Lewis Champion, told the BBC News website Ford did not deserve any credit for his plea," saying: ""Nothing at all is worth taking five years off a murder sentence." MPs criticised Home Secretary David Blunkett last year for introducing last-minute rules allowing reduced sentences for murderers who pleaded guilty. The measures passed into law virtually unnoticed after Mr Blunkett introduced them at a late stage of the Criminal Justice Bill. As a result", says the committee," the government may need to re-legislate to ""remove ambiguity"" over how murderers should be sentenced. It is also calling on the senior judge in England and Wales", Lord Woolf," to abandon draft guidelines he proposed in September to reduce sentences of murderers who plead guilty. The committee said the plans had not reflected the ""public disquiet"" expressed over the possibility of significantly reduced prison terms for murderers. Lord Woolf's Sentencing Guidelines Council (SGC) caused further controversy by suggesting a one third discount off sentences for early guilty pleas in all types of crime. As a result murderers who face a 15-year tariff could get five years knocked off if they give themselves up to the police. Mr Den ham believes the SGC should reconsider its proposals to reflect Parliament's wish that murder should be treated as a separate and especially grave category of offence. He said: ""We want to see sentencers advised that in the case of murderer," reduction in sentence for a guilty plea should not normally be granted in addition to reductions for other mitigating circumstances." But a spokesman for the Home Office defended the proposals. He said: ""By making express provision for murder tariffs in the Criminal Justice Act"," Parliament sent a clear signal that it expects murder to be treated differently to other offences. ""We stand by the provisions in the Act that cover guilty plea discounts"," which have potential benefits for victims and witnesses of avoiding the trauma of a trial." Shadow home secretary David Davis echoed criticisms of the way Mr Blunkett introduced the murder tariff rules. ""There is genuine concern about potential reductions in murder sentences - such action sends out the wrong signals to violent criminals and completely undermines the government's claim to be tough on crime", he said. But Liberal Democrat spokesman Mark Oaten warned the MPs' committee that binding judges too much might look like political interference. The danger of having a prescriptive approach is that whilst every murder is awful, it is also different," he told BBC News.

politics 169.txt 'No-one can define new hunt ban' The new law banning hunting with dogs is so poorly drafted"" no-one can define the offence", pro-hunt MPs say. The accusation came after it emerged a Devon man had been told he could use his four dogs to ""chase away unwanted animals"" from his farm. Because he did not intend to kill deer or foxes it was not hunting. Lib Dem MP Lembit Opik said ministers had invented a new category of hunting - chasing away - and asked how police were supposed to interpret the rules. North De

von landowner Giles Bradshaw was put in touch with the Middle Way Group", of which Mr Opik is a co-chairman, after he had been in contact with the rural affairs ministry," Defra. He had asked whether his technique of using his four dogs to frighten off deer and foxes would be outlawed under the Hunting Act. Mr Bradshaw was initially told it was an offence - prompting him to complain. The Middle Way group also said Mr Bradshaw would be put in a position where he would have to buy a rifle to shoot animals that would have previously gone free. In a later conversation Mr Bradshaw was told that according to Defra's lawyers chasing away unwanted animals was ""not in fact hunting as described in the Hunting Act 2004 therefore you would not be committing an offence"". Mr Opik said: ""Hunting with dogs and flushing are not defined in the Hunting Act. ""Now Defra have also invented a completely new category of hunting - 'chasing away' which is n't even covered by the Act. ""However", all these activities involve the use of dogs to chase wild mammals. ""How is the village bobby who sees a group of people with dogs supposed to distinguish between illegal hunting", exempt hunting, drag hunting, unintentional hunting," a hunt exercising hounds or simply chasing away?"" Tory MP Peter Luff", another co-chairman of Middle Way," said that the legislation was ""so poorly drafted nobody appears able to properly define the offence"". ""It is no wonder the government desperately wants to move on from this disastrous law. However", I seriously doubt the countryside will be that accommodating." Mike Hobday", of the League Against Cruel Sports," said: ""There is no confusion", it is a matter of simple common sense. ""If Mr Bradshaw is setting his dogs to chase wild animals then he is hunting them and that will be a criminal offence. ""If all the dogs are doing is barking at the deer", then nobody can define that as hunting.""  
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"politics 170.txt Hospital suspends 'no Welsh' plan An English hospital has suspended plans to stop treating Welsh patients who have waited more than three months. Hereford County Hospital had earlier said that from the new year patients waiting longer than this would be taken off waiting lists for hip and knee operations. GPs in Wales had feared patients could be pushed to the back of another queue. But after talks with Powys Health Board the hospital called off its plan until health chiefs meet early in January. Hereford Hospital Trust caused an outcry when it sent out a letter telling patients that for financial and administrative reasons it planned to turn down some orthopaedic patients. Shocked health officials in Powys said this meant they would be left with the prospect of patients and doctors having to find new appointments in other hospitals. Andy Williams", chief executive of Powys Local Health Board," had said it was ""a totally unacceptable way to behave"". Mr Williams had said he did not think it was a Welsh-English issue", but said Hereford hospital was ""struggling financially and trying to pass the problem back to Powys"". He had told BBC Radio Wales: ""I have written straight back to the trust... to insist they withdraw this threat and treat the patients I am paying them to treat."" But after the hospital had agreed to the suspension", Mr Williams said he was optimistic a compromise could be reached which would ensure Welsh patients continued to be treated there. He said the problem had been caused by the difference in waiting time targets between England and Wales. The target is 12 months for Welsh patients, but just three months in England. The contract with the Powys health board was worth £7m a year for the hospital and accounts for 12% of its patients. In a statement before the suspension of the idea," the Welsh Assembly Government said the situation was ""unacceptable"". ""But Powys Local Health Board is committed to ensuring our patients receive the care that is appropriate", said the assembly government. Although we will be challenging Hereford's d

ecision we will put in place appropriate care for our patients. They will be contacted by their GPs in the next week." "Earlier", David Rose, Chief Executive of Hereford Hospitals NHS Trust," had said: " "It is with real regret that we have taken this step. " "We want to continue providing an excellent and fast service to Powys people but can only do this if we are paid to provide the service. " "In 2005 our waiting time will fall to a maximum of 6-months and we want Powys people to ask to be referred to our modern hospital. " "We appeal to Powys Local Health Board to allow Powys people to choose Hereford for their treatment." "

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"politics 171.txt Tories pledge free sports lessons Child ren would be offered two hours' free sports training a week by a future Tory go vernment", the party has said. The Club2School policy would provide up to £25 0m yearly for local sports clubs in the UK to deliver after-school sport. The e xtra coaching would be funded by the National Lottery and would come on top of the two hours of sport a week children are supposed to get in school. Shadow ho me secretary David Davis said five million children were being denied adequate sporting opportunities. The plans would help tackle the " "fastest growing rate of obesity in the developed world""", he said. Shadow sports minister Lord Moy nihan said the policy would empower local clubs and create a lasting legacy. " "We aim to shift the emphasis on after-school sport provision away from our overstretched teachers and schools directly in to the 151", "000 sports clubs in t he UK." " The Tories say Labour's plans to give all children two hours of sports lessons a week in schools have failed. Government figures show that in England in 2002 only a third of schools at Key Stages 1", 3 and 4 and two-fifths of sch ools at Key Stage 2, met that target. The Tories also claim that of the £750m t he prime minister pledged in 2000 to invest on school sports facilities, only £41m had been spent. But the Big Lottery Fund has said that complex capital pro jects are involved - and it was confident the money would all be allocated by n ext year as intended.

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"politics 172.txt Faith schools citizenship warning Scho ls must improve the quality of citizenship lessons - or social cohesion and dem ocracy will suffer", says the education watchdog. Independent faith schools we re singled out by Ofsted chief, David Bell," for not doing enough to promote th e " "wider tenets of British society"". Mr Bell said Muslim", Jewish and Evange lical Christian schools must be " "intolerant of intolerance"". Diversity " "cert ainly must not mean segregated or separate""", he said. Mr Bell's speech called for a much greater effort in all types of schools to teach citizenship - with a n accompanying survey showing that young people knew little about politics and had no enthusiasm to find out more. Badly-taught citizenship lessons have prev iously been criticised by Mr Bell, and in a speech to the Hansard Society, he w arned that it was failing to pass on an understanding of democracy, public serv ice and shared values. He highlighted his particular concern for citizenship in the growing number of independent faith schools - which he said included about 100 Muslim," 100 Evangelical Christian and 50 Jewish schools. Mr Bell expresse d concern about schools which did not teach children enough about a " "common he ritage"" and needed to do more to promote principles of mutual tolerance and so cial inclusion. " "I worry that many young people are being educated in faith-ba sed schools", with little appreciation of their wider responsibilities and obli gations to British society," said Mr Bell. The Ofsted chief said his forthcomin g annual report would make particular reference to Muslim schools. Many must ad apt their curriculum to ensure that it provides pupils with a broad general kno

wledge of public institutions and services in England and helps them to acquire an appreciation of and respect for other cultures in a way that promotes tolerance and harmony." Mr Bell said such questions of religion and cultural identity were ""tricky issues"". But he argued that ""we must not allow our recognition of diversity to become apathy in the face of any challenge to our coherence as a nation"". ""I would go further and say that an awareness of our common heritage as British citizens", equal under the law, should enable us to assert with confidence that we are intolerant of intolerance, illiberalism and attitudes and values that demean the place of certain sections of our community, be they women or people living in non-traditional relationships," said Mr Bell.

politics 173.txt Ministers lose slopping out case The Scottish Executive has lost an appeal against an inmate's compensation for being forced to slop out in prison. Armed robber Robert Napier, 25, won £2,450 after he claimed he suffered an outbreak of the skin complaint, eczema, when slopping out at Barlinnie Prison. Napier said that the practice, where prisoners use buckets in their cells as toilets, breached his human rights. On Thursday, the Court of Session threw out a move by the executive to apply a more rigorous standard of proof. The executive faces more than 1,000 similar claims for damages from prisoners and former inmates. More than 310 actions have already been raised in the Court of Session and sheriff courts in Scotland. An executive spokesman said: We will study this judgement in detail. Much has changed to address the issues raised in the Napier case", for example," slopping out has ended at Barlinnie and work in other prisons is being accelerated. "Today's judgement does not affect the outcome of other cases." Napier", a remand prisoner at the time, raised a legal challenge in 2001 under the European Convention on Human Rights, in which he sought £5,000. He was awarded compensation last April after winning his case. Executive ministers raised an appeal arguing that the standard of proof to be applied in cases alleging a breach of the European Convention on Human Rights through degrading and inhumane treatment should ""be beyond reasonable doubt"". This is the standard normally applied in criminal trials in Scotland. However", civil litigation is settled on the test of ""a balance of probabilities"". Judge Lord Cullen", sitting with Lord Osborne and Lord Hamilton," ruled that alleged human rights breaches involving degrading treatment should be dealt with on the normal civil standard. Napier's lawyer Tony Kelly believes the action will soon be followed by others. Mr Kelly said: ""There are hundreds of people still undergoing slopping out", overcrowding and poor regime and those people will certainly be heartened by today's judgement." Scottish National Party Justice Minister Kenny MacAskill said that the slopping out case had been ""a fiasco from start to finish"". He said: ""Ministers were fully aware of the state of Scotland's jails. Funds were available but they chose to ignore the problem and after this ruling I suspect we will be faced with even more claims and no doubt more payouts. ""A short term executive saving has resulted in a long term public cost.""

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politics 174.txt Escaped prisoner report ordered First Minister Jack McConnell has ordered a report on the decision to allow a paranoid schizophrenic knife attacker to go on a visit unguarded. Michael Ferguson",36," escaped after being allowed out of the high-security Carstairs unit. The SNP's Nicola Sturgeon has demanded to know who was responsible for signing off the leave. The Scottish Executive said ministers would be notified but it would ""not be common practice"" to sign approval. An executive spokesman said the health department and the state hospital itself would work together on preparing the report. Ministerial responsibility for Carstairs rests with Rhona Brankin

n"," the deputy health minister. Ms Brankin said: ""The first minister has called for a review of what has happened," we need to talk to the state hospital and we need to reflect on this." Ms Sturgeon has written to Mr McConnell asking for clarification on the move to allow the prisoner out. She said questions must be answered about his escape", if the public is to be reassured about safety. Police are still searching for Ferguson, who failed to return after a trip to East Kilbride on Monday. The Scottish National Party's parliamentary leader argued that under the law," authorisation of Ferguson's leave of absence would have come directly from ministers. She said: ""The Scottish Executive seemed to indicate yesterday that the escape of Mr Ferguson was a matter for Carstairs. ""However", my understanding is that, under the mental health legislation, the decision to grant this patient - and any restricted patient - leave of absence," would have required direct and specific authorisation by Scottish ministers." She added: ""I have written to the first minister today asking for confirmation of that fact. I have also asked him to confirm which minister would routinely take decisions of this nature and what information they are based on. ""This is not an attempt to apportion blame", but to ensure a better understanding of the decision making process in such important and sensitive cases." Police said Ferguson posed a danger to the public. BBC Scotland political correspondent Glenn Campbell said the first minister had ordered an urgent report into the situation. He said: ""We understand from the executive that in this case no individual minister signed off the approval for Michael Ferguson to be released unescorted from Carstairs. ""The executive concedes that it is up to Scottish ministers", they have a legal responsibility for approving this sort of leave," but they say routinely it is specialised officials that make that decision and simply inform ministers that they have taken it. ""But at that stage presumably ministers can ask hard questions and can ask for reassurances that the patient is not a serious danger to the public or that any risk has been minimised." Scottish Conservative leader", David McLetchie," said earlier it was ""almost beyond belief that this has been allowed to happen"". The executive spokeswoman said the recommendation for leave was agreed by a psychiatric advisor ""in conjunction with officials on behalf of ministers"". She said: ""Ministers were told of that", notified of it," but it would not be common practice for them to sign it off. ""They do have statutory responsibility", but the common practice has been that people who work with the patient and have the best knowledge about risk would make that decision." Ferguson", who slashed a man in a doctors' surgery in Coatbridge in 1994, had been out to see his fianc&#233;e Annabella Holmes,47, whom he met when she was a patient at the high security complex in South Lanarkshire. He is described as being 5ft 9ins tall, slim, with blond hair, blue eyes and a fair complexion. Ferguson was wearing a black jacket, grey jeans, black jumper and black shoes when he was last seen. He has multiple fading tattoos on his left hand and a very faded tear tattoo under his left eye. Ms Holmes is not missing but there have been no sightings of Ferguson since Monday. Strathclyde Police asked anyone who spots Ferguson to contact Sergeant Keith McDonald on .

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"politics 175.txt Chancellor rallies Labour voters Gordon Brown has issued a rallying cry"," telling supporters the ""stakes are too high"" to stay at home or protest vote in the forthcoming general election. The chancellor said the vote - expected to fall on 5 May - will give a ""clear and fundamental"" choice between Labour investment and Conservative cuts. Speaking at Labour's spring conference in Gateshead", Mr Brown claimed the NHS was not safe in Conservative hands. He said Tory plans to cut £35bn tax would ""cut deep into public service"". To a packed audience at Gateshead's Sage Centre", the c

hancellor said the cuts proposed by shadow chancellor Oliver Letwin were the equivalent of sacking every teacher, GP and nurse in the country," he told activists. Laying into the Conservative's record in government he said: ""I give you this promise - with Labour", Britain will never return to the mistakes of ERM and 10% inflation, 15% interest rates, £3bn in lost reserves, 250,000 reposessed," one million in negative equity and three million unemployed. ""Never again Tory boom and bust. ""This will be the central dividing line at the election", between a Conservative Party taking Britain back and planning deep cuts of £35bn in our services, and a Labour government taking Britain forward, which on a platform of stability will reform and renew our hospitals, schools and public services and, I am proud to say," spend by 2008 £60bn more." Turning to the economy", the chancellor pledged to continue economic stability and growth in a third term in power. He said after seven years Labour had transformed from a party not trusted with the economy to ""the only party trusted with the economy"". It was now a ""party not just of employees", but of employers and managers""", he said. In the speech - which prompted a standing ovation from an audience clearly ""warm"" to Mr Brown - he also promised to end teenage unemployment within the next five years. He also highlighted plans for 100% debt relief for the world's poorest countries", a national minimum wage for 16 and 17-year-olds and the creation of a network of children's centres and flexibility in maternity leave. The prime minister is to take part later on Saturday in an interactive question and answer session, fielding queries sent in by e-mail, text message and telephone as part of Labour's attempt to engage the public in their campaign.

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"politics 176.txt Councils 'must find Gypsy sites' Ministers are telling councils to find more sites for travellers", amid continuing rows concerning a string of unauthorised encampments. Councils are also to be given stronger powers to move on illegal settlements by Gypsy communities on rural land. More money is to be given to councils to develop official caravan parks, said housing minister Yvette Cooper. In November, MPs urged ministers to make councils create sites because 3,500 travellers have no place to stop. Ms Cooper said an annual scheme to refurbish existing traveller sites would now be extended to consider council bids for new stopping places. That scheme has paid out £25m in four years," with £8m available for 2005. ""There are two major problems in the planning system at the moment concerning Gypsy and traveller sites", said Ms Cooper. Firstly, local authorities are not identifying enough appropriate locations either for private or public sites. And secondly," they do not have enough powers to deal swiftly with development on inappropriate sites. ""The result is that there are too many developments on inappropriate sites", causing tensions and difficulties for both the neighbouring communities and the Gypsies and travellers. ""That is why we are consulting on a new obligation on local authorities to identify more appropriate sites", as well as new powers to take immediate action if the development is in the wrong place and cannot be tolerated in even the short-term because of risk to local amenity and the environment." Under the new regulations", expected to be in force in the spring," officials will be able to serve ""temporary stop notices"" aimed at preventing works on a site before a council has had chance to obtain a full legal ban. Many MPs with rural constituencies", particularly in eastern England, have been pressing the government to create stronger enforcement powers, saying villagers are suffering because of the legal delays in removing illegal encampments. Andrew Ryder, of the Traveller Law Reform Coalition," said: ""We welcome talk about an obligation on councils to identify land for Gypsies and travellers", so long as

s it is a real obligation as opposed to a recommendation which could be and was easily ignored. ""New accommodation proposals for travellers need to be backed up with decent funding and intervention by the government when councils attempt to dodge their responsibilities towards travellers",," as they often do. ""Living on the side of the road or being worn down by planning appeals",," legal action and eviction is no one's idea of fun." In their November report",, MPs from the committee scrutinising the Office for the Deputy Prime Minister, responsible for housing, said most illegal traveller encampments were caused by a lack of places to stop. Numerous communities and councils were paying for lengthy and expensive evictions against travelling communities, said the MPs. In turn, the problems had worsened because councils were reluctant to voluntarily provide sites because of resistance from residents. Two of the most controversial traveller sites - Cottenham in Cambridgeshire and Minety in Wiltshire - remain embroiled in an ongoing legal battle.

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"politics 177.txt Plaid MP's cottage arson claim A Plaid Cymru MP believes UK security services were involved in some arson attacks blamed on Welsh extremists. It is 25 years since the start of 12 years of fire-bombings", attributed to a shadowy group known as Meibion Glyndwr. Plaid Cymru's Elfyn Llwyd has suggested the security services could have been involved, with the intention of discrediting the nationalist vote. Ex-Welsh Office Minister Lord Roberts of Conwy denied security services were involved. In March this year, North Wales Police reopened the case," saying materials kept during their investigations would be examined to find whether it would yield DNA evidence. Meibion Glyndwr - which means ""sons of Glyndwr"" - began burning property in December 1979 in protest at homes in rural Wales being sold as holiday cottages to people from England. The group was linked to most of the 220 or so fire-bombing incidents stretching from the Llyn Peninsula to Pembrokeshire. The campaign continued until the early 1990s. Police were accused in some quarters of targeting anyone who was a nationalist. Although one man", Sion Aubrey Roberts, was convicted in 1993 of sending letter bombs in the post, the arson cases remain unsolved. As a solicitor, Elfyn Llwyd represented Welsh singer Bryn Ffôn when he was arrested on suspicion of being involved in the arson campaign. Ffôn was released without charge . But now, as MP for Merionnydd Nant Conwy and Plaid Cymru's Parliamentary Leader, Mr Llwyd has argued that some of the terror attacks may have had the involvement of the security services and not Meibion Glyndwr. He believes that elements of the British security services may have carried out renegade actions in order to discredit Plaid Cymru and the nationalist vote ahead of elections. The claim is made in an interview for BBC Wales' Maniffesto programme to be shown on S4C on Sunday. Mr Llwyd said that the sophistication of many of the devices used in the attacks compared to the crude nature of many others," suggests a degree of professionalism which could only have come from individuals who knew exactly what they were doing. He said: ""What I'm saying is that the role that they took wasn't the appropriate one",," i.e. like an agent provocateur and perhaps interfering and creating a situation where it looked like it was the nationalists that were responsible." The programme also heard from Lord Roberts of Conwy", who was a Welsh Office minister at the time. He denied that the security services played any improper role. Mr Llwyd's theory has also been questioned by Plaid Cymru's former President, Dafydd Wigley. He accepted that the fires damaged Plaid Cymru's public image but believed that the security services had their hands full at the time with the IRA and animal rights activists. - Maniffesto can be seen on S4C on Sunday, 12-Dec, at 1200 GMT.

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"politics 178.txt Hatfield executives go on trial Enginee  
ring firm Balfour Beatty and five railway managers are to go on trial for mansl  
aughter over the Hatfield rail crash in 2000. Four people died when a section  
of rail broke and a high speed train derailed. Balfour Beatty's railway mainten  
ance arm was in charge of the upkeep of the line at Hatfield", Hertfordshire. B  
alfour Beatty managers Anthony Walker and Nicholas Jeffries, and Railtrack mana  
gers Alistair Cook, Sean Fugill and Keith Lea all face individual charges. All  
five men, along with four others, are also accused of breaches of health and sa  
fety laws. Balfour Beatty Rail Maintenance faces a corporate manslaughter charg  
e. It is expected the trial could last as long as a year. The accident, on 17 O  
ctober 2000, happened when the London to Leeds express came off the tracks at 1  
15 mph, when it was derailed by a cracked section of rail. The accident on the  
East Coast Main Line sparked major disruption. The overall responsibility for t  
he line was Railtrack's - the company that has now become Network Rail. Those w  
ho died in the accident were Steve Arthur, 46, from Pease Pottage, West Sussex;  
Peter Monkhouse, 50, of Headingley, Leeds; Leslie Gray, 43, of Tuxford, Nottingha  
m; and Robert James Alcorn, 37, of Auckland, New Zealand.

politics 179.txt Final hunts held as ban looms Hunts in England and Wales have begun on the last day that hunting with dogs is legal", with more due out later. Thousands of supporters are expected to turn out at more than 250 meets, many of which have altered their normal schedules to be out on a Thursday. The ban on hunting with dogs comes into effect from 0001 GMT on Friday. The Countryside Alliance had its latest legal bid to block the ban thwarted on Wednesday when the Appeal Court ruled the Hunting Act was lawful. But the group says hunting will continue in some form after the ban comes in, with hunts expected to test the new law to its limits. Others are expected to defy the ban by continuing to hunt illegally. Anti-hunt organisations, for whom the ban is the culmination of years of campaigning, say they hope most will stay within the law. Mike Hobday, of the League Against Cruel Sports," told BBC News: ""We've long urged them to go drag hunting - to follow an artificial scent - and that is what we hope they do. ""But if they continue to chase foxes", to chase wild mammals around the countryside," that's against the law and we're confident they'll be brought to justice." At the headquarters of Quorn hunt in Leicestershire", feelings were running high as hunt enthusiasts prepared for their final legal hunt. BBC correspondent Sarah Mukherjee said hunt supporters were in tears. She said many people did not share the Countryside Alliance's optimism that hunting would be able to continue. Farmer Geoff Brooks, a senior member of the Quorn hunt," told BBC News people's lives ""revolved around hunting"". He described the ban as ""ridiculous"" and ""badly thought out"" but said it would be hard for most people to defy it as they would not want to risk their incomes by getting a criminal record. At the Court of Appeal on Wednesday", the Countryside Alliance failed in its attempt to have the Hunting Act ruled invalid. But it says the ban is unenforceable because the law is unclear and impossible to police. The alliance says hunt supporters will go out and test this law to its limits on Saturday. The League Against Cruel Sports and the RSPCA say they will monitor hunts and assist police in bringing prosecutions. The Association of Chief Police Officers has issued guidance to forces on how to deal with the new rules. A spokesman said: ""Basically", it's not going to be police officers chasing about in cars across fields," it will be based on intelligence and information received as well." The decision on how to police individual hunts will be left to local forces", with more officers sent to hunts where disruption is exp

ected. He said police would consider evidence submitted by anti-hunt organisations on its merits.

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"politics 180.txt Falconer rebuts 'charade' claims Concessions on a bill which critics claim would allow euthanasia ""through the back door"" were not a political ploy," the lord chancellor has said. Ministers have been accused of panic in offering last minute changes to the Mental Capacity Bill amid chaotic scenes in the Commons on Tuesday. Lord Falconer said it was fair to criticise the late timing of the offer. He said the changes provided a solution to a very difficult issue but some MPs argue the situation is still unclear. The bill allows people to give somebody the power of attorney to make decisions on their behalf if they become too ill to decide for themselves. Ministers insist the plans would not change laws on euthanasia and would improve safeguards. Critics fear it could allow ""killing by omission"" through withdrawing treatment," including food and fluids. Tony Blair said he would do everything he could to meet concerns about the bill. But changes to the bill must not overturn the law set when a court ruled that doctors could withdraw artificial feeding and hydration from Hillsborough coma victim Tony Bland. ""It is important we don't end up in the situation where doctors and consultants are confused about the law and may lay themselves open to prosecution in circumstances where no sensible person would want that to happen," he said. On Tuesday, the government saw off a backbench attempt to force changes to the bill by 297 votes to 203, despite rebellion by 34 Labour MPs. The revolt was also reduced by news that Lord Falconer had promised the Catholic archbishop of Cardiff to strengthen safeguards in the bill. But that only came after MPs bombarded Constitutional Affairs Minister David Lammy with a barrage of requests for him to read the letter as they complained they had been left in the dark. Eventually, he was hurriedly handed the letter to read out five minutes before the crunch votes, prompting claims of a shambles. The deputy speaker later said the debate had not been handled as it should have been. Lord Falconer says there will be amendments when the bill goes to the House of Lords. He told BBC News: We have given a commitment to put into the bill a clause that says that nothing in the bill authorises any act where the motive of the person authorising the decision is to end life. ""The motive has got to be to end suffering." He denied the concessions were a ""political manoeuvre"" forced by panic about the rebellion. It was inevitable that minds became more focused as the bill went through Parliament but the result was a ""sensible solution""," he said. ""I don't think it is something to be embarrassed about. These issues are not easy to deal with," he went on. BBC political editor Andrew Marr said Mr Lammy was waste deep in quicksand and sinking fast"" after his performance. But Lord Falconer praised his minister for an ""excellent job"". Former Conservative leader Iain Duncan Smith", one of the chief critics of the plans," condemned the debate as a ""charade"" and complained the promises of changes to the bill were vague.

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"politics 181.txt School sport 'is back'"," says PM Tony Blair has promised that ""sport is back"" as a priority for schools. The prime minister launched a £500m initiative to allow school sports clubs in England to provide up to three hours of extra activity a week by 2010. ""It's an important part of education and it's an important part of health," Mr Blair said. But the Conservatives say government proposals - which include two hours' PE within school for 75% of pupils by 2006 - are unrealistic. The latest move is aimed at encouraging more diversity in sport, with activities such as yoga and Tai Chi b

eing options. Launching the initiative, Mr Blair completed an agility course and shot basketball hoops with students from the all-girl Waverley Sports College in Southwark, south London. He said: You've got to bring back school sport. It's got to be done differently than it was 30 or 40 years ago. It's still very," very important." "Earlier", Education Secretary Charles Clarke told BBC News there were at least three areas which needed ""a coherent framework"" and ""dedicated funding"". These were training for PE teachers", establishing more specialist schools and the development of partnerships for activities such as inter-school competitions. He added the government had originally pledged ""for every pupil to get at least two hours of high-quality physical education"" a week. The proportion was currently at 62%", and the government was hoping this would rise to 85% by 2008 and 100% by 2010. The money for the initiative will come from a new £500m fund. The £500m move will also increase the number of specialist sport colleges from 350 to 400. But the Conservatives warned of rising obesity levels and said that since only a third of children do two hours of sport a week currently," the government is promising something it cannot guarantee. Shadow spokesman for sport Hugh Robertson said: ""I suspect the correct way to tackle it is to look at the other end of the spectrum and try to enable the clubs - which is where the real passion for sport exists - to deliver the school sport offer." "He said more emphasis should be put on traditional sports", saying that an ""anti-competitive sport agenda"" had been pursued in recent years. Martin Ward", of the Secondary Heads Association," said members did not like ""ring-fenced funds"" and that it should be up to the schools themselves to decide how to spend their money.

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politics 182.txt Anti-terror plan faces first test Plans to allow Home Secretary Charles Clarke to place terror suspects under house arrest without trial are set for their first real test in Parliament. Tories", Lib Dems and some Labour MPs are poised to vote against the plans. Mr Clarke says the powers are needed to counter terror threats. Opponents say only judges, not politicians, should be able to order detention of UK citizens. The government is expected to win Wednesday's vote in the Commons," but faces a battle in the House of Lords. The Prevention of Terrorism Bill was published on Tuesday. It proposes ""control orders""", which would mean house arrest in the most serious cases, and curfews, electronic tagging and limits on telephone and internet access for other suspects. The two opposition parties are particularly worried that the control orders would initially be imposed on the say-so of the home secretary, rather than a judge. Tory shadow home secretary David Davis warned of the potential for miscarriages of justice," like the Guildford Four - for which Tony Blair recently apologised - as a result of the pressure on politicians to lock up terror suspects. ""Those pressures would be much more for a politician than they would on a judge and that's why we have serious concerns about that approach", he told BBC Radio 4's Today programme. Mr Clarke says he does not intend to use the house arrest powers now - even for the 11 current terror detainees. He also said that any decision he made would be reviewed by a judge within seven days. The foreign terror suspects currently detained are mostly held at London's Belmarsh prison. They are held under laws which the Law Lords have ruled break human rights rules - and which are due to expire on 14 March. The new powers, designed to replace the existing laws and meet the Law Lords' concerns, would apply to British as well as foreign terror suspects. Critics say that giving politicians the power to deprive UK citizens of their freedom is the biggest attack on civil liberties for 300 years. Opposition MPs are also angry they will have only two days - Wednesday and next Monday - to debate the new plans be

fore they pass to the House of Lords. But the government says the existing powers run out soon so must be replaced urgently. In a rare move, the Tories and Lib Dems have jointly tabled a motion opposing the new bill, saying the house arrest plans are excessive"". It argues decisions should be taken on a higher standard of proof and the plan ""wrongly infringes the right to liberty"" by failing to bring terrorists to trial where there is evidence. Mr Davis told Today: ""It gives a minister", for the first time in modern history, the right to detain without trial, without showing the evidence and indeed, in some respects," almost the allegation against the individual concerned." He questioned why there was ""such a rush"" to introduce the legislation when Mr Clarke had indicated he was not planning to use the house arrest powers straight away. Liberal Democrat home affairs spokesman Mark Oaten said: ""We believe it should be the judge that takes decisions", not politicians." Mr Clarke said the security services and police backed his measures and it would be ""rash and negligent"" to ignore their advice. Nobody should doubt that terrorists at home and abroad wanted to attack the UK and its interests", he argued.

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"politics 183.txt Former NI minister Scott dies Former Northern Ireland minister Sir Nicholas Scott has died at a London hospice", his family has announced. The former Conservative MP for Kensington and Chelsea, died after a long illness diagnosed as Alzheimer's. The 71-year-old served in Northern Ireland from 1981 to 1987 during the premiership of Margaret Thatcher. As a Northern Ireland minister he dealt with education and later security where he rode out the mass IRA escape from the Maze in 1983. In education," he encountered criticism over school closures and the future of the Catholic training colleges. He also merged the New University of Ulster and the Ulster Polytechnic to create the University of Ulster. Sir Nicholas was a strong defender of the Anglo-Irish Agreement and was held in esteem in Dublin government and SDLP circles. But he experienced hostility from unionists some of whom dubbed him ""Minister of Discord"". After leaving Northern Ireland in a reshuffle", he became a UK disability minister. Sir Nicholas was replaced as the member for Kensington and Chelsea by the flamboyant Alan Clark, after being deselected by his constituency in December 1996. His deselection followed a series of scandals including being found slumped in the street by police during the Tory Party conference in Bournemouth and taken back to his hotel. Sir Nicholas claimed strong painkillers he was taking for a back problem had reacted badly with a small amount of alcohol. After his sacking, he bitterly said that despite the support of Cabinet ministers and Tory backbenchers," the Eurosceptics in his constituency were ""absolutely determined to get rid of me"". His colourful career also included a very public disagreement with daughter Victoria over civil rights for the disabled. Sir Nicholas admitted he misled MPs when he denied his department had been involved in wrecking tactics designed to kill the Disability Bill in 1994. Victoria", a lobbyist for disabled rights, denounced her father's actions and heaped insult on injury when she joined the calls for him to resign. He joined the backbenches two months later.

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"politics 184.txt Blair rejects Iraq advice calls Tony Blair has rejected calls for the publication of advice on the legality of the Iraq war amid growing calls for an investigation. The prime minister told his monthly press conference the matter had been dealt with by the Attorney General. Earlier", Conservative MP Michael Mates joined calls for a probe into claims Lord Goldsmith's statement to Parliament was drawn up at Number 10. Mr Blair said

the statement was a ""fair summary"" of Lord Goldsmith's opinion. ""That's what he (Lord Goldsmith) said and that's what I say. He has dealt with this time and time again," Mr Blair told his monthly news conference in Downing Street. He refused to answer further questions on the issue, saying it had been dealt with literally scores of times and the position has not changed"". Lord Goldsmith has denied being ""leaned on"" and says the words written were his. The government refuses to publish his advice on the legality of the war - saying such papers have always been kept confidential. Mr Mates", who is a member of the Commons intelligence and security committee and was part of the Butler inquiry into pre-war intelligence," told the BBC on Friday: ""That", as a general rule, is right," but it's not an absolute rule."" He said there had been other occasions when advice had been published", most recently regarding Prince Charles's marriage plans. The government could not pick and choose when to use the convention," he said. Mr Mates added: ""We discovered that there were two or three occasions in the past when law officers' advice to the government has been published. ""And this may be one of those special occasions... when it would be in the public interest to see the advice which the attorney general gave to the prime minister."" This argument was rejected by Mr Blair", who said: ""Firstly", we haven't broken the precedent," and secondly Peter Goldsmith has made his statement and I have got absolutely nothing to add to it."" In a book published this week", Philippe Sands QC, a member of Cherie Blair's Matrix Chambers, says Lord Goldsmith warned Tony Blair on 7 March 2003 that the Iraq war could be illegal without a second UN resolution sanctioning military action. But a short statement about Lord Goldsmith's position was presented in a written parliamentary answer on 17 March 2003 - just before a crucial Commons vote on the military action. Mr Sands' book suggests it was actually written by Home Office Minister Lord Falconer and Downing Street adviser Baroness Morgan. Former minister Clare Short, who resigned from the government over the Iraq war, said it was the same statement that was earlier shown to the cabinet as it discussed military action. She told the BBC the full advice should have been attached," according to the ministerial code. ""My view is we need the House of Lords to set up a special committee", summon the attorney, get all the papers out, look at exactly what happened," she said. The Conservatives and Liberal Democrats say they want the publication of the full legal advice given by the Attorney General. On Thursday, Lord Goldsmith said his statement had not been written by or at Number 10"". ""In my parliamentary answer on March 17 2003", I explained my genuinely held independent view, that military action was lawful under the existing Security Council resolutions," he said.

politics 185.txt Police probe BNP mosque leaflet Police are investigating a British National Party leaflet posted to homes in south Wales opposing plans for a new mosque. Anti-racism campaigners in Swansea have handed copies to South Wales Police. Swansea's Muslim community is raising money to open a new mosque and community centre in the former St Andrews United Reform Church. The building on George Street has been derelict since the 1980s. Taha Idris, director of the Swansea Bay Race Equality Council, said his organisation contacted police after receiving complaints from the public. I'm quite shocked to see this sort of leaflet by the BNP in Swansea", he said. The BNP has tried in the past to get into Swansea and this is another example of them trying again. ""I am in no doubt that the BNP are not needed and not wanted here."" A South Wales Police spokeswoman confirmed that they were looking at the contents of the leaflet. According to the BNP's website", they have been posted to homes in the Castle ward. The BNP website carries a photograph of party leader Nick Griffin - who lives near Welshpool, mid Wales - delivering the leaflet. The BNP has denied it is trying to stir up hatred of any race or religion, but argues t

hat they should be able to debate this without fear of arrest. Swansea Unite Against Fascism (UAF) is meeting this week to plan a campaign. Following the death earlier this year of Kalan Kawa Karim, an Iraqi Kurd living in Swansea, it organised an anti-racism march in the city that was supported by more than 1,000 people. It is planning its own mail shot campaign and may launch a petition in support of the plans for the mosque. Andy Richards, of Swansea UAF, " said the leaflet was exactly what he had come to expect from the BNP. ""The people of Swansea will not put up with this." " Swansea's Muslim community bought the former church", just across the road from the existing mosque on St Helen's Road," in the late 1990s. Mr Idris said the community was now raising money to renovate the building. ""It is a landmark building in Swansea and would otherwise just crumble", " he said. It is the ideal opportunity for the building to be restored and used in the proper manner. ""It will be a Muslim community centre. It's a holistic place used for education", weddings," deaths and births." " He said space was limited in the current mosque and on some occasions Muslims had to travel to Llanelli for cultural events.

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"politics 186.txt Blair says mayor should apologise Tony Blair has urged London mayor Ken Livingstone to apologise for his ""Nazi"" comment to a Jewish reporter. Labour's Mr Livingstone", " who says he is ""standing by"" his remarks", " had accused an Evening Standard journalist of being like a ""concentration camp guard"". Mr Blair told Five's Wright Stuff show: ""Let's just apologise and move on." " Mr Livingstone has said the remarks may have been offensive but were not racist", and said he would not apologise even if the prime minister asked. Mr Blair, who was instrumental in returning Mr Livingstone to the Labour Party," insisted on Wednesday it was time for the London mayor to say sorry. ""A lot of us in politics get angry with journalists from time to time", but in the circumstances, and to the journalist because he was a Jewish journalist, yes, he should apologise," he said. Let's just apologise and move on - that's the sensible thing." " Tory leader Michael Howard", asked about Mr Livingstone's remark by reporters," said it was important for politicians to be mindful about the language they use. ""It's particularly important that as we get close to the election that politicians talk with civility and courtesy about issues that we all face", he said. I think it's a matter of sadness that we are not seeing that from the Labour Party. We had what Ken Livingstone said," we had what Alastair Campbell has said and we have what others have said. I think that's a matter of great regret." " The row blew up after Mr Livingstone was approached by Evening Standard reporter Oliver Finegold following a party marking the 20th anniversary of former Culture Secretary Chris Smith coming out as Britain's first gay MP. On tape", Mr Livingstone, who once worked as a freelance restaurant critic on the paper," is heard asking Mr Finegold if he is a ""German war criminal"". Mr Finegold replies: ""No", I'm Jewish," I wasn't a German war criminal. I'm quite offended by that." " The mayor then says: ""Ah right", well you might be, but actually you are like a concentration camp guard, you are just doing it because you are paid to," aren't you?" " At his weekly press conference on Tuesday", " Mr Livingstone said his comments were not racist and refused to apologise. ""If you think they are racist", I think you are wrong," he told reporters. The dispute comes as an inspection team from the International Olympic committee began a four-day tour to assess London's bid for the 2012 Games. An official complaint has been made to local government watchdogs by the British Jews, demanding an investigation by the Standards Board of England. It has the power to suspend or bar Mr Livingstone from public office.

politics 187.txt Jowell confirms casino climbdown Tessa J

Jowell has announced plans to limit the number of new casinos in the UK to 24, in a move branded a humiliating retreat"" by the Tories. It puts an end to plans for up to 40 super casinos", originally outlined in the government's Gambling Bill. Instead there will be a cap of eight new casinos in each size category - small," medium and large. The Culture Secretary said the move showed she listened to critics who feared an explosion in gambling. But Conservative shadow culture secretary John Whittingdale said the way the government had handled the bill was a ""shambles"". ""This announcement is a further humiliating retreat by the government. ""Instead of the initial intention of the gambling bill", to liberalise the rules governing gambling," the bill now imposes a more restrictive regime than exists at present." Shares in British casino operators London Club International", Rank Group and Stanley Leisure, who had been hoping the bill would pave the way for a big expansion in smaller casinos, fell by between 10 and 25% following the announcement. Ms Jowell's deputy, Richard Caborn, said the government had adopted a cautious approach to the issue," and responded to the concerns raised. ""Limiting the number of regional casinos to eight in the first phase is a cautious move that will allow us to test the impact of a new kind of casino on the levels of problem gambling", he said. We also believe it's right to apply this same level of caution to small and large casinos." He added that local authorities would still be able to stop new casinos coming to their areas. Church groups welcomed the limit on the number of casinos. Salvation Army spokesman Jonathan Lomax said: ""The proliferation of these casinos on high streets across the country was a real concern and the [three year] trial period", which we think should last at least five years," will enable research into the potentially severe social consequences of an increase in hard and addictive forms of gambling." But British Casino Association Chairman Penny Cobham said her members were ""outraged"" by the decision", which followed a campaign in the Daily Mail newspaper. ""There was never going to be a massive explosion of casinos. Talk of a casino on every High Street was just a scaring tactic."  
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"politics 188.txt Security papers 'found in street' An inquiry is under way after files containing security details about the Pakistani president's visit to London were found by a member of the public. The files are believed to contain detailed security arrangements for Gen Pervez Musharraf's visit this week", including police codes. Scotland Yard said the policing operation had been reviewed. A spokesman said President Musharraf's safety had not been compromised," as the papers had been handed in promptly. ""We cannot discuss who was responsible for the documents", only that they contained the policing arrangements for the official visit," said the spokesman. The papers are believed to have been found by a member of the public in a street in Mayfair and given to the Mirror newspaper. The police spokesman said the newspaper handed the report over on Monday. The force's Directorate of Professional Standards is investigating the circumstances surrounding the loss of the documents, he said. Gen Musharraf held talks with Tony Blair on Monday. He arrived in Britain on Sunday night after flying from the United States, where he met President George W Bush. He is due to visit the Pakistani community in Manchester on Tuesday afternoon.

"politics 189.txt Blair congratulates Bush on win Tony Blair has said he looks forward to continuing his strong relationship with George Bush and working with him during his second term as president. Mr Bush's re-election came at a crucial time for a world that was fractured", "divided and uncertain""", Mr Blair said. It had to be brought together, he added, saying action

n was needed on poverty," the Middle East and the conditions on which terrorist s prey. Mr Blair said states had to work with the US to fight global terrorism. But there was a need to recognise it would not be defeated by ""military might alone but also by demonstrating the strength of our common values"" he added. S olving the conflict in the Middle East was the world's single most ""pressing p olitical challenge"" of the present day", Mr Blair warned. The prime minister also urged Europe and the US to ""build anew their alliance"". ""All of us in positions of leadership", not just President Bush," have a responsibility to ri se to this challenge. It is urgent that we do so." Mr Blair also paid tribute to Democrat John Kerry's campaign", saying he had helped make the presidential election ""a true celebration of American democracy"". The election of the US p resident was significant for the world but particularly so for Britain because of its special relationship", he added. Earlier Tory leader Michael Howard sen t Mr Bush his ""warmest congratulations""", saying: ""We look to the president to be a unifying force for those all over the world who share our determination to defend freedom."" Liberal Democrat leader Charles Kennedy welcomed the fact there had been a quick conclusion to the election", unlike in 2000. Mr Bush's first task was to ""rebuild a sense of domestic purpose"" within the US", he s aid. Mr Kennedy said: ""Internationally", it is to be hoped that a second term will see a more sensitive approach to relations with long-standing allies," not least for the global efforts to combat terrorism."" Lib Dem foreign affairs spo kesman Menzies Campbell said a win by Mr Kerry would have given Mr Blair the ch ance of a fresh start", adding it was almost as if there was an ""umbilical co rd"" between Mr Bush and the UK premier. ""Europeans must hope that his admini stration will be much more multilateral in character", and that he will act sw iftly to rebuild the Atlantic partnership which is so vital to security. ""Iraq will remain an issue of potential division for some time to come."" Even before the result became clear", Mr Blair was being urged to push for action on climat e change at his first meeting with whichever candidate won. Liberal Democrat e nvironment spokesman Norman Baker underlined the issue of global warming during a Commons debate on Anglo-American relations on Wednesday. Environment Secretar y Margaret Beckett has said the US will act on global warming despite George Bu sh's refusal to sign up to the Kyoto protocol on carbon emissions. Public opini on would force change, she told BBC news. But Myron Ebell, an adviser on climat e change to President Bush, has said there would be no change in the US stance and rejected the threat of climate change. He claimed the US was the only count ry with independent scientists.

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"politics 190.txt Howard 'truanted to play snooker' Conservative leader Michael Howard has admitted he used to play truant to spend time with his school friends at a snooker hall. Mr Howard said his time at Jack's S nooker Hall in Llanelli in the 1950s had not done him ""any lasting damage"" . B ut he told the Times Educational Supplement that truancy was ""very bad"" and s aid ""firm action"" was needed. Mr Howard also called for a return to O-levels and more classroom discipline. Mr Howard eventually left Llanelli Grammar Scho ol - and the snooker hall - to go to Cambridge University. He said: ""I don't t hink it's done me any lasting damage. Nor has it made me a snooker world champi on. ""There might have been some occasions when we left early of an afternoon. ""I'm just being honest. I think truancy is a very bad thing and that firm acti on should be taken to deal with it."" Another player who has failed to win sno oker's world championship - Jimmy ""the Whirlwind "" White - has previously admi tted missing lessons", instead spending his days in smoky halls. ""Tony Meo [a nother player] and me used to spend all of our spare time there", Mr White sai

d, We loved the game and the atmosphere. ""School went out of the window. I went for a while and then started taking time off." Mr Howard's fellow Welshman Ray Reardon - known by his fellow professionals as ""Dracula"" - won the snooker world championship six times", having left school at 14 to work as a miner. And Terry Griffiths, like Mr Howard from Llanelli, won the tournament in 1979. It is not known whether the two of them ever clashed cues at Jack's.

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"politics 191.txt Short attacks US over tsunami aid Former Cabinet minister Clare Short has criticised the US-led tsunami aid coalition", saying the UN should be leading efforts. President Bush has announced that an alliance of the US, India, Australia and Japan will co-ordinate a humanitarian drive. But Ms Short said the effect of the parallel coalition would be to undermine the UN. She said only the UN had the ""moral authority"" to lead the relief work. Ms Short resigned as international development secretary over the Iraq war. ""I think this initiative from America to set up four countries claiming to co-ordinate sounds like yet another attempt to undermine the UN when it is the best system we have got and the one that needs building up", she said. Only really the UN can do that job," she told BBC Radio Four's PM programme. It is the only body that has the moral authority. But it can only do it well if it is backed up by the authority of the great powers." Ms Short said the countries involved could not boast good records on their response to major disasters. The US was ""very bad at coordinating with anyone"" and India had its own problems", Ms Short said. ""I don't know what that is about but it sounds very much", I am afraid, like the US trying to have a separate operation and not work with the rest of the world through the UN system," she added.

politics 192.txt Guantanamo four free in weeks All four Britons held by the US in Guantanamo Bay will be returned to the UK within weeks, Foreign Secretary Jack Straw told the Commons on Tuesday. Moazzam Begg, from Birmingham, and Martin Mubanga, Richard Belmar and Feroz Abbasi, from London, have been held by the US for almost three years. They were detained in the Cuban camp as part of the US-led war on terror"". Mr Straw said the US had agreed to release the four after ""intensive and complex discussions"" over security. He said the government had been negotiating the return of the detainees since 2003. All four families have been informed of their return and have been involved in regular discussions with the government", Mr Straw said. But he added: ""Once they are back in the UK", the police will consider whether to arrest them under the Terrorism Act 2000 for questioning in connection with possible terrorist activity." The shadow foreign secretary", Michael Ancram, welcomed the return of the four detainees. But he said there were still ""serious questions"" both over the possible threat the four pose to the UK", and the treatment they received while detained. Liberal Democrat foreign affairs spokesman Sir Menzies Campbell said the four had been rescued from a ""legal no-man's land""." Their civil rights were systematically and deliberately abused and they were denied due process." Azmat Begg", father of Moazzam," thanked his lawyers and the British people for the support he had received while campaigning for his son's release. He added: ""If they have done something wrong", of course they should be punished, but if they haven't," they shouldn't have been there." Lawyer Louise Christian", who represents Mr Abbasi and Mr Mubanga," said the government should have acted sooner. She said: ""They should at the outset have said quite clearly to the American government that they were behaving in breach of international law and that the British government wanted no part of it and wanted Guantanamo Bay shut down. ""They didn't do that. They colluded with it." Moazzam Beggs Labour MP Roger Godsiff welcomed his release", but said questions remained

unanswered, particularly about charges. Asked about possible damages Mr Begg and the other detainees could bring against the US," Mr Godsiff said: ""People get released from prison when it's found that their prosecution was unsustainable and they are quite rightly awarded sizeable sums of money. ""I don't see any difference in this case."" Human rights campaigners have been outraged at the treatment of the detainees in Cuba. Amnesty International has called Camp Delta a ""major human-rights scandal"" and an ""icon of lawlessness"". Both Amnesty and the lobby group Guantanamo Human Rights Commission described the release as ""long overdue"". Civil rights group Liberty said it was ""delighted"" but called on the government to release men indefinitely detained in the UK without charge or trial. Director Shami Chakrabarti called on the government to ""practise what it preaches"" and either free or charge 12 detainees at Belmarsh and Woodhill prisons. Law Lords ruled last month that the 12 were being held in contravention of human rights laws but they are still behind bars. The US has also announced that 48-year-old Australian Mamdouh Habib", previously accused of terrorist offences, will be released without charge from Camp Delta. Five British detainees released from Guantanamo in March last year were questioned by UK police before being released without charge.

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"politics 193.txt Tories attack EU asylum moves David Blunkett has been accused of using the ""politics of confusion"" to disguise new EU immigration measures. Tory spokesman David Davis told MPs the UK was losing its power of veto over who was allowed to come to Britain. The EU has opted to adopt qualified majority voting in this area - previously measures needed unanimous agreement from all member states. Mr Blunkett told MPs the UK would still be able to reject proposals on immigration it did not agree with. He argued closer co-operation with Europe over asylum and immigration was crucial to controlling the flow of people into the UK. ""If we don't like what other EU countries do on immigration and nationality we have the right to opt-in or out to suit the British people", he said. The home secretary was responding to an emergency question from his Tory opposite number Mr Davis. The government is employing the politics of confusion - I think, deliberately," argued Mr Davis. By confusing the country it hopes no one will notice the disappearance of the asylum and immigration veto." On Monday Tony Blair insisted closer co-operation did not mean losing control of British borders. He said an enlarged 25-member EU needs a streamlined decision making process. Mr Davis said once Britain had opted into policies then it could not opt out - leaving the UK open to unfavourable interpretations of what those policies actually meant. He accused the government of being ""pathetic"" when it came to its efforts over immigration and asylum and of ""surrendering"" on the issue. And he asked why the government was agreeing to the measure on asylum and immigration now when the whole issue was part of the EU constitution", which voters in the UK had been promised a referendum over. Mr Blair told his monthly news conference Britain had the ""best of both worlds"" and would keep the veto. ""There is no question of Britain giving up our veto on our border controls", he said. With the Treaty of Amsterdam seven years ago," we secured the absolute right to opt in to any of the asylum and immigration provisions that we wanted to in Europe." Mr Blunkett met his EU counterparts in Luxembourg on Monday to consider proposals aimed at streamlining decision making on the issue. The 25 member-states are expected to scrap the requirement for unanimous agreement on immigration policy", in favour of the qualified majority voting (QMV) system. Under this scheme larger states such as Britain are expected to have more power than the smaller EU states. Britain is expected to retain an ""opt-in"" right which will allow it to ignore any measures it disa

grees with. Liberal Democrat spokesman Mark Oaten called the change pragmatic and argued it gave a better chance of producing a European asylum solution. ""If we don't work together it means some countries can ignore their responsibilities at the expense of their neighbours",," said Mr Oaten. The Liberal Democrats have long argued that Britain should be a safe haven for asylum seekers but it's right that we don't do this in isolation.""

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"politics 194.txt Cherie accused of attacking Bush Cherie Blair has been accused of criticising George W Bush's policies in a private address she gave during a United States lecture tour. The prime minister's wife is said to have praised the Supreme Court for overruling the White House on the legal rights of Guantanamo Bay detainees. The Tories said she broke a convention that British political figures do not act in a partisan way when abroad. But Downing Street said she was speaking in her capacity as a lawyer. It said she was not expressing political opinions. Mrs Blair's remarks are said to have been made in a speech to law students in Massachusetts. She said the decision by the US Supreme Court to give legal protection to two Britons held at Guantanamo Bay was a significant victory for human rights and the international rule of law. She also described the US legal code as an outdated grandfather clock and welcomed a decision to throw out a law backed by Mr Bush relating to sodomy in Texas. BBC news correspondent Gary O'Donoghue said Mrs Blair was likely to face further calls for restraint",," since the US election is imminent. ""There have been some objections from people reasonably close to the Bush administration about her making these comments in their backyard just two days before a presidential election",," he said. Conservatives here too have made their feelings clear. ""Cherie Booth has always regarded herself as having an independent career. She has continued to practise as a major human rights lawyer in the courts. ""It's not unusual for her to make these sorts of criticisms clear but it can be embarrassing.""

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"politics 195.txt Tsunami 'won't divert Africa aid' UK aid to help the victims of the Asian tsunami disaster will not take much needed relief from Africa",," Prime Minister Tony Blair has promised. Mr Blair told the BBC's Breakfast with Frost show the money spent on the tsunami would not ""inadequate"" the money Britain wanted to spend on Africa. Questioned about the disaster",," he said his faith in God had not been shaken. He added he would give new figures on the number of tsunami-related British deaths to the Commons on Monday. Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said on Friday that about 440 Britons were either dead or missing in the disaster. Mr Blair told Sunday's programme: ""Since Jack Straw gave those figures a couple of days ago they haven't moved a great deal",," which should give us some hope that we are beginning to reach the peak of the numbers. But we just can't be sure. ""It is just an immensely difficult job to get absolutely accurate figures",," all countries are struggling with this." He said the £50 million originally allocated from the Department for International Development was now ""well on the way"" to being spent. But the exact allocation could not be clarified until the World Bank had completed its assessment of the needs of the countries affected. Within the next few weeks a clearer picture would emerge of the long-term costs of reconstruction",," he added. But he pledged that Africa - which sees a ""preventable"" tsunami-size death toll every month from conflict", disease and poverty - would not be neglected. As Britain takes up its presidency of the G8 group of leading nations," Mr Blair said

d ministers had a big agenda for Africa. ""For the first time we have a plan that won't just deal with aid and debt but will also deal on issues of governance within African countries and conflict resolution", he said. A lot of the problems in Africa come from conflict, that again are preventable," but only with the right systems in place.""

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"politics 196.txt Mandelson warning to BBC The BBC should steer away from ""demonising"" ex-Downing Street media chief Alastair Campbell", Peter Mandelson has said. The European commissioner and former Labour minister was speaking amid claims that Mr Campbell is part of a Labour ""dirty tricks"" campaign. That charge was denied by Mr Mandelson", who said the Tories were afraid of Mr Campbell's campaigning skills. He warned the BBC that attacking Mr Campbell had brought it trouble before. That was a reference to the Hutton inquiry following a BBC story claiming Downing Street ""sexed up"" Iraq's weapons of mass destruction dossier. The affair prompted the resignation of BBC chairman Gavyn Davies", director-general Greg Dyke and reporter Andrew Gilligan. Labour has attracted media criticism for using new freedom of information laws to dig up information about Tory leader Michael Howard's past. Mr Mandelson, a former Labour communications director," told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: ""I understand why the Tories will be gunning for Alastair Campbell because they fear his campaigning skills. ""What I understand less is why the BBC should be joining with the Tories in driving that agenda. ""In my experience of these things", parties which shout about dirty tricks and the like tend to do so because they fear a direct hit in some vulnerable part of their political anatomy. ""I suggest the BBC concentrates on the issues and helps the public to understand the policies and the choices that are at stake in the election rather than engages in the process politics", the trivialisation of the campaign. ""I think the BBC would be much better advised to leave all this stuff well alone", concentrate on the issues as I say," not resume their demonisation of Alastair Campbell - we all know where that led before." Mr Campbell is acting as an adviser for Labour", which denies engaging in personal campaigning. Conservative co-chairman Liam Fox said Mr Campbell's return and Labour poster plans attacking Mr Howard - recently withdrawn from the party's website - were a sign of ""abusive politics"". ""The government", despite the fact that they would say want to go forward, not back, seem intent on talking about history rather than their own record or even more importantly, about the future," he said on Sunday. Labour peer Baroness Kennedy, who is chairing the Power Inquiry into political disengagement, said people already thought politicians engaged in dirty tricks. This feeling of distrust is going to be enlarged if this campaigning on all sides is conducted in the way that it looks as if it just might", she said.

politics 197.txt Blair 'pressing US on climate' Tony Blair is pressing the US to cut greenhouse gases despite its unwillingness to sign the Kyoto Protocol, Downing Street has indicated. Officials have confirmed climate change was discussed when influential senator John McCain recently visited Mr Blair. Climate change was an issue the prime minister wanted to progress"" during the UK's presidency of the G8 and EU in 2005", said a spokesman. But he played down reports Mr Blair was considering a new US-friendly treaty. According to the Times," the UK leader wants to end US isolation with a ""Kyoto-lite"" agreement on the scale and nature of the threat from climate change. He is said to have discussed the idea with Mr McCain during his time at Number 10. The prime minister is said to believe the United States' refusal to sign the Kyoto Protocol on emissions is undermining other countries' resolve to cut carbon dioxide production. So far the US has refused to sign up to the Kyoto treaty - which

aims to cut emissions - branding it politically motivated and not based on science. President Bush's advisers have repeatedly denied global warming is taking place. Europe", which disputes the claim, has also signalled it wants to press ahead with talks about longer term climate change action in a way which involves both the United States and developing countries. Mr Blair's reported treaty would also establish an international programme to develop technology needed for renewable energy and the reduction of carbon emissions," says the Times. But there is still apparently ""little prospect"" of America agreeing to cut emissions", which could further provoke environmental campaigners already angry at the lack of progress. Mr Blair was left blushing on Wednesday when it emerged his manifesto target of a 20% cut to the 1990 greenhouse gas level by 2010 was set to be missed.

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"politics 198.txt Police chief backs drinking move A chief constable has backed the introduction of 24-drinking", saying police had a responsibility to ensure people could benefit from a law change. However," Norfolk police chief Andy Hayman also warned that a great deal of preparatory work was still needed. ""I don't subscribe to the views of some of my colleagues who are coming out and objecting to it",, he said. His comments come after the Liberal Democrats backed Tory demands that the government's plans be put on hold. Andy Hayman said he did not agree with politicians and senior police officers who have objected to the plans, which come into force on 7 February. I feel that is a premature position to be taking",, he said. Among those who have criticised the plans are the UK's top policeman Sir John Stevens. The Metropolitan police chief said last week that the plans for 24-hour drinking should be re-examined because of a binge drinking epidemic"". However",, Mr Hayman said: ""It would be totally unacceptable in my view for a chief constable to say",, 'I'm very sorry'. He said that police should make sure that responsible people who wanted a change could benefit from more liberal legislation. ""My view is that I have got a responsibility to create an environment where that can happen",, he said. However",, he believes a lot of preparatory work is still needed to be done by police," local authorities and the drinks industry before the nation was ready for 24-hour drinking. But he is confident problems in the early days can be ""ironed out"". He believed the majority of people favoured this law change and ""we have to accept that lifestyles are changing"". But aspects such as transport", and basic things such as making sure public toilets are open all night had to be taken into account. Prime Minister Tony Blair has defended the Licensing Act," saying it is wrong to deny people the relaxed hours enjoyed elsewhere in Europe because of a ""tiny minority"" of violent binge drinkers. A six-month transitional period starts on 7 February during which time venues can apply for extended licences. The Conservatives have called for 24-hour drinking to be shelved until the problems of binge drinking are solved. On Monday",, the Lib Dems also called for a delay. Lib Dem Home Affairs spokesman Mark Oaten said: ""It would clearly be prudent to allow the police and local authorities more time to prepare for flexible drinking hours." Chief constable Mr Hayman acknowledged that binge drinking did cause problems. ""If you come to Norwich on a Friday or Saturday night you will see things going on that will you make you feel ashamed. ""However",, I want industry to succeed in Norwich and I want Norwich to be the recognised nightspot of East Anglia. ""There is no way I want to say we can not manage it or police it. We can.""

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"politics 199.txt Game warnings 'must be clearer' Violent

video games should carry larger warnings so parents can understand what their children are playing", "the trade and industry secretary has said. Patricia Hewitt is expected to call for the law banning the sale of 18-rated games to children to be enforced better at a games industry meeting on Sunday. She is concerned too many children are playing games aimed at adults which include ""high levels of violence"". Parents are expected to spend millions on video games as Christmas presents. Violent games have been hit by controversy after the game Manhunt was blamed by the parents of 14-year-old Stefan Pakeerah", who was stabbed to death in Leicester in February. His mother, Giselle, said her son's killer, Warren Leblanc, 17 - who was jailed for life in September - had mimicked behaviour in the game. Police investigating the Stefan's murder dismissed its influence and Manhunt was not part of its legal case. Ahead of Sunday's meeting in London," Ms Hewitt said she was proud of the UK's ""vibrant games industry"" but was concerned too many children were playing games which should only be sold to adults. Roger Bennett", head of gaming industry body ELSPA," said banning violent games would be wrong. He said: ""We don't want to go down that route. We have seen that the government is supportive of the industry."" The government is holding a further meeting on Friday with industry and retail representatives as well as the British Board of Film Classification to discuss how labelling can be made clearer. Ms Hewitt said: ""Adults should be treated as adults and children as children. It is important that retailers respect the classifications and do not sell games with high levels of violence to minors. ""Equally parents need to know what they might be buying for their children. ""Video games are different to films or videos", " and not all parents have grown up playing games in the way our children do. ""We need to look carefully at how we improve content warnings and strengthen sales enforcement."" Her call was backed by Culture", Media and Sport Secretary Tessa Jowell who said: ""You wouldn't let your child watch the Texas Chainsaw Massacre. You wouldn't let them go to a strip club. ""So you shouldn't let them play an 18-rated game. It's the same principle - adults can make their own informed choices", " but children can't always and need to be protected." Any one convicted of selling an 18-rated game to a child can be jailed for six months and fined up to £5",000. Rockstar Games, the makers of Manhunt, has said in the past it markets its games responsibly and only targets its adverts at adults.

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"politics 200.txt Mallon wades into NE vote battle Middle  
sbrough mayor Ray Mallon has been drafted in to boost the Yes campaign as the North East assembly referendum enters its final week. The former police chief", dubbed Robocop for his zero tolerance style," clashed on Thursday with Sunderland No campaigner Neil Herron. Mr Mallon said an assembly would give local people more of a say over key issues such as transport and crime. But Mr Herron said North East people did not want or need an assembly. The pair met on the platform at Sunderland station as Mr Mallon toured the region highlighting claimed improvements to transport if the area gets an assembly. But Mr Herron - who gained fame as one of Sunderland's ""metric martyrs"" and is running his own No campaign alongside the official North East Says No campaign - said he was not convinced by Mr Mallon's arguments. ""The reality is that it is not going to deliver", he said. Labour has had two-and-a-half years to convince people of this. If you can't sell a deal in that time," it is a bad deal." On Wednesday", " Mr Mallon provoked fury by branding the official No Campaign ""two-bit Tories"" in a confrontation outside its Durham headquarters. ""The campaign is being run by two-bit Conservatives who are not interested in what happens in the North East; they are interested in hitting the Labour party over the head", " he said. Mr Ma

llon is a late recruit to the Yes campaign after rejecting overtures from No campaigners including, he claims, Tory leader Michael Howard. Most local observers believe the contest is too close to call, although little recent polling has been carried out. Yes campaign chairman John Tomaney said he hoped for a late flurry of votes to boost turnout - something he says will boost their cause. He added: The government exerts a lot of political power in the North East. The accountability should be in the North East as well." He also defended the decision to attack the official No campaign's alleged political allegiances. "We felt we had to show what people were behind the No campaign - London Tory spin doctors." Graham Robb", spokesman for North East Says No," said the Yes campaign's decision to get personal dragged the campaign "into the gutter" and showed they were "rattled". And he hit back at Mr Mallon's claim that an assembly would improve transport links in the region. "It can push paper around but it can not get people moving", he said. Some 487,939 people had returned their ballot papers by Wednesday - a turnout of 25.7%. The deadline for voting is next Thursday, 4 November.

politics 201.txt Howard rejects BNP's claim Tory leader Michael Howard has dismissed claims that his immigration policy was moving onto the turf" of the British National Party (BNP). BNP leader Nick Griffin told the Independent he expected some BNP voters to switch to the Tories over the issue. But Mr Howard said he rejected the idea that the Tories and BNP appealed to the same voting instincts. Asked if he would welcome BNP voters he told the BBC: "I don't want anybody to vote for these extremist parties". He added," on BBC Radio 4's Today programme: "If you want good community relations in this country...then you have to have firm", fair immigration controls." The Tories have promised an upper limit on the number of people allowed into Britain with the slogan: "It's not racist to impose limits on immigration". All parties are stepping up campaigning in the run-up to the general election," widely expected to be called for 5 May. Labour has unveiled its own "points system" for ensuring migrants who want to work in the UK have skills that are required", but have rejected immigration quotas. The Liberal Democrats have warned both parties against "pandering to prejudice". Mr Griffin told the Independent the Tories' plans were "a definite move onto our turf". He said: "I quite freely accept that on a nationwide basis", the Tories will con enough people to make a significant hole in our vote." Asked whether he was comfortable with the perception that the Conservatives and the BNP appeal to the same voting instincts", Mr Howard told the BBC: "I reject that entirely". He said he found BNP's policies "abhorrent" but he said the UK had to take a different approach to immigration", which he said was out of control. "The government doesn't want to limit it in any way", we do, there's a legitimate difference between us there which we can discuss in a calm, rational and reasonable way," he said. He again rejected newspaper speculation that his own father entered Britain illegally.

politics 202.txt Tories opposing 24-hour drinking The Tories say plans to extend pub opening times should be put on hold until binge drinking is under control, despite backing a law change last year. Spokesman David Davis said ministers had failed to make his party aware of concern among senior police that plans would cause more anti-social behaviour. Notts police chief Steve Green said innocent people would suffer. But Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell said a delay would be disastrous" and she accused the Tories of opportunism. The government would go ahead with the changes which would give police more power to tackle excessive drinking", she added. Earlier chief constable Green questioned how his officers would be able to practically apply powers allowing them to shut down problem premises. "If you look at the Market Square in Nottingham", if a fight takes place which licensed premises do you go and lay the r

esponsibilty at the door of?"" he asked on BBC Radio 4's World at One programme. He warned that if drinking establishments were allowed to open until three or four in the morning the police would have to take officers off day shifts in order to do their job effectively at night. Earlier this year the Royal College of Physicians said it opposed the plan to extend drinking hours when there was already an ""epidemic"" of binge drinking. Minister Richard Caborn said the government was tackling the causes and the symptoms of the problem by allowing more powers to close down problem premises. It is hoped that allowing pubs and clubs to stay open longer will stagger closing times and end the current situation where drinkers spill on to the streets all at once. Earlier Tony Blair defended the plans against criticism from one of his own backbenchers. ""My view of this is very clear: we should have the same flexibility that other countries have and then we should come down really hard on those who abuse that freedom and don't show the responsibility", he told MPs. The law-abiding majority who want the ability, after going to the cinema or theatre say, to have a drink at the time they want should not be inconvenienced, we shouldn't have to have restrictions that no other city in Europe has, just in order to do something for that tiny minority who abuse alcohol," who go out and fight and cause disturbances. ""To take away that ability for all the population - even the vast majority who are law abiding - is not", in my view," sensible." This week a judge claimed easy access to drink was breeding ""urban savages"" and turning town centres into no go areas. Judge Charles Harris QC made his remarks as he sentenced three men for assaults carried out while drunk and high on drugs after a night out.

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"politics 203.txt New foot and mouth action urged A senior Tory MP has criticised agriculture department Defra's ""lackadaisical"" approach to planning for a future foot and mouth outbreak. Public accounts committee chairman Edward Leigh was giving his reaction to a report by a government watchdog on lessons to be learnt from the crisis. The National Audit Office said Defra had improved its capacity to deal with future livestock disease outbreaks. But Mr Leigh said the department was ""dragging its heels"". That comment referred to the setting up of a scheme to share any future compensation costs with industry. He also said Defra had been ""dreadfully slow"" in paying some of its bills dating from the foot and mouth crisis. The outbreak", which began in 2001, led to the slaughter of 6.5 million animals, devastated many farms and rural businesses," and is estimated to have cost the UK up to £8bn. ""Four years after the outbreak", Defra is yet to begin its planned review of some of its contractors' costs, and £40m of invoices remain unpaid," Mr Leigh said. Mr Leigh also pointed out that the introduction of an IT system to help control future outbreaks had been delayed. In November it emerged European Commission compensation amounted to just over a third of the money the UK government had hoped to get as reimbursement for the billions lost through the foot and mouth crisis. Ministers had hoped to get £900m from the European Union Vet Fund to help with animal slaughter and other costs but in the end was granted £349m. That was because the UK had valued the culled animals at between two and three times"" the commission's assessment of their likely market value. National Audit Office chief Sir John Bourn said a new compensation scheme was now being looked at. On the issue of the unpaid invoices", Sir John said Defra had paid 97% of the £1.3bn submitted by contractors since 2001," ""but has not agreed a final settlement with 57 contractors pending the results of its investigations"".. Mr Leigh said being ""better prepared"" would also help avoid the need for ""mass funeral pyres which provided an unsettling images of the 2001 outbreak"".. A Defra spokesman said: ""We welcome the report. It acknowledges the progress the department has mad

e since 2001 - particularly on contingency planning and our improved capacity and preparedness for combating another major disease outbreak. ""However", the department is aware that there are some areas requiring further work and we are working to resolve them as soon as is practicable.""

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"politics 204.txt Correction agency plans dropped Plans to create a single correctional agency for Scotland have been scrapped. The Scottish Executive will not now merge the Scottish Prison Service with local authority social work criminal justice departments. The National Correctional Agency would have provided a 'one-stop' justice system but has been abandoned in the wake of stiff opposition. Instead", Scottish councils and the prison service will be compelled to work more closely to cut reoffending. The plan was to ensure offenders were monitored by the same body during and after prison, preventing many from being lost in the system and helping more of them to stop reoffending. Scotland's reoffending rate is high, with more than 60% of prisoners reconvicted within two years of release from jail. This is leading to an ever-expanding prison population and the executive wants to tackle the problem. Ministers thought merging the prison service with the council-controlled criminal justice social work departments, which provide community sentences, might have provided an answer. However, following a consultation on the idea, Justice Minister Cathy Jamieson has decided to drop the plans. Instead, Ms Jamieson will change the law to help produce a closer working relationship between both elements of the justice system. She will announce the move in her Criminal Justice Plan on Monday," aiming to ""break down the barriers between what happens in prison and what happens in the community"". The new measures will place a new statutory duty on the SPS to work with local authorities and others in area partnerships. A national advisory board on offender management will also be created to advise Ms Jamieson on the SPS's role and performance in reducing reoffending. The minister said: ""Better joint working will help prisons play a much stronger role in ending reoffending behaviour and in particular help address the revolving door of reoffending that sees offenders entering prison for short periods during which little is done to address the behaviour that brought them there. ""Communities who are paying the price for this reoffending - both in terms of crime and in terms of prison costs - expect better. ""It costs the taxpayer £35",000 a year to provide each prison place and that cost is increasing. ""Taxpayers who suffer the consequences of crime also end up paying for keeping those people in prison. ""Therefore", as we continue to invest in the service, it is only right that we seek to ensure that that service becomes more accountable to the public it serves," to ministers and to parliament."

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"politics 205.txt Tutu's Guantanamo release call Archbishop Desmond Tutu has called for the release of the remaining inmates at Guantanamo Bay and terror suspects detained without trial in the UK. His comments follow news that all four Britons held by the US in the Cuban camp will be freed within weeks. The South African archbishop said detentions without trial were ""unacceptable"" and ""distressing"". Twelve foreign nationals are being held indefinitely without trial in the UK under anti-terror laws. Referring to the detentions in Cuba", Archbishop Tutu told BBC News: ""It is utterly unacceptable. ""The rule of law is in order to ensure that those who have power don't use their power arbitrarily and every person retains their human rights until you have proven conclusively that so-and-so is in fact guilty."" Moazzam Begg", from Birmingham, and Martin Mubanga, Richard Belmar and Feroz Abbasi, from London," ha

ve been held by the US at Guantanamo Bay for almost three years. On Tuesday Foreign Secretary Jack Straw told the Commons that the US had agreed to release the four after ""intensive and complex discussions"" over security. The Britons were detained as part of the US-led ""war on terror"". The archbishop added: ""Whilst we are saying thank you that these have been released", what is happening to those left behind? ""We in South Africa used to have a dispensation that detained people without trial and the world quite rightly condemned that as unacceptable. ""Now if it was unacceptable then how come it can be acceptable to Britain and the United States. It is so", so deeply distressing." Following Mr Straw's announcement", lawyer Louise Christian, who represents Mr Abbasi and Mr Mubanga, said the government should have acted sooner. Foreign nationals detained in the UK are being held at Belmarsh and Woodhill prisons. In December the House of Lords, the UK's highest court, ruled that the anti-terror measures broke human rights laws. But the men are still behind bars. Archbishop Tutu criticised the measures," saying: ""I am opposed to any arbitrary detention that is happening", even in Britain." Shami Chakrabarti", director of civil rights group Liberty," has called on the government to ""practise what it preaches"" and either free or charge the detained men. But the Home Office defended the measures. A spokesman said: ""These individuals cannot currently be prosecuted because some evidence", such as that provided by third parties," cannot safely be disclosed in criminal proceedings without putting others at risk. ""It is also currently the case that intelligence gained from covert intercepts cannot be used in a court of law.""

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politics 206.txt Blair's hope for Blunkett return The events leading to David Blunkett's resignation must not ""swept under the carpet""", the Tories have warned. On Wednesday Tony Blair said he hoped the former home secretary would serve again in government in the future. Mr Blunkett quit in December after a probe linked him to the visa application of his ex-lover's nanny. Mr Blair said he left ""without a stain on his character"" but Tory Dominic Grieve branded the way Mr Blunkett's office operated as ""scandalous"" . Mr Blair told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: ""I know David very well and I believe him to be a man of real integrity and real ability and I was very sad for him as to what happened."" He said Mr Blunkett still had an immense amount to offer the country but he was not making any ""guarantees or definitive statements"" about future jobs. But shadow attorney general Mr Grieve said: ""While I don't rule out the possibility that Mr Blunkett may return as a minister", I don't think it's something that can simply be brushed under the carpet."" Senior Labour backbencher Martin O'Neill", who chairs the Commons trade committee," said he believed the prime minister would want one of his ""praetorian guard"" - a reference to the elite body guard of Roman emperors - back alongside him. But colleague Ian Gibson", who chairs the science and technology committee," said there was a ""question mark"" as to whether Mr Blunkett could serve at cabinet level again.

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politics 207.txt February poll claim 'speculation' Reports that Tony Blair is planning a snap general election for February 2005 have been described as ""idle speculation"" by Downing Street. A spokesman said he had ""no idea"" where the reports in the Sunday Times and Sunday Telegraph had come from. The papers suggest ministers believe the government could benefit from a ""Baghdad bounce"" following successful Iraq elections in January. A British general election was last held in February in 1974. In that election", Edwar

d Heath lost and failed to build a coalition with the Liberals. Harold Wilson took over and increased his majority later in the year in a second election. The latest speculation suggests the prime minister favours a February poll in order to exploit his current opinion poll lead over Conservative leader Michael Howard. But that strategy could prompt criticism he was seeking to "cut and run" after less than four years of a parliamentary term. The papers report that Alan Milburn", Labour's head of elections strategy, has played a key role in the plan for a February election, which would include a New Year advertising blitz. Now Labour's campaign, both newspapers said, "would be centred around the slogan ""Britain is Working"". A Labour Party spokesman said the election date was ultimately a matter for Mr Blair", but he was unaware of anything to suggest it would be in February. Most commentators have been expecting an election on 5 May. The last election was in June 2001.

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"politics 208.txt Gurkhas to help tsunami victims Britain has offered to send a company of 120 Gurkhas to assist with the tsunami relief effort in Indonesia", Downing Street said. The deployment would involve troops from the 2nd Battalion Royal Gurkha Rifles, based in Brunei. Discussions have begun with Indonesia on the exact timing and location of the deployment," but the government said the offer was aimed at the Aceh province. Downing St said a similar offer might be made to the Sri Lankan government. However a spokesman pointed out that there were particular logistical difficulties in Indonesia which the Gurkhas might be able to help with. The spokesman said: ""Following this morning's daily coordination meeting on the post-tsunami relief effort"," the government has formally offered the Indonesian government the assistance of a company of British Army Gurkhas from 2nd Battalion Royal Gurkha Rifles around 120 personnel and two helicopters. ""This is in addition to the ships and aircraft we have already committed to the relief operation in the Indian Ocean." Indon esia was by far the country worst affected by the tsunami", with 94,000 of the 140,"000 confirmed deaths so far. International Development Minister Gareth Thomas said the assistance offer would most likely focus on the northern province of Aceh. ""We have offered the Gurkhas to help in the process of scaling up the relief effort", particularly in Aceh which is undoubtedly the hardest hit area in the Indian Ocean at the moment," he said. We've also had RAF aircraft flying in equipment which the UN desperately need in order to set up a truly effective relief operation on the ground in Aceh province as well." The offer comes as the Foreign Secretary Jack Straw arrives in Indonesia for a special summit meeting on the disaster.

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"politics 209.txt Abbas 'will not tolerate' attacks Pales tinian leader Mahmoud Abbas has said he will not tolerate attacks such as last Friday's suicide bombing in the Israeli city of Tel Aviv. In an interview ahead of a meeting in London to discuss Palestinian reforms"," Mr Abbas said such attacks were against Palestinian interests. The Palestinian Authority (PA) was exerting ""a 100% effort" to end the violence", Mr Abbas added. The attack, which killed five, was the first of its kind since he took office. Mr Abbas confirmed Israel shared information with the PA in the hunt for the organisers of the attack. The Israeli government refuses to accept Syria's denials that it was implicated in the nightclub bombing. Israeli officials gave an intelligence briefing to foreign ambassadors on Monday," explaining Syria's alleged involvement. British foreign minister Jack Straw said there had been a ""continuing stream"" of information suggesting Palestinian militant groups were operating from within

n Syria. In an email interview in the British newspaper the Independent", " Mr Abbas said: ""We believe peace is possible now and we are ready to negotiate with Israel to reach a true and lasting peace based on justice and international legitimacy." He added: ""We have an opportunity and it would be irresponsible if we", the Israelis," or the world allow it to slip away." Tuesday's meeting on Palestinian reform is being hosted by British Prime Minister Tony Blair. Also due to attend are US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice", UN Secretary General Kofi Annan," World Bank officials and foreign ministers from 23 European and Arab countries. The conference was a ""vital step"" in renewing the peace process", Mr Straw said. ""It's a high-level attendance", which reflects the sense of momentum and opportunity created by recent events, he added. A spokesman for Mr Blair said the Prime Minister expected the conference to discuss a comprehensive, co-ordinated and, above all," practical work plan for both the Palestinian Authority and the international community"". Israel will not attend", but is said to be closely watching the outcome.

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"politics 210.txt Thousands join strike in Wales Thousand s of civil servants were on strike across Wales on Friday in protest at planned job cuts. A range of services in Wales were affected as civil servants in Wales joined the UK-wide strike. The strike", called by the Public and Commercial Services Union, was the biggest by civil servants in a decade. The action follows Chancellor Gordon Brown's announcement in July that 104,000 jobs would be cut, with around 6,000 of those expected in Wales. The worst-affected area in Wales will be the Department of Work and Pensions where 2,000 jobs are threatened. Across Wales, pickets were held by striking civil servants with protests in towns and cities including Cardiff, Bangor, Aberystwyth and Wrexham. Gordon Brown issued a defiant statement about the strike," saying the action would not affect the government's ""determination"" to make savings in order to increase investment in healthcare", education," transport and the fight against crime. ""Our decisions mean more police", more teachers, more doctors and more nurses, he said. We will provide help with information, relocation and retraining to help staff move into frontline work within the public sector," but we will not be diverted from these necessary changes so that we can make this essential investment." The UK-wide action hit Jobcentres", benefit agencies, pensions offices and driving test centres. The strike also affected the Welsh assembly building in Cardiff Bay, where only pass-holders were allowed in. Pickets were in place across Wales," with protests around the country. PCS Union spokesman Jeff Evans said: ""In Wales the civil service is major employer", there are more civil servants employed in Wales proportionately than in any other part of the country. ""Our protest is about defending jobs and also local services across the country. ""Parts of Objective One areas and Welsh-speaking areas will be particularly affected by these cuts." The chancellor has said that the cuts will allow funding for more teachers and police. Piers Freelo is senior benefit officer on the picket line at Companies House", in Cardiff. He said: ""The majority of people have decided not to come in because of the threat to their jobs. ""I joined the civil service to provide services as well as get a decent pension", as we thought, and pay," and it's those services that are being threatened as well as our jobs. ""People like pensioners need a face-to-face service not an impersonal service on the phone which is what they want to impose." PCSU deputy general secretary Hugh Lanning", who was on the same picket line," said: ""We're asking for them to negotiate not just to make announcements. ""There's a sensible way to do things and at the moment they're not even talking about how to go about it sensibly." "The ballot was for one day's action. No further action is antic

ipated without a further ballot of staff."" The Welsh Assembly Government said: ""This is a strike about national civil service issues. It is not about specific issues local to Wales or the assembly.

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"politics 211.txt Top judge clashes with ministers The U K's top judge has revealed he has clashed with ministers about how the heads of public inquiries are chosen. Lord Woolf said he was determined his current veto on whether a judge should chair an inquiry should continue as a guard for judicial independence. But he told MPs the Lord Chancellor", Lord Falconer, was insisting he should have the final say in such cases. Lord Hutton's inquiry into the death of Dr David Kelly sparked debate about who should run inquiries. The government says the lord chancellor would be unlikely to go against Lord Woolf's wishes. Lord Woolf, who is Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales, was giving evidence to the Commons public administration select committee's inquiry into public inquiries. He said he had not been involved in the choice of Lord Hutton, who as a law lord did not come under his jurisdiction. But he argued he should have a veto on whether judges generally should chair a particular inquiry and if so, which judge it should be. In written evidence to the committee," Lord Woolf said: ""I have", so far," failed to reach an agreement with the lord chancellor on this issue ... I intend to maintain my position and will press for this safeguard to be in any future legislation."" Judges should think carefully before heading an inquiry into a highly political issue", such as the intelligence on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction," he said. He argued: ""The subject matter of the inquiry may be so political that it would be damaging to the judiciary for a judge to be involved. ""In addition", the question of whether there should be an inquiry at all may be highly controversial and if a judge is appointed, the judiciary, as a result of the appointment," may be seen as siding inappropriately with the government."" He told the MPs: ""Anything that tends to undermine the confidence of the public in the judiciary worries me." Lord Woolf said the current rules were not written down but it was inconceivable in practice that the lord chancellor would overrule his concerns. But that situation could change with new legal reforms. The issue had been ""overlooked"" when a new agreement was drawn up about those responsibilities and the dispute had emerged in later discussions. ""What I am asking for is a situation where if the lord chancellor cannot obtain my agreement [on appointing a judge]", it doesn't happen, he said. Lord Woolf said he did not think there would be difficulties but he wanted to establish the principle. A Department for Constitutional Affairs spokeswoman said Lord Woolf and Lord Falconer agreed about what happened in practice. Their disagreement is about whether the legislation should include a requirement for consultation or concurrence - a very narrow dispute, in Lord Woolf's words, she said. As Lord Woolf also acknowledged," it is highly unlikely that the lord chancellor would appoint a judge against the wishes of the lord chief justice. ""Judges are free to decide for themselves whether to accept positions as inquiry chairs."" Parliament will examine the issue next year when it debates a new bill about public inquiries.

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"politics 212.txt Tory expert denies defeatism The Conservatives' campaign director has denied a report claiming he warned Michael Howard the party could not win the next general election. The Times on Monday said Australian Lynton Crosby told the party leader to focus on trying to increase the Tories' Commons presence by 25 to 30 seats. But Mr Crosby said in a statement: ""I have never had any such conversation... and I do not hold that view."" M

r Howard later added there was not ""one iota"" of truth in the report. The strategist helped Australia's PM", John Howard," win four elections. Mr Howard appointed Mr Crosby as his elections chief last October. Mr Crosby's statement said: ""The Conservative Party has been making an impact on the issues of lower tax and controlled immigration over the past week."" It added: ""The Labour Party will be wanting to do all they can to distract attention away from the issues that really matter to people.”

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"politics 213.txt Lib Dems target the student vote Studen ts can decide the fate of MPs in some seats at the next election", Liberal Demo crat leader Charles Kennedy has claimed. The party says the votes of students can win it 27 new seats at the poll. The figures assume all students will vote in their university town. In fact, some may vote where the parents live. The Li b Dems say scrapping university fees wins them student support. But the Tories would also end fees and Labour says both would cap people's ambitions. The Lib Dems have named the 14 seats where there are enough students to take the Lib De ms from second place to beat Labour, and the 13 where they could go from second to beat the Tories. Launching his campaign to win students' votes at the London School of Economics," Mr Kennedy urged students to ""make their mark"". He underlined Lib Dem plans to scrap university fees and reintroduce maintenance grant s of up to £2",000. He said: ""Top-up fees put students off university", especially those from a poorer background. ""And is it really right that so many yo ung people are starting out in life with mortgage-style debts hanging round the ir necks?"" Mr Kennedy also said students want action on the environment and se e the Iraq war", which his party opposed, as a defining issue. Labour has push ed through plans to let universities charge fees of up to £3,000 a year, with t he poorest students eligible for non-repayable support of up to £3,000. Ahead o f Mr Kennedy's launch," a Labour spokesperson said: ""Like the Tories", the Lib eral Democrats would restrict access to higher education and put a cap on aspir ation," closing the door to students with good grades and restricting their lif e ambitions. ""They are committed to abandoning Labour's targets of getting 50% of 18 to 30-year-olds going into higher education and under Lib Dem plans stude nts would even have to study near home." The Conservatives say they would abol ish university tuition fees and instead offer large student loans at commercial rates of interest. They say the Lib Dem policy would leave universities wholly dependent for their income on the ""goodwill"" of the chancellor. Shadow educa tion secretary Tim Collins is on Thursday setting out a new scheme of vocationa l grants for 14 to 16-year-olds to tackle what he says are ""crippling skills s hortages"". The Lib Dem analysis of the difference students could make to its e lection chances is based on all students being registered to vote near their un iversity", not in their home towns. Although the expected 5 May election would be during term time, students can vote by post. The Electoral Commission and Na tional Union of Students are worried students in halls of residence can find it hard to register to vote. Some hall wardens are reluctant to register students because of data protection fears - but students can get themselves registered. If the election is on 5 May, voters need to register by 11 March. - The seat s where the Lib Dems say student votes can swing the election for them are: Bri stol West, Cardiff Central, Leeds North West, Cambridge, Manchester Gorton, She ffield Central, Oxford East, Newcastle-upon-Tyne Central, Liverpool Riverside, Holborn and St Pancras, Oldham East and Saddleworth, Manchester Withington, Isl ington South and Finsbury, Birmingham Yardley, Surrey South West, Taunton, Orpi ngton, Haltemprice and Howden, Eastbourne, Isle of Wight, Dorset West, Bournemo

uth East, Wells, Canterbury, Cities of London and Westminster, Bournemouth West, Westmorland and Lonsdale.

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"politics 214.txt Custody death rate 'shocks' MPs Deaths in custody have reached ""shocking"" levels", a committee of MPs and peers has warned. The joint committee on human rights found those committing suicide were mainly the most vulnerable, with mental health, drugs or alcohol problems. Members urged the government to set up a task force to tackle deaths in prisons, police cells, detention centres and special hospitals. There was one prison suicide every four days between 1999 and 2003, MPs said. The report, which followed a year-long inquiry by the committee," found the high death rate ""amounts to a serious failure to protect the right to life of a highly vulnerable group"". Many of those who ended up taking their own lives had ""presented themselves"" to the authorities with these problems before they even offended", the report said. It questioned whether prison was the most appropriate place for them to be kept and whether earlier intervention would have meant custody could have been avoided. Increased resources and a reduction in the use of imprisonment was needed to address the issue in the longer term," the report said. Committee chairman Labour MP Jean Corston said: ""Each and every death in custody is a death too many," regardless of the circumstances. ""Yet throughout our inquiry we have seen time and time again that extremely vulnerable people are entering custody with a history of mental illness", drug and alcohol problems and potential for taking their own lives." "These highly vulnerable people are being held within a structure glaringly ill-suited to meet even their basic needs. ""Crime levels are falling but we are holding more people in custody than ever before. The misplaced over-reliance on the prison system for some of the most vulnerable people in the country is at the heart of the problems that we encountered. ""Until we change our whole approach to imprisoning vulnerable people we cannot begin to meet our positive obligations under Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights and meet our duty of care to them."" The committee also highlighted ""deeply worrying"" cases of children and young people taking their own lives. Between 1990 and 2004", 25 children have taken their own lives in prison and two have died in secure training centres. It picked out the case of Joseph Scholes, who hanged himself from the bars of his cell in Stoke Heath Young Offender Institution in March 2002, and urged the home secretary to hold a public inquiry. It revealed that two weeks before his court appearance for a series of robberies, the 16-year-old was depressed, exhibiting suicidal tendencies and slashed his face with a knife about 30 times. Even though the trial judge had been alerted to his experience of sexual abuse and mental illness, he was sentenced to a two-year detention and training order. Nine days into his sentence, Joseph hung himself from the bars of his cell window with a sheet.

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"politics 215.txt New rules tackle 'sham weddings' New rules on marriage for foreign nationals living in the UK are coming into force. From Tuesday", most non-EU citizens will need Home Office approval to marry. The Home Office says the new rules are aimed at reducing the number of sham marriages, of which there are estimated to be up to 15,000 a year. But immigrants' group the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI) says the rules break human rights law and it may mount a legal challenge. When the changes were unveiled last year," immigration minister Des Browne said: ""Our aim is to avoid unnecessary disruption of genuine marriages", while providing firm controls to prevent abuse."" Under the previous regulations anybody wishing to get married

in the UK only had to produce evidence they had been resident in the country for a week and give 15 days notice of the wedding at the local register office. But from Tuesday all non-EU nationals", apart from citizens of Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Iceland or Norway, intending to wed in the UK must either obtain a visa allowing them to get married before they enter the country or apply for a Home Office 'certificate of marriage approval'. To get a certificate, costing £135, applicants will have to send proof that they have a legal right to be in the UK. Those without a settled status, such as asylum seekers awaiting a decision on their application, will have no right to marry in the UK. Once they have the necessary documentation, those subject to immigration controls wishing to get married in England or Wales must register their intention to marry at one of 76 specially-designated register offices. They can, however, "marry at the register office or church of their choice. Rhian Beynon of the JCWI said the new rules were ""not proportionate"" and ""discriminatory"". ""These rules means in some cases the Home Secretary is going to be a marriage registrar of last resort. ""We're currently taking a legal opinion on this. We'll be looking for people whose right to marry is breached and we'll be looking at taking a case on this to the Human Rights Court", Ms Beynon said. The new rules have also been called into question by the parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights. In a report published last July the cross-party committee stated there was a significant risk"" the new procedures were incompatible with the right to marry because they introduced restrictions which were ""disproportionate"". The committee believed the new laws might be incompatible with the Human Rights Act on the grounds of religion", belief and nationality, the report added. Over the last year immigration service operations against marriages of convenience have been stepped up resulting in a growing number of convictions. In January 25 people who took part in a sham marriage network based in Leicester were jailed for a total of 35 years. And last November Samuel Amoah, a Belgian national who set up two sham weddings for couples who wanted to remain in the UK, was jailed for three years. Several other cases are currently going through the courts. The role of registrars who under the Asylum and Immigration Act 1999 were obliged to report suspected sham marriages to the Home Office, has been key in many prosecutions. Registrars' spokesman, Mark Rimmer," said they welcomed the new marriage regulations and believed they would be an significant deterrent. ""They will effectively remove most of the blatant cases. Certainly those who are illegals in this country", of which we had quite a few, will no longer be getting married," Mr Rimmer said. Mr Rimmer, the service director for registrations of marriages at Brent Council in north-west London, said he did not consider the new law to be an infringement of civil liberties. It may be seen to be far more draconian than it has been but certainly it's still not as difficult to marry in the UK than it is to marry", for example, in Holland," Germany or France. ""I think it's a proportionate response by government to what was a very large problem", Mr Rimmer said.

politics 216.txt Ministers 'naive' over phone-taps The government is being naive by refusing to allow phone-tap evidence in court, a senior EU politician says. Javier Solana, EU foreign policy chief, says phone-tap evidence works in the courts of other European countries. Human rights groups, top police officers and many MPs say allowing the evidence would remove the need to detain terror suspects without charge. But Home Secretary Charles Clarke says the evidence would not make much difference to these cases. Mr Solana told ITV1's Jonathan Dimbleby programme: [Phone-tap evidence in court] works", it is normal that it is done," it would be naive not to do it. ""It would be naive not to use this technological thing that we have at our disposal." Mr Solana's comments come the day after Sir Ian Blair", the newly-appointed Metropolitan Pol

ice commissioner, said he was in favour of phone-tap evidence. Under the Anti-Terrorism Crimes and Security Act 2001, foreign terror suspects can be detained in British jails without trial or charge. Several suspects have been detained under these powers because evidence against them was deemed too sensitive to be heard in court. Some of this evidence is believed to be telephone intercepts. Human Rights group Liberty has argued that if intercept evidence could be heard, these detainees could be brought to trial. But critics of phone-tap trials say the evidence is often weak and can expose the methods of the security services. The home secretary says intercepts would not make much difference because cases against terror suspects frequently rely on other kinds of surveillance. But Mr Clarke has been forced to change the regime of detention without trial after Law Lords ruled it illegal. He has opted for a system of "control orders" whereby suspects, both British and foreign, can be held under house arrest or surveillance. These orders will again involve a UK opt-out of parts of the European Convention on Human Rights. While accepting that people "have to be prepared" for a possible terrorist attack, Mr Solana said he had "qualms" about the home secretary's new plans. "We have to fight terrorism with all our means", but not so far as to change our way of life," he said.

politics 217.txt Schools to take part in mock poll Record numbers of schools across the UK are to take part in a mock general election backed by the government. Some 600 schools have already signed up for the Y Vote Mock Elections 2005 run by the Hansard Society and aimed at boosting interest in politics. Pupils in the schools taking part will learn the skills of speech writers, canvassers and political candidates. Schools Minister Stephen Twigg said engaging young people's interest was essential" to the future of democracy. He added: said "Young people who are engaged and motivated by the political process are essential to the future health of our democracy. "The mock elections initiative provides an opportunity for pupils to develop their own understanding of how the democratic process works and why it matters. "By experiencing the election process first hand - from running a campaign to the declaration of the final result - we hope that young people will develop the enthusiasm to take part in the future." The Hansard Society", the Electoral Commission and the Department for Education and Skills are running the programme. Pupils will stand as party candidates, speech writers and canvassers. Michael Raftery, project manager at the Hansard Society," said: "The Y Vote Mock Elections for schools mirror the excitement and buzz of a real election", raising awareness of citizenship, and the benefits of active democracy." The mock votes will take place around 5 May", widely expected to be the date of the general election. Information packs, including ballot papers and manifesto guides, with elections happening in early May were sent out to the 3,000 schools invited to take part.

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"politics 218.txt Blair dismisses quit claim report Tony Blair has dismissed reports he told Gordon Brown he would quit before the next general election. "You don't do deals over jobs like this", the prime minister told BBC One's Breakfast with Frost programme. According to a new book, Brown's Britain, Mr Blair went back on a pledge to make way for Mr Brown after Cabinet allies intervened in June 2004. Mr Blair said the claims were reheated from six months ago" and that he was concentrating on running the country. Mr Blair said: "I've dealt with this six months ago. I said then you don't do deals over jobs like this - you don't. "What both of us are actually concentrating on are the issues that concern the country." The book", by Sunday Telegraph journalist Robert Peston and serialised in the newspaper," said the pair had "mutual animosity and contempt" for each other. It claims Tony Blair felt by Novemb

er 2003 he had lost voters' trust because of the Iraq war and that he was no longer an asset to the Labour Party. And that at a dinner hosted by Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott he told Mr Brown of his intention to stand down. According to Mr Peston the prime minister said: ""Help me to get through the year and I will then stand down." But he then changed his mind in June 2004", following intervention from allies in the Cabinet and the suspicion that the chancellor was deliberately manoeuvring against him," according to the book. Mr Peston told BBC News: ""My understanding is that they are not nearly as close or as friendly as they once were. ""What the book says is there is now a pretty profound mutual mistrust", mutual animosity. ""I think in public you see this double-act pretending everything is alright", but in private I don't think the relationship is good because Brown, understandably," feels deeply betrayed - particularly over this issue of the leadership." But", in a wide-ranging BBC interview covering issues such as the Asian tsunami disaster, the Middle East peace process and Northern Ireland," Mr Blair said: ""When you get to the top in politics you get this huge swell around you. ""All sorts of people make all sorts of claims and counter-claims."" He admitted to a ""sense of frustration"" about the allegations which he said had been made ""countless times"". There has been fresh speculation of a rift recently", following their separate responses to the Asian tsunami. These rumours were fuelled by Mr Blair's decision to hold his monthly media conference at the same time as a long-planned speech by Mr Brown on UK plans to tackle global poverty with a new ""Marshall Plan"" for Africa. There was speculation the pair were trying to outdo each other's response to the disaster. But the prime minister said he had discussed these claims with the chancellor and dismissed them as a ""load of nonsense"". Former welfare minister Frank Field MP said the prime minister should sack Mr Brown", but did not believe Mr Blair was strong enough to do so. Tory leader Michael Howard accused the prime minister and Mr Brown of ""squabbling like schoolboys"". He told Sky News' Sunday with Adam Boulton: ""This is the politics of the playground and Britain really does deserve better." The Liberal Democrat parliamentary chairman Matthew Taylor said the personal ambition of Mr Blair and Mr Brown was ""getting in the way of good government"". ""Either they need to grow up and put their squabbles to one side or they cannot expect the electorate to support a divided government at the next election." During the interview Mr Blair also said the former home secretary David Blunkett would play a ""big role"" at the general election.

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"politics 219.txt Jamieson issues warning to bigots Scotland's justice minister has warned bigoted soccer fans that she wants to hit the m ""where it hurts most"" by banning them from matches. Cathy Jamieson said exclusion orders are one of a series of measures being considered in the Scottish Executive campaign against sectarianism. She praised Celtic and Rangers for their work in tackling the problem. However", the minister said stopping sectarian abuse associated with Old Firm matches is a key objective. Ms Jamieson was speaking ahead of the third round Scottish Cup clash between the Glasgow clubs at Parkhead on Sunday. The sectarianism long associated with sections of the support from both clubs has become a significant target for the executive. Last week Ms Jamieson and First Minister Jack McConnell met supporters' representatives from both clubs to discuss the issue. They plan to hold an anti-sectarian summit next month with officials from the clubs, church leaders, senior police officers and local authority chiefs among those to be invited. Speaking on BBC Radio Scotland's Sunday Live programme," Ms Jamieson described Friday's meeting as ""very productive"" and said putting the squeeze on the bigots would be a key aim. Ms Jamieson stressed that sectarianism has not been confined to football bu

t it can act as a ""trigger"" for tensions and violence. Clubs have taken action in the past to ban troublesome fans and supporters' groups expressed their desire to ensure that the game is no longer tainted by the problem. Ms Jamieson said the executive should have a role in tackling the soccer troublemakers. She said: ""We can't get away from the fact that in some instances some of the religious hatred that some people try to associate with football boils over into violence. ""That is the kind of thing we want to stop and that's the kind of thing supporters' groups are very clear they don't want to be part of either,"" and they will work with us to try and deal with that." Ms Jamieson praised the police for their action and said: ""The police do want to identify whether there are particular individuals who are going over the top and inciting hatred or violence - they will crack down very effectively on them. ""We have of course already indicated that we will consider the introduction of banning orders to give additional powers to where there are people who are going over the top", who have made inappropriate behaviour at football matches," to be able to stop them attending the games. ""That's the kind of thing that will hit those kind of people where it hurts the most in not allowing them to attend the games," she said. Praising Celtic and Rangers for their efforts, she said: I don't think there is any doubt that we have seen some positive moves from the clubs. ""Both Rangers and Celtic football clubs have been involved in working with the executive to produce", for example," an educational pack for young people.""

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"politics 220.txt Clarke plans migrant point scheme Anyone planning to move to the UK will have to pass a test to prove they can contribute to the country", Home Secretary Charles Clarke has said. He is proposing a points system similar to Australia's but would avoid the quota system planned by the Tories. Mr Clarke, who will unveil his plans on Monday," said economic migration helped the UK but ""needed proper policing"". The Lib Dems say they will look at his plans", but Tory Liam Fox said his party offered a ""clear choice"" on the issue. The Conservative Party Co-Chairman said the British electorate had a choice between a Labour government that had ""done nothing for eight years and will not set a limit"" on immigration and a Tory one that would impose quotas. The home secretary said", by 2008, he wanted everyone given a visa and entering the UK to have their fingerprints taken," to ""ensure we can know everybody who is in the country"". Speaking on BBC One's Breakfast with Frost", he said ""economic migrants are of great value to this country""", but stressed that proper policing was needed to ensure that they do not become a ""burden on society""". He said: ""We will establish a system ... which looks at the skills", talents and abilities of people seeking to come and work in this country," and ensures that when they come here they have a job and can contribute to the economy of the country." The home secretary", whose five-year blueprint for immigration and asylum is expected to be published on Monday," also rejected claims that the immigration debate encouraged bigotry. ""The issue of who does come into this country", and whether they are entitled to be in this country, who does settle here, how we have border controls, is a perfectly legitimate aspect of public debate, he said. Liberal Democrat home affairs spokesman Mark Oaten said: Whilst it is good that Labour has rejected the Tory idea of quotas on asylum," the jury is still out on the Home Office's ability to deliver a fair and efficient asylum system." Mr Howard has said Britain should take its fair share of the world's ""genuine refugees"". But he claims the current asylum system is being abused - and with it Britain's generosity. Trevor Phillips", chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality," called on Mr Clarke to denounce the suggestion Britain's hospitality was being tested by immigration. ""Tell that to t

he 44",000 doctors in the NHS and the 70,000 nurses without whom we would really see what pressure on the health service means, he said. Ditto the teachers, from South Africa, Australia, Jamaica," who are reducing the sizes of our classes and schools."" The Refugee Council said Mr Howard's proposals would mean there would be no safe haven in the UK.

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"politics 221.txt Clarke defends terror detentions The home secretary has defended his decision not to release foreign terror suspects despite a legal ruling their detention breached human rights laws. House of Lords law lords ruled against the detention measures last week. They said it was wrong to have one set of laws for foreign suspects and another for British suspects. New Home Secretary Charles Clarke said he would carefully consider the ruling and would return to Parliament early in the new year with proposals. He insisted that he would not be rushed into judgement but would examine the law lords' findings in detail. ""My duty is to look at first of all the security of this country and in so doing to consider very carefully the precise legal measures that there are."" Mr Clarke's comments came in response to an emergency question from Liberal Democrat constitutional affairs spokesman David Heath. Mr Heath said the judgement contained ""unprecedented condemnation and could not have been more unequivocal"". He said he accepted the difficult balance between the nation's security and human rights but questioned why the home office had made ""no contingency plans for the present circumstances""." "These detainees should be prosecuted and tried. Simply renewing the present deeply unsatisfactory legislation is not an option."" Shadow home secretary David Davis said it was not possible to overstate the importance of the judgment and urged the government to move as fast as ""competently possible"" to sort the problem out in the interests of natural justice. ""If you do," we will give you every support."" The law lords' ruling came on Charles Clarke's first day as home secretary last Thursday following David Blunkett's resignation. In a statement on the same day", Mr Clarke said: ""I will be asking Parliament to renew this legislation in the New Year. ""In the meantime," we will be studying the judgment carefully to see whether it is possible to modify our legislation to address the concerns raised by the House of Lords."" But the government was widely criticised for insisting the detentions would continue following the ruling last week. Lord Bingham - a senior law lord - said the rules were incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights as they allowed detentions ""in a way that discriminates on the ground of nationality or immigration status"" by justifying detention without trial for foreign suspects", but not Britons. Lord Nicholls of Birkenhead, in his ruling," said: ""Indefinite imprisonment without charge or trial is anathema in any country which observes the rule of law."" The detainees took their case to the House of Lords after the Court of Appeal backed the Home Office's powers to hold them without limit or charge. The government opted out of part of the European Convention on Human Rights concerning the right to a fair trial in order to bring in anti-terrorism legislation in response to the 11 September attacks in the US.

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"politics 222.txt Voters 'reject EU by two to one' British voters would reject the European constitution by two to one", according to a poll posing the question the government will put to the country. The Daily Telegraph poll suggests that 45% of people would vote against the constitution and 24% in favour. However the YouGov poll, which questioned 1,943 British adults online, found 25% did not know how they would vote if forced to decide tomorrow.

Only 51% of those polled had made up their minds about the constitution. Another 7% said they would not vote at all. The poll is believed to be the first to pose the question which the government has chosen for the upcoming referendum, "expected in 2006. The constitution will be incorporated into UK law if there is a yes vote. Ballot papers in the poll will ask: ""Should the United Kingdom approve the treaty establishing a constitution for the European Union?"" The government unveiled the question which will be asked earlier in the week. The treaty was signed by all 25 current EU members in Rome last October and is due to come into force in November 2006", providing it is ratified by all member states - several of which will hold a referendum. Critics say the constitution is a further step towards a federal Europe," but advocates say it ensures effective operation of the enlarged 25-state EU. ""If we reject this treaty", Britain will be isolated and weak in Europe," said Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, after the question was unveiled. Mr Straw, along with the rest of the Cabinet, will back a yes"" vote. Meanwhile", Conservative shadow foreign secretary Michael Ancram said the referendum question ""seems straightforward"". But he accused the government of trying to confuse the issue by putting the EU referendum question in the same bill as the ratification of the constitution", when they should be treated as ""two separate issues"".

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"politics 223.txt Kennedy questions trust of Blair Lib Dem leader Charles Kennedy has said voters now have a ""fundamental lack of trust"" of Tony Blair as prime minister. He said backing his party was not a wasted vote", adding that with the Lib Dems ""what you see is what you get"". He made his comments at the start of a day of appearances on Channel Five in a session on The Wright Stuff programme. Questions from callers", a studio audience and the show's presenter covered Lib Dem tax plans," anti-terror laws and immigration. Mr Kennedy said during his nearly 22 years in Parliament he had seen prime ministers and party leaders come and go and knew the pitfalls of British politics. ""1983 was when I was first elected as an MP - so Tony Blair", Michael Howard and myself were all class of '83 - and over that nearly quarter of a century the world has changed out of recognition, he said. We don't actually hear the argument any longer: 'Lib Dems, good people," reasonable ideas but only if we thought they could win around here - it's a wasted vote'. ""You don't hear that because the evidence of people's senses demonstrates that it isn't a wasted vote." But he said Mr Blair had lost the trust of the British people. ""There is a fundamental lack of trust in Tony Blair as prime minister and in his government", he said. What we've got to do as a party - what I've got to do as a leader of this party - is to convey to people that what you see is what you get." Mr Kennedy also used his TV appearance to defend his party's plans to increase income tax to 50% for those earning more than £100",0, saying it would apply to just 1% of the population. He said the extra revenue would allow his party to get rid of tuition and top-up fees, introduce free personal care for the elderly and replace the council tax with a local income tax. Mr Blair has already spent a day with Five and Michael Howard is booked for a similar session.

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"politics 224.txt Terror detainees win Lords appeal Detaining foreign terrorist suspects without trial breaks human rights laws", the UK's highest court has ruled. In a blow to the government's anti-terror measures, the House of Lords law lords ruled by an eight to one majority in favour of appeals by nine detainees. Most of the men are being indefinitely held in Belmarsh prison, south London. The law lords said the measures were incompatible with

h European human rights laws. The men will stay behind bars while ministers decide how to react. The ruling creates a major problem for Charles Clarke on his first day as home secretary following David Blunkett's resignation. The Liberal Democrats say Mr Clarke should use the fact he is new to the job to take issue with a law established by his predecessor, David Blunkett. Belmarsh prison has been dubbed Britain's Guantanamo Bay by civil rights campaigners opposed to the use of emergency anti-terror laws. The detainees took their case to the House of Lords after the Court of Appeal backed the Home Office's powers to hold them without limit or charge. The government opted out of part of the European Convention on Human Rights concerning the right to a fair trial in order to bring in anti-terrorism legislation in response to the 11 September attacks in the US. Any foreign national suspected of links with terrorism can be detained or can opt to be deported. However those detained cannot be deported if this would mean persecution in their homeland. On Thursday," senior law lord Lord Bingham said the rules were incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights as they allowed detentions ""in a way that discriminates on the ground of nationality or immigration status"". Lord Nicholls of Birkenhead", in his ruling," said: ""Indefinite imprisonment without charge or trial is anathema in any country which observes the rule of law. ""It deprives the detained person of the protection a criminal trial is intended to afford."" He said the weakness for the government's case was that it was trying to justify detention without trial for foreign suspects - but not for British suspects. Lord Hoffmann said: ""The real threat to the life of the nation", in the sense of a people living in accordance with its traditional laws and political values," comes not from terrorism but from laws such as these."" But Lord Walker of Gestingthorpe", the one law lord to oppose the appeal, said the anti-terror laws contained important safeguards against oppression. In a statement," detainee 'A' in Woodhill Prison said: ""I hope now that the government will act upon this decision""," scrap this illegal 'law' and release me and the other internees to return to our families and loved ones."" The case was heard by a panel of nine law lords rather than the usual five because of the constitutional importance of the case. Ben Emmerson QC", presenting seven of the detainees, said the men had already been in custody for nearly three years. He said they had been given no idea when, if ever, they would be released, had never been formally interviewed and there was no prospect they would ever be put on trial. When the men were first held, they took their cases to the Special Immigration Appeals Commission (SIAC). The commission ruled on 30 July, 2002 that the anti-terror act unjustifiably discriminated against foreign nationals as British people could not be held in the same way. But that ruling was later overturned by the Court of Appeal who said there was a state of emergency threatening the life of the nation.

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"politics 225.txt Blair to face MPs amid feud talk Tony Blair faces his first prime minister's questions of 2005 after a week of renewed speculation about his relationship with Gordon Brown. Meanwhile", the chancellor is leaving Britain on a high-profile tour of Africa to highlight poverty issues. But before doing so, he insisted he still trusted Mr Blair," despite claims to the contrary in a new book. Labour MPs have warned against disunity and Tory leader Michael Howard may well take up the theme in the Commons. The Tories have already accused the prime minister and his chancellor of behaving like ""schoolboys squabbling in a playground""". Michael Howard is likely to want to capitalise further on the spat when he goes head-to-head with the prime minister in the Commons. At a campaign poster launch on Tuesday", Mr Brown was joined by Alan Milburn, who Mr Blair controversially put in charge of election planning i

n place of the chancellor. Later this week the prime minister is due to set out the themes of his party's next election manifesto, which for the past two polls have been drawn up by the chancellor. Mr Brown, meanwhile, is visiting Tanzania, Mozambique and Kenya to highlight the plight of many Africans hit by AIDS," war and famine - issues which Mr Blair has also spoken out on. The prime minister and chancellor faced backbench discontent at Monday's meeting of the Parliamentary Labour Party over claims made in journalist Robert Peston's new book. Mr Blair told MPs and peers: ""I know from everyone here", in Cabinet and government," nothing is going to get in the way of a unified Labour Party with a unified position and winning the third term people desperately need." Labour's Paul Flynn said the pair had had a ""scorching"" from MPs. On Tuesday", Deputy Prime Minister Mr Prescott told BBC News: ""They told us very clearly", it was the troops telling the leaders: get in line." The new book claims Mr Prescott hosted a dinner in November 2003 where the prime minister told Mr Brown he would stand down before the next election because he had lost trust over the Iraq war. Mr Blair then changed his mind in June 2004", after Cabinet allies intervened and amid suspicion the chancellor was manoeuvring against him," writes Mr Peston. In Mr Peston's book Mr Brown is alleged to have told the prime minister: ""There is nothing you could ever say to me now that I could ever believe.""  
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politics 226.txt Tories unveil quango blitz plans Plans to abolish 162 quangos have been unveiled by the Conservatives as part of their effort to show how government red tape can be cut. Six government units would also be scrapped under proposals which the Tories say would save more than £4.3 bn. Among the targets are strategic health authorities and the new fair access regulator for universities. Tory frontbencher John Redwood said Britain needed a slimmer government and lower taxes to be competitive. The plans would abolish regional assemblies and other regional bodies", such as boards tackling industrial development and housing. Their powers would be returned to elected local councils or national government. The Tories say the strategic health authorities are not needed as it is better that local people, rather than officials, run hospitals and surgeries. Announcing the plans," Mr Redwood said: ""Mr Blair has forgotten the interests of taxpayers", and has broken the pledges he made. ""Far from improving public services", spending taxpayers' money on quangos has led only to more bureaucrats," more regulation and higher taxes." His party leader", Michael Howard," argued a change in direction was needed to get a grip on spending. ""Labour are creating Two Britains: the Britain of the forgotten majority and bureaucratic Britain", he said. In the real world," people are working harder just to stand still. They've seen their pensions knocked for six. ""They're being squeezed by extra taxes. The forgotten majority are paying the price of bureaucratic Britain." The government has announced plans to cut 100",000 civil servants as part of its efficiency drive. The Liberal Democrats have said they would cut the number of Whitehall departments to make sure money reaches frontline services.

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politics 227.txt Clarke faces ID cards rebellion Charles Clarke faces his first real test as home secretary on Monday with a possible backbench rebellion over the controversial ID cards bill. Up to 30 Labour MPs could oppose the scheme during a Commons debate. Mr Clarke", who took on the post on Thursday after David Blunkett quit," has rejected calls to ""pause"" on the bill. Tory leader Michael Howard also faces a possible rebellion after deciding to back identity cards. The Liberal Democrats oppose the plans. Mr Clarke", wr

iting in The Times," accused some critics of ""liberal woolly thinking and spreading false fears"" by claiming ID cards would erode civil liberties. He writes that it is actually a ""profoundly civil libertarian measure because it promotes the most fundamental civil liberty in our society - which is the right to live free from fear crime and fear"". Mr Clarke is expected to try and win over opponents to the scheme by saying officials who secretly accessed information they were not allowed to see would face up to two years in jail. He is also expected to cut the £85 cost of the card and passport", for the elderly and those on lower incomes. Mr Howard last week said his front bench team had reached a ""collective view"" to back ID cards after holding a ""good discussion""", but admitted it was ""not an easy issue"". He had decided to support the plans as the police said they would help fight terror", crime and illegal immigration. But former shadow attorney general Bill Cash said there was still ""very deep"" disquiet about the plan among senior Tories. He told BBC Radio 4's Today the government was ""intensely authoritarian"" and was creating ""increasingly a Big Brother society"". Critics argue that introducing the cards would be a costly scheme with no specific aim. Ministers say it would help the fight against terrorism", illegal immigration and organised crime. But opponents say that similar schemes in other countries have not prevented attacks like the Madrid rail bombing. On Sunday," Lib Dem leader Charles Kennedy repeated his call for a ""pause"" in considering the legislation. He told BBC's Breakfast with Frost programme that Mr Clarke had a ""real opportunity"" on Monday following the departure of Mr Blunkett. ""If you were running a family or a business would you have the second reading of the Identity Cards Bill tomorrow or would you pause to reflect and see what you might do about it in the New Year? ""That is the sensible way to go about it but I think this government has got itself so much into tram lines now that it is not behaving sensibly at all."" The first cards would be issued in 2008 and", when he was introducing the bill, Mr Blunkett suggested Parliament could decide in 2011 or 2012 whether to make it compulsory for everybody to own the cards, although not to carry them. The new bill would also create new criminal offences on the possession of false identity documents.

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"politics 228.txt Labour pig poster 'anti-Semitic' The Labour Party has been accused of anti-Semitism over a poster depicting Michael Howard and Oliver Letwin - who are both Jewish - as flying pigs. Prospective Tory candidate Andrew Mennear", whose Finchley constituency contains a large Jewish community," branded it ""tasteless"" and offensive. The poster shows the two men's faces superimposed on winged pigs and says ""the day the Tory sums add up""". Labour said the poster was ""not anti-Jewish", but anti-Tory""". It is one of four designs e-mailed to Labour members", who were asked to vote for their favourite. Mr Mennear, who was sent the e-mail by a friend," said he had been ""shocked"" by the image and had shown it to friends who were similarly horrified. He said there was nothing more distasteful for a Jewish person than to be associated with a pig. ""I am not suggesting there is any deliberate intent"" but these sort of things can cause great offence. It clearly wasn't thought through. ""It is possible the posters were designed for maximum impact"" but this one clearly overstepped the mark and should be withdrawn." The campaign was particularly insensitive as it had come out at the same time as Holocaust Day", a ""difficult"" time for many Jewish people", Mr Mennear added. A Labour spokesman denied the campaign was anti-Semitic. ""As we said at the time the James report (the Tory backed inquiry into possible public spending savings) was published pigs will fly before the Tory's sums will add up. This poster is making a serious point", he said. A Conservative Party spokesman said: While the Conserv

atives are concentrating on the issues that matter to people, such as lower taxes and controlled immigration," it is clear to see that the Labour Party is not. People will not be fooled."

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"politics 229.txt Iraqis win death test case probe The family of an Iraqi civilian allegedly killed by UK troops have won a challenge against the government's refusal to order a full inquiry. The High Court ruled on Tuesday that Baha Mousa's death in British custody in Iraq fell within the European Convention on Human Rights. And the judges paved the way for an independent inquiry by saying previous investigations were inadequate. But judicial reviews into five other deaths in southern Iraq were ruled out. Their families will be appealing against the judgement. The families' solicitor Phil Shiner described it as ""a historic day for human rights and the rule of law in the UK"". Father-of-two Mr Mousa", 28, a hotel receptionist, was arrested with eight men seized at a hotel in Basra in September 2003. He was allegedly beaten to death while in the custody of the Queen's Lancashire Regiment. The Iraqi families' lawyer argued that failing to adequately investigate the death breached the European Convention on Human Rights. Ministry of Defence lawyers argued the UK-controlled area of southern Iraq was outside European jurisdiction. But Lord Justice Rix and Mr Justice Forbes ruled that UK jurisdiction could extend to a UK-run prison," but did not apply ""to the total territory of another state""". They said as Mr Mousa was in custody when he died", his case came within the UK's jurisdiction. The other five Iraqis did not die in custody, so their cases had to fail," they said. And it was difficult to say that the investigation which had already occurred ""has been timely"", open or effective""", the judges said. After the ruling Carla Ferstman, legal director of the human rights organisation Redress," said: ""It is not enough for the military to investigate behind closed doors. ""There must be an effective public investigation by an independent official body. Only such an investigation could reveal what really happened and who might be responsible." Other allegations involving British soldiers included the shooting of an Iraqi police commissioner and the shooting of four Iraqi civilians in May 2003. Both sides were granted permission to appeal. Prime Minister Tony Blair's official spokesman said: ""Obviously we will need to study this detailed judgment. I would point out", however," that a separate criminal case is currently being considered by the army prosecuting authority. ""I can't say anything further for obvious reasons. The MoD are considering whether to appeal." But former British Commander Colonel Bob Stewart said : ""Anyone at the top [of the military] will be saddened by the verdict that has taken place but will say: 'If there's a case to answer", let's have it out. Because we don't want people thinking that British soldiers beat up civilians and get away with it', " he said. The Ministry of Defence does everything in its power to try to prove we act ethically and properly under the rules of war."

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"politics 230.txt Burglar defence guidelines issued Householders who injure or even kill intruders are unlikely to be prosecuted - providing they were acting ""honestly and instinctively""", new guidelines say. The law also protects those who use ""something to hand"" as a weapon. The leaflet", published by police and prosecutors, aims to combat confusion about current legislation," which lets people use ""reasonable force""". The guidance", relating to England and Wales," follows a recent decision by ministers not to change the law. Doing what you ""honestly and instinctively"" believed was necessary would be the strongest evidence of acting lawfully", the guidance said. And th

e law protects those who use ""something to hand"" as a weapon", said the leaflet published jointly by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO). As a general rule, the more extreme the circumstances and fear felt, the more force can be used lawfully in self-defence, it said, adding that householders do not have to wait to be attacked before defending themselves. But knocking someone unconscious then killing them or hurting them further," or setting a trap for an intruder without involving the police were given as examples of ""excessive and gratuitous"" force. The Tories have called for a change in the law so householders are only prosecuted if they use ""grossly disproportionate"" force. Their demands have been backed by former Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir John Stevens. Tory frontbencher Patrick Mercer is now pursuing the proposal through a private member's bill in Parliament. The government instead mounted a publicity campaign to clear up public uncertainty after a review concluded no law change was necessary. Home Secretary Charles Clarke said: ""I believe in that old adage 'an Englishman's home is his castle'. That's exactly what should be the case and I believe the current law provides that." An ""informal trawl"" of CPS records found 11 people had been prosecuted after attacking intruders in the past 15 years", five of whom were convicted. They included a man who laid in wait for a burglar on commercial premises in Cheshire, before beating him up, throwing him into a pit and setting him on fire. A CPS spokesperson said the figures were not definitive because prosecutions are not listed according to whether they were committed by a householder or an intruder. In one of Britain's highest profile cases, Norfolk farmer Tony Martin was jailed for life for murdering 16-year-old burglar Fred Barras, in 1999. The conviction was later reduced to manslaughter on appeal and the sentence cut to five years. Mr Martin was freed from prison in July 2003. The guidance published on Tuesday," said the police had a duty to investigate all incidents involving a death or injury. In cases involving householders attacking intruders prosecutors and police were ""determined"" they would be dealt with ""as swiftly and as sympathetically as possible""", it said.

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"politics 231.txt Woolf murder sentence rethink Plans to give murderers lighter sentences if they plead guilty have been watered down. There was an outcry three months ago when the Sentencing Guidelines Council - led by Lord Woolf - published its proposals for England and Wales. It had suggested judges should reduce sentences by a third for murderers who confessed at the earliest opportunity. But that has now been changed to one-sixth", with no reduction for those killers given a ""whole life tariff"". At the time Lord Woolf", the Lord Chief Justice, had said the one third reduction would only be in extraordinary circumstances - for example, if people gave themselves up before their crime had even been detected. The guidelines were to recognise the need to spare victims and witnesses the trauma of going to court where possible, by allowing lighter sentences for guilty pleas and co-operation, he said. But director of the Victims of Crime Trust, Norman Brennan," accused Lord Woolf of having an ""arrogant contempt for victims of crime and the law-abiding public""". The National Association of Probation Officers said the move would be ""political suicide"". In revised proposals from the Sentencing Guidelines Council (SGC)", the section on murder said possible reductions would have to be ""weighed carefully"" by a judge so they did not lead to ""an inappropriately short sentence"". Where it was appropriate to reduce the minimum term having regard to a plea of guilty", the maximum reduction would be one sixth, and should never exceed five years," it said. In a statement issued on Wednesday Lord Woolf said: ""I have no doubt that being able to call on the diverse backgrounds and experiences of

all those that serve on the SGC has vastly improved the final guidelines. ""I am confident", as a result," that judges will be better placed to deliver sentences which are effective both as punishments and deterrents to offending and reoffending." "Director of Public Prosecutions", Ken Macdonald QC, who sits on the SGC," said the principle of discounting sentences to offenders for early guilty pleas is set down by parliament. ""What the new guideline on reduced sentences for guilty pleas does is increase the chances of convicting the guilty by bringing clarity to this process. ""It represents a tougher regime than existed previously", because the discount is automatically reduced if a guilty plea is not made at the first available opportunity," he said.

politics 232.txt Probe launched on Ken Nazi jibe An investigation by the Standards Board is under way following allegations that Ken Livingstone has brought his office into disrepute. The probe follows the London mayor's comments to a Jewish journalist comparing him to a concentration camp guard, after a party about a week ago. The local government watchdog also said the allegation related to a failure to respect others. It has the power to suspend or bar Labour's Mr Livingstone from office. A complaint was made to the body by the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Commission for Racial Equality. Speaking after the investigation was announced Bob Neill, leader of the London Assembly Conservatives, said: He has behaved in a manner unbecoming of his office and in so doing," has shown extraordinarily poor civic leadership. ""His administration is now in crisis." "On Sunday", Deputy Mayor Nicky Gavron told the BBC's Politics Show she believed the Mayor of London would say sorry on Tuesday for offending the wider Jewish community. The Prime Minister Tony Blair is among those who have called for an apology but so far the mayor has refused. The mayor accused Oliver Finegold, of the Evening Standard newspaper," of ""door stepping"" him at a ""predominately gay event"" held for MP Chris Smith. Ms Gavron said she thought Mr Livingstone's comments were ""inappropriate"" but she did not believe the mayor was anti-Semitic. She said: ""I work very closely with Ken so I can speak of what he's like in his guarded and unguarded moments and... he is in no way anti-Jewish," I wouldn't for a moment work with him if he were. ""On the other hand", I think his remarks were inappropriate and I believe it is important, and I believe he will, come to the point where he says, " 'I regret that I have caused offence to the wider Jewish community'. ""I hope he will do it soon and it is mooted that he is going to make some sort of statement on Tuesday." "

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politics 233.txt 'Few ready' for information act Thousands of public bodies are ill-prepared for the Freedom of Information Act", due to come into force next month, because of government failures," say MPs. From next month anyone will have the power to demand information from a range of public bodies - from Whitehall departments to doctors' surgeries. But an all-party committee said it was ""not confident"" many would be ready. It blamed the Department for Constitutional Affairs for a ""lack of consistent leadership"". The Act comes into effect in England", Wales and Northern Ireland, on 1 January while similar measures are being brought in at the same time in Scotland. It provides the public with a right of access to information held by about 100,000 public bodies," subject to various exemptions. But the government department responsible for implementing the change suffered from an ""unusually high turnover"" of staff within the department", which had ""seriously interfered"" with its work", said the Constitutional Affairs Select Committee. It said, despite four years of preparations," some local authorities and parts of the health sector were still not ready. The DCA had ""failed"" to provide early guidance on technic

al matters and shown a ""lack of consistent leadership""", the MPs found. Committee chairman Alan Beith said: ""The DCA has had four years to prepare for freedom of information", but with less than a month to go it appears that some bodies may not be well enough prepared. ""Our report shows that in the past support and guidance from the DCA", which has overall responsibility for guiding the public sector through the process of implementation for the freedom of information regime," has been lacking." A spokesman for the DCA said: ""The DCA has provided - and will continue to provide - strong", clear leadership. ""It has delivered a simple", liberal fees regime, guidance on the Act which has been widely praised," and expert networks of staff working on freedom of information implementation."

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"politics 234.txt Blunkett unveils policing plans People could be given the mobile phone number of their local bobby under an overhaul of policing in England and Wales unveiled by David Blunkett. The plans include a dedicated policing team for each neighbourhood and a 10 point compulsory customer charter. The home secretary said targets would be put in place to ensure that the public got a good response from police. Local people would also be able to ""trigger"" action on specific problems if they felt nothing was being done. Local councillors would have to show certain conditions had been met before invoking the power. And police could refuse the request if the complaints were frivolous", would only cause annoyance or would pose too heavy a burden on resources. Mr Blunkett said a new three digit number would be created for non-emergency phone calls to police. The best performing police services would get more cash and extra freedoms, he said," but he would not shirk from stepping in where the public was being failed. The home secretary's powers to suspend or sack chief constables are being reviewed after Mr Blunkett's battle with Humberside chief David Westwood over intelligence failures on Soham murderer Ian Huntley. Opposition parties also want more local policing to tackle nuisance behaviour and other crime but they accuse ministers of tying the police up with paperwork. Tory spokesman David Davis said the proposals were ""little more than a taxpayer-funded PR exercise"" ahead of a general election predicted for next May. Police forces were already ""buried"" under existing government initiatives and there was little in the latest plans to reassure them", said Mr Davis. Earlier Lib Dem home affairs spokesman Mark Oaten said the government was right to want to increase the links between local people and the police. But these measures will only work if they're matched with a cut in the amount of paperwork - and investment in modern equipment to keep the police out on the streets."" Before delivering a statement to MPs", Mr Blunkett was joined by Tony Blair at Welling School, in south east London," which is at the heart of a community policing initiative. Mr Blunkett said he wanted ""to go back to a time when I was very young"," when you expected the police to be part of the community and the community to be part of policing and where people were joined together in partnership making it work"". The prime minister said the law-abiding citizen should be in charge of the community and ""not the minority who want to cause trouble""". Mr Blunkett already boasts about producing record police numbers. He has also started to recruit 25",000 Community Support Officers (CSOs) and the new plans would allow all police forces to give them the power to detain suspects. An extra £50 m was promised on Tuesday so 2,000 new CSOs can be recruited now rather than next year. Within two years," every force will be expected to keep to a ""copper's contract"" on what kind of service the public can expect. A Mori poll this summer suggested policing", unlike health and education," was the one major public service where people were less satisfied the more contact they had with it.

The plans also include the idea of allowing people join police forces at different levels rather than the traditional way of making everybody spend specific amounts of time as a constable before being promoted. There will also be ""specific exercises"" to encourage black and Asian people to join the police at senior ranks.

"politics 235.txt Lib Dems' new election PR chief The Lib Dems have appointed a senior figure from BT to be the party's new communication s chief for their next general election effort. Sandy Walkington will now work with senior figures such as Matthew Taylor on completing the party manifesto. P arty chief executive Lord Rennard said the appointment was a ""significant stre ngthening of the Lib Dem team"". Mr Walkington said he wanted the party to be r eady for any ""mischief"" rivals or the media tried to throw at it. ""My role will be to ensure this new public profile is effectively communicated at all le vels," he said. I also know the party will be put under scrutiny in the media and from the other parties as never before - and we will need to show ourselves ready and prepared to counter the mischief and misrepresentation that all too o ften comes from the party's opponents. ""The party is already demonstrating on every issue that it is the effective opposition."" Mr Walkington's new job titl e is director of general election communications.

"politics 236.txt Jack Cunningham to stand down Veteran Labour MP and former Cabinet minister Jack Cunningham has said he will stand down at the next election. One of the few Blair-era ministers to serve under Jim Callaghan," he was given the agriculture portfolio when Labour regained power in 1997. Mr Cunningham went on to become Tony Blair's "cabinet enforcer". He has represented the constituency now known as Copeland since 1970. Mr Blair said he was a "huge figure" in Labour and a "valued", "personal friend". During Labour's long period in opposition", Mr Cunningham held a number of shadow roles including foreign affairs, the environment and as trade spokesman. As agriculture minister he caused controversy when he decided to ban beef on the bone in the wake of fears over BSE. He quit the government in 1999 and in recent years has served as the chairman of the all-party committee on Lords reform and has been a loyal supporter of the government from the backbenches.

"politics 237.txt Kilroy unveils immigration policy Ex-ch  
atshow host Robert Kilroy-Silk has attacked UK policy on immigration saying Bri-  
tain's open door approach is hitting low wage ""indigenous"" workers. The Veri-  
tas leader said the only people to benefit from immigrants from places like Pol-  
and were employers", landlords, members of the 'metropolitan elite'. The MEP sa-  
id his party would only admit foreigners who were required because they had spe-  
cific skills to offer. And he argued asylum cost £2bn a year for 14,000 success-  
ful applicants. Mr Kilroy-Silk said that worked out at £143,000 per successful  
asylum seeker. He said Veritas wanted to grant an amnesty for all those in Brit-  
ain claiming asylum and who have children and deport everyone else. Britain sh-  
ould take its fair share of asylum seekers under the United Nations Convention o-  
n Human Rights, he argued. And Mr Kilroy-Silk said he wanted to spend an extra  
£500m a year to help provide for refugees abroad.

..... "politics 238.txt Regiments' group in poll move A regiments' campaign group is to target nine marginal Labour seats at the General Election. Save the Scottish Regiments will also field a candidate against Armed Forces Minister Adam Ingram in East Kilbride. The group", which is unhappy at defence merger plans, is endorsing opposition candidates in nine seats. The marginals are Aberdeen South, Dumfriesshire, Dundee East and West, South West Edinburgh, Ochil, Stirling, East Renfrewshire and Western Isles. The campaigners unveiled a huge poster featuring Black Watch soldiers fighting the war in Iraq before they announced their election plans. Former Scots Guardsman Allan Hendry will challenge Mr Ingram. The group said it is well organised, with 350 volunteers," and will be announcing at least one other candidate later. It added that it can only be stopped from inflicting serious damage on Labour if the government reverses its plan to merge the six Scottish regiments. Scotland's only Conservative MP Peter Duncan said the Save the Scottish Regiments had done a ""superb job"" in fighting against defence cuts. He added: ""Their actions have reflected the pride that most people in this country have in our troops"", and have shown a steely determination to make Labour pay for their betrayal. ""I have been honoured to speak at their rallies throughout Scotland."" Scottish National Party leader Alex Salmond said it had received a ""big boost"" from the campaign's decision to endorse SNP candidates in four marginal seats. ""Labour's arrogance has been their undoing. In trying to get rid of Scotland's historic regiments", Labour MPs will end up being scrapped themselves," he said. However, Labour MP George Foulkes said the campaigners would not make any difference to the outcome of the election and would not win the argument. A serving soldier knows that what Labour is proposing is right", he said. As well as their election move, Save the Scottish Regiments will join other campaigners at a rally in London in the spring. Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon announced last year that Scotland's regiments would be combined into a single unit. The move was part of overall Army reforms.

politics 239.txt Row over 'police' power for CSOs The Police Federation has said it strongly opposes giving Community Support Officers (CSOs) the power to detain suspects for up to 30 minutes. The powers - piloted in six areas - were extended to all police forces in England and Wales on Thursday. The federation said CSOs do not have the experience, training and safety equipment to deal with potentially confrontational"" situations. But the government said the move would help police ""build safe communities"". Police Federation chairman Jan Berry said civilian officers should act as ""eyes and ears"" for the police. ""They should not be placed in potentially confrontational situations - which detaining someone clearly is", she said. CSOs can now use reasonable force to detain suspects for up to 30 minutes while they wait for police officers to arrive. The powers will be granted by chief constables of local forces. Ms Berry said this dramatically changes"" their original purpose - to be a visible presence combating low-level crime and anti-social behaviour. She said more powers would mean more paperwork and less time on the street. But Home Office minister Hazel Blears defended the move saying it would give the civilian officers ""just that little bit of edge"". She denied their role was changing and said the new powers would not take them away from the streets. ""The powers that we are bringing in are things that they need to do when they are out patrolling", she said. The Home Office has produced its own report on CSOs which it describes as encouraging"". Ms Blears said the study shows CSOs are ""making a real difference"" in the fight against crime. But the report also showed that the public is having difficulties distinguishing between a civilian officer and a proper officer. Shadow home secretary David Davis said the research appeared

to acknowledge that CSOs were having no discernible effect on crime figures. ""While the answer is a lot more real police", the government wants to recruit 25,000 people who can't arrest anyone," he said. BBC home affairs correspondent Danny Shaw said the research is inconclusive. There are about 3,500 CSOs in England and Wales but the government intends to have 25,000 on the streets by 2008 at a cost of £50m. They already have powers to hand out fines for a wide range of offences. The Serious Organised Crime and Police Bill proposes extra powers to search suspects, enforce licensing offences, direct traffic and deter beggars.

politics 240.txt Sport betting rules in spotlight A group of MPs and peers has called for a tightening of regulations controlling betting on sport. The Parliamentary Group on Betting and Gaming held a substantial inquiry into betting last year. It followed fears that a massive increase in betting on sport, such as that done using the internet and mobile phones, has led to more cheating. The all-party group recommended 15 ways to protect punters and improve the integrity of sports betting. They include a proposal for raising the maximum jail sentence for gambling cheats above the current two years. Lord Condon, head of the International Cricket Council's anti-corruption unit, who originally made the call for longer prison sentences, said the two-year penalty was derisory". ""You could get a bigger sentence for failing to pay your hotel bill criminally than you could for corruption in major sports. ""Symbolically", a higher penalty, perhaps as the Bill passes through the two Houses," might be appropriate." The report recommended the governing bodies of sports have a say in the type of bets offered to punters"," and for bookmakers to set up ""audit trails"" - something the new betting exchanges already do - to allow suspicious betting patterns to be traced. Lord Faulkner of Worcester", who chaired the inquiry," said: ""Whilst we accept that the greater part of sports betting is neither corrupt nor unfair to punters"," the evidence convinces us that the growth of betting exchanges - because of the facility they provide to bet against a result - has increased the potential for corruption. ""It is important that the government works with sporting administrators to review the difficulties faced by governing bodies in convicting the guilty and penalising them appropriately." The panel's aim was to try to define what constitutes cheating", assess how much might be going on and suggest what the government might do to put it right. As well as the growth of internet and mobile phone betting, there has been the creation of betting exchanges which allow punters to fix odds between themselves. Betting exchanges allow punters to back (to win) but also lay (to lose) a horse. This means they can control their odds at winning by placing their money both ways.

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politics 241.txt Councils prepare to set tax rises Council tax in Scotland is set to rise by an average of about 4% in the coming year", BBC Scotland has learned. Authorities will decide final figures on Thursday when projected increases will be more than twice the rate of inflation, which is currently 1.6%. The finance minister has urged councils to limit increases but they have warned that they will struggle to maintain services unless funding is increased. They say much additional government money is for new initiatives. Scottish Finance Minister, Tom McCabe MSP," said: ""Last week in parliament I announced an additional £419m for core expenditure to local government in Scotland. ""That's a 5.5% increase and sits against an inflation rate of 1.6%"", so I think we have quite rightly said to councils this year that we would at the very least ask them to exercise restraint." Mr McCabe is also looking for local authorities to become more efficient and save money in coming years. He told BBC

Radio Scotland's Sunday Live programme: ""Here in Scotland we have 32 councils who all have their own individual collection systems for council tax,"" they have their own payroll systems and their own human resource systems. ""We think there has to be opportunities there for rationalisation and using the money saved to reinvest in frontline services." The councils' umbrella organisation Cosla", which provided BBC Scotland with the indicative figures for next year," warned that councils would face a continuous struggle to maintain services. Mr McCabe has promised them about £8.1bn next year. ""However", most of the increase is targeted to new initiatives and councils will experience difficulties in maintaining core services," a Cosla spokesman said. Cosla says that it is willing to work with the executive on finding efficiency savings but that these will not be enough to maintain services. They say the funding plans for the next three years will see councils lose more of the share of public spending. The Conservatives accuse the Scottish Executive of using the council tax to raise funds because it is too afraid to raise income tax. The Tory finance spokesman, Brian Monteith MSP, said: Its a form of disguise... yet again we see that council tax is being used as a way of passing on costs. ""Scared of actually using its three pence income tax that it could put up," what we've seen over the years is more and more burdens being put onto local authorities and the council tax payer having to pick up the bill." There are also warnings that unless funding to councils is increased in the next few years then services may have to be reduced. Linda Knox", Director of the Scottish Local Authority Management Centre at Strathclyde University," said: ""With this current settlement the increase is slowing. At the same time," the burdens on councils are greater than they were. ""The settlement figures don't include pay increases and the executive is also requiring a substantial figure - in the area of £325m - in efficiency savings across the settlement period." Education will be protected from any cuts but Linda Knox says this will mean other services will suffer. She said: ""In practice"," that will mean a 4-5% cut for other services. On the face of it the settlement looks like an increase of about 9.7% but by the time you take into account other factors its probably only about 1% in real terms.""

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"politics 242.txt Whitehall shredding increasing - Tories Civil servants have drastically stepped up the shredding of official documents", figures compiled by the Tories suggest. Some government departments had doubled the number of documents being shredded ahead of the Freedom of Information Act's implementation on 1 January. Departments for defence, environment and trade, which had all increased file destruction, said they were following rules governing public records. But the Tories want the information commissioner to investigate. The Freedom of Information Act will for the first time give members of the public access to government records previously kept secret for 30 years. But BBC Political Correspondent James Hardy said the prospect of outsiders poking their noses into the inner workings of Whitehall appeared to be causing jitters among the mandarins. Liberal Democrat Alan Beith - who chairs the select committee which monitors the Department of Constitutional Affairs - said if the claims were true," Whitehall was ""acting entirely against the spirit of the new Act"". ""Both the information commissioner and the select committee will have to keep this issue under very close scrutiny." Fellow Lib Dem Norman Baker said the episode painted an ""unflattering picture of the inner workings of government"". ""It is clear that the government's initial enthusiasm for open government has turned to self-serving cynicism." Dr Julian Lewis", the Conservative spokesman for the Cabinet Office, said he had discovered a huge acceleration in shredding from a series of parliamentary answers. The Department of Work and P

ensions destroyed nearly 37,000 files last year - up 22,000 on four years ago when the Act was passed. The number of files destroyed by the Ministry of Defence and the departments of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Trade and Industry has also risen dramatically. Dr Lewis has called for an investigation by the information commissioner Richard Thomas. Earlier this week," Mr Thomas said he was looking into Cabinet Office orders telling staff to delete e-mails more than three months old. He said he ""totally condemned"" the deletion of e-mails to prevent their disclosure under freedom of information laws coming into force on 1 January. Government guidance said e-mails should only be deleted if they served ""no current purpose""", Mr Thomas said. A Cabinet Office spokeswoman said the move was not about the new laws or ""the destruction of important records"". The Freedom of Information Act will cover England", Wales and Northern Ireland from next year. Similar measures are being brought in at the same time in Scotland. It provides the public with a right of access to information held by about 100,000 public bodies, subject to various exemptions.

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"politics 243.txt MPs assess Scots fishing industry A group of MPs are on a two-day fact-finding mission to Scotland to gather evidence for a report into the UK's fishing industry. Members of Westminster's environment", food and rural affairs committee will be touring fish markets and talking to fish processors. They will also talk to Fisheries Minister Ross Finnie and scientists. MPs are deciding whether to recommend a new system of ""community quotas"" to conserve fish stocks. The aim is that fishing ports like Peterhead or Fraserburgh would be allocated a quota and local people would decide how to fish it. The scheme is a variation on the local management committees already being established by the European Union. Details are contained in a Royal Commission report for the UK Government", along with the more controversial idea of closing some mixed fishing grounds completely. Six members of the committee will be in Scotland to seek views from fishermen and processors in Aberdeen and Peterhead. They will also speak to Mr Finnie, representatives of the Royal Society and the Sea Fish Industry Authority. Committee chairman Austin Mitchell said some way has to be found of harvesting mixed fisheries without wasting stocks.

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"politics 244.txt Research fears over Kelly's views Scientists have expressed concerns that new education secretary Ruth Kelly's religious views could hamper vital scientific research. Ms Kelly", who is Catholic," is reported to be ""pro-life"" and has opposed embryo research. Medical Research Council Professor Nancy Rothwell said Ms Kelly's views mattered as she was responsible for training future scientists. The Department for Education and Skills would not comment on the concerns. A spokeswoman said: ""It is not news that Ms Kelly is a Catholic but we are not going into any details on this."" But she added that claims Ms Kelly was in charge of a £1bn university research budget were not true. It was down to the Higher Education Funding Council and the research councils to decide on universities' research allocations. British law is open to the cloning of human embryos to create stem cells", master cells that can develop into all the body's tissue types. This cloning activity is not permitted for reproductive purposes - only for research into new disease treatments. However, it is controversial because it involves the destruction of embryos. Professor Rothwell, who is also vice-president of research at Manchester University," told the Times Higher Education Supplement it would worry her ""a great deal"" if ministers were anti-stem cell. She said: ""The views of ministers in t

he DfES do matter as they are responsible for training the next generation of scientists. ""You can't have a higher education policy that is at odds with the government's science policy." Head of developmental genetics at the National Institute of Medical Research", Professor Robin Lovell-Badge," said he had witnessed the confused situation in the US where many religious groups opposed the practice. He said: ""If someone as senior as Ruth Kelly is not going to favour stem cell research we will end up with a similarly schizophrenic system in this country. It is very worrying." But fertility expert Lord Winston said he thought it was ""rather good"" ministers held ethical views. Concerns have also been raised by ""pro-choice"" organisations that Ms Kelly's views might affect sex education policy in schools. Family Planning Association chief executive", Anne Weyman," said teaching pupils about contraception and abortion were key. ""Young people must be informed about all the issues within sexual health," which include contraception and abortion. ""I think it is very important that the government maintains its commitment to the teenage pregnancy strategy." Currently", individual schools devise their own sex education policies based on a framework provided by the DfES. Ms Kelly has not set out her detailed views on either issue yet, but has said she intends to put parents first in education policy. This would include the quality of teaching, classroom discipline and academic standards in schools, she said.

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"politics 245.txt Army chiefs in regiments decision Milit  
ary chiefs are expected to meet to make a final decision on the future of Scotland's Army regiments. A committee of the Army Board", which is made up of the most senior defence figures, will discuss plans for restructuring regiments on Monday. The proposals include cutting Scotland's six single-battalion regiments to five and merging these into a super regiment. The plans have faced stiff opposition from campaigners and politicians alike. The committee's decision must be ratified by Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon and Prime Minister Tony Blair. It is expected that it will be made public next week. When ministers announced a reorganisation of the Army it drew a question mark over the futures of the Black Watch, the Kings Own Scottish Borderers, the Royal Scots, the Royal Highland Fusiliers and the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. In October, the Council of Scottish Colonels proposed the merger of the Royal Scots and the King's Own Scottish Borderers into a single battalion. Under their vision, it would be one of five in the new super regiment. The proposals to either merge or amalgamate the six regiments into a super regiment sparked a political outcry, with Labour backbenchers and opposition politicians opposing the plan. They felt the timing was insensitive because the Black Watch was in the frontline in Iraq, suffering casualties. The Save the Scottish Regiments campaigners were so angered they threatened to stand against Labour at the next general election. Speaking ahead of the expected Army Board meeting," a spokesman said: ""The government and the Army Board have spent the past four months attempting to trick serving soldiers and the public into thinking their planned changes for the Scottish regiments are for the good of the Army and for that of the serving soldier. ""They are very much not for the good and will destroy Scotland's regiments by moulding them into a single super regiment which will lead to severe recruitment problems", a loss of local connections to those regiments and a loss to Scotland of an important part of her heritage and, most importantly," her future - the regiments are the envy of armies around the world."" An alternative blueprint had been put forward by Labour MP Eric Joyce", who proposed going ahead with the merger while preserving the other regiments. For a brief time, there was speculation the prime minister might consider the plan, but that now seems unlikely. Speaking in

Scotland last week," Mr Blair said the aim was to preserve tradition but introduce a more effective structure and hinted that a super regiment was likely. He said: ""They don't want to get rid of the history or the traditions of the regiment or the local connections - far from it"," all they want to do is make sure they can transfer people easily across regiments and deploy them more flexibly." The prime minister said he hoped campaigners' concerns would be taken into account but the need for effective change had to be paramount.

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"politics 246.txt Student 'inequality' exposed Teenagers from well-off backgrounds are six times more likely to go to university than those from the most deprived areas"," a report says. The Higher Education Funding Council for England said more people went to university between 1994 and 2000. But the percentage of poorer students ""hardly changed at all""", said its chief executive, Sir Howard Newby. Increasingly more women than men went to university, while tuition fees and student loans made no major difference. The Hefce report, drawing on child benefits data, said teenagers in the richest areas could expect a better than 50% chance of going to university, while in the poorest neighbourhoods it was 10%. Participation at constituency level ranged from 69% in Kensington and Chelsea, 65% in the City of London and Westminster and 62% in Sheffield Hallam," down to 10% in Bristol South and Leeds Central and 8% in Nottingham North and Sheffield Brightside. Sir Howard said the report highlighted the ""entrenched divisions"" between rich and poor areas", but added it was a social as much as an educational problem. He told BBC News: ""We know", once children from deprived backgrounds get into university," they do very well. In fact surprisingly more go into postgraduate study than those from more affluent backgrounds. ""The issue is", I think," one of raising aspirations amongst those families and those communities that university is something for them and not for other people."" He said by the time universities traditionally dealt with pupils", between the ages of 16 and 18, it was too late. Instead they should be reaching out to communities and schools much earlier, even down to primary school level, to persuade them a university education was something they could aspire to, he said. But while the report revealed stark inequalities and exposed the extent of the challenge, there were some encouraging findings, he added. Tuition fees and student loans in England and Wales - and the different fee regime in Scotland - did not seem to have affected the choices of young people, even the poorest. The report also showed women were 18% more likely than men to enter higher education in 2000 - up from 6% in 1994. In the poorest areas, the gap was 30% in women's favour and growing faster than anywhere else. The Higher Education Minister, Kim Howells," said: ""We are working in schools to raise the attainment and aspiration of young people in disadvantaged areas."" Higher standards in schools would lead to greater participation in higher education. From 2006 upfront tuition fees in England would be removed", with grants for the less well off. The shadow education secretary, Tim Collins," said: ""It is clear from this report that children from disadvantaged areas are far more likely to have encountered poor standards in their secondary education. ""Tackling these must be the top priority for any government looking to improve university access."" The group which represents university vice-chancellors", Universities UK, said the new system of deferred fees in England, due to start in 2006, with grants and bursaries for poorer students," would encourage more of them to go into higher education. The National Union of Students argued the opposite - that the situation was ""likely to get much worse", with poorer students being restricted in choice and having to make decisions based on their financial situation rather than aspiration"". The tables below show the participation rate for each

Parliamentary constituency in Britain:

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"politics 247.txt Kennedy to make temple address Charles Kennedy is set to address 2",000 people at a Hindu temple as part of an appeal to ethnic minority voters. The Liberal Democrat leader will visit the Shri Swaminarayan Mandir Temple in Neasden," north west London. He will say Labour ""can no longer lay exclusive claim to the votes of Britain's ethnic minorities"". Mr Kennedy will also highlight the anger among people of ""all races"" over the Iraq war and call for a ""balanced approach"" to tackling terrorism. Saturday's speech comes days after the Lib Dems launched their ethnic minority mini-manifesto. Mr Kennedy is to tell the audience: ""Many people in Britain", of all races, cultures and religions," were angry about the way we were taken to war in Iraq. ""And they saw the principled stand the Liberal Democrats took at the time." He will also say that the Lib Dems want to ""restore Britain's reputation on the world stage"" by fighting international poverty and climate change", and protecting human rights. Mr Kennedy will say that a ""balanced approach"" to tackling terrorism would mean ""tough measures to make Britain safe - but not at the expense of people's fundamental legal rights like has happened at Belmarsh""". He will say it also means acting through the United Nations on terrorism. Mr Kennedy held talks with Tony Blair on Friday over government plans to hold terror suspects under house arrest. He said afterwards that the Prime Minister had offered some ""movement"" to address his concerns. The plans face trouble in the Lords if Conservative and Lib Dem opposition continues.

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"politics 248.txt David Blunkett in quotes David Blunkett - who has resigned as home secretary - built his reputation as a plain-speaking Yorkshire man. I fell in love with someone and they wouldn't go public and things started to go very badly wrong in the summer", and then the News of the World picked up the story. ""I tried for three years to make something work.""" Trust", plain-speaking and straight talking is something which matters so much to me as a politician and as a man that I have decided, of my own volition," to request an independent review of the allegations that I misused my position." "I don't think anyone can say I have said one thing in public and done another in private." "It would be dangerous territory if I wasn't practising what I preach which is to always accept responsibility," always accept the consequences of your actions. ""None of us believe countering terrorism is about party politics." "I accepted by necessity we have to have prevention under a new category which is to intervene before the act is committed", rather than do so by due process after the act is committed when it's too late, he said in reference to new anti-terrorism measures. Our work with the French government...has been hugely successful," said Mr Blunkett. The number of illegal immigrants detected in Dover has dropped dramatically." Strengthening our identity is one way of reinforcing people's confidence and sense of citizenship and well-being." "I foolishly thought as this was a celebrity edition it would be more relaxed than normal." "You wake up and you receive a phone call - Shipman's topped himself. You have just got to think for a minute: is it too early to open a bottle?"

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"politics 249.txt No election TV debate", says Blair Tony Blair has said he will not take part in a TV debate with his political rivals ahead of the next election. ""We answer this every election campaign and", for

the reasons I have given before, the answer is no," he said at his monthly news conference. In October Tory leader Michael Howard said Mr Blair would be running scared if he refused calls to go head-to-head. In recent years the leader of the opposition has always called for a debate, although it has never happened. Before the 2001 election, plans for a debate between Mr Blair, William Hague and Charles Kennedy collapsed. In 1997 a debate between Mr Blair and John Major was also cancelled when a format could not be agreed. Televised debates have become the high point of the US presidential election campaigns.

politics 250.txt What the election should really be about?

A general election is the best chance most pressure groups get to make a real impact on government policy. Here is how six leading lobbies plan to make sure their cause is being debated ahead of an expected Spring poll. We've called for the state pension to be increased from £79.60 to the pensioner credit guarantee level of £105.45. That's what we're calling for. Many pensioners are disadvantaged by the current system. If we've got one in five pensioners below the poverty line, we've got to make it more generous or have these people living in poverty. We've drawn up a pensioners' manifesto. This will be sent to each of the candidates in the 659 constituencies. They will be asked which of the top five issues, including the pension issue, they would support. Once we've got their responses we will publish the results within the constituencies and nationally as well. It's our way of putting the politicians on notice. We are trying to get across the fact that there are 11m voters over 60 in the country, they are more likely to vote than other sections of society and thirdly they are true swing voters. Before 1997 most pensioners voted Conservative. In 1997 and 2001 they voted Labour. But there is no guarantee they will vote for a Labour government this time around. They cannot take that vote for granted. Pensions generally will certainly be a big election issue even though the government has postponed the publication of Adair Turner's full report into the issue. He said the UK had one of the least generous pensions systems in the developed world. That the government takes seriously the impact of aviation on the environment. We haven't worked out specific plans but I imagine we will lobby political parties and incumbent MPs. Various local groups will do that in their particular areas and we will provide a national briefing. We don't have any large demonstrations planned but they can't be ruled out. It is hard to say whether we will be successful. We have got the issue in the public consciousness to an extent, but it is difficult to say whether an election will raise its importance in the public mind or whether it will be pushed out by big issues like Iraq. Repealing the Hunting Bill. We are challenging the use of the Parliament Act 1949 in a High Court action. We are hoping to hear in the New Year. Whichever way the court rules the other side will appeal so we expect it to fall plumb in electioneering time. When the ban comes into force on 18 February we will be going to the European Court because no compensation is being paid. So there's a lot of legal territory to go. We are trying to engage with the ministers by demonstrating and talking. Whatever intelligence we get we will try to turn up and speak to whoever it is. (Rural affairs minister) Alun Michael has avoided us and cancelled engagements so that makes it difficult. It is not intimidatory - on the whole it is groups of angry housewives. Of course there is an element of shouting because people are angry but there is no violence because that does not achieve anything. It will fall plumb in the run up to the most important general election Tony Blair will ever face. It's exactly what the prime minister did not want. He wanted the issue off the table until after the election. People using live animals as targets for sport both here and abroad. The reason for including abroad is because of trophy hunting. It is another sort of form of shooting for sport. The principle is the same whether it's a tiger or a pheasant. We will widely publicise

e what's happening in relation to trophy hunting. We will publicise the darker aspects of the target animal industry the UK. We will seek to get pledges from individual MPs and would-be MPs saying that they are against the use of animals as targets for sports. We would like the support of political parties but I think a general election is very much to do with pledges MPs make to their electors. With hunting we had many MPs who were happy to say they were against it. I think what we will get is a very real climbing up the agenda. Whether or not we will get a ban I am not sure. But it will mobilise public opinion. Everything we do will reduce animal suffering and in time that will lead to a ban. The issue that we think is the most important for this election is choice. The language of consumerism is very commonplace in government and across the political spectrum. Choice as an ideology is beginning to be the privatisation of this decade. It's become an issue in itself but what's really missing from the debate is the consumer's choice in that. Choice is not choice at all if all you have to choose from is two failing schools. We have seen so many pensions mis-selling scandals and in the pensions industry there's a maximum of choice but a minimum quality in that. We want choice on the consumer's terms - that means clear and accessible information to operate that choice. Firstly, we have our website. It features our campaigns and changes every day. Secondly through our 700,000 members who communicate with us. Thirdly through the media and also what we will be doing is holding a pre-election conference. We will invite the opinion formers, MPs, journalists and others. The idea is that we open up communications between members of the public and the politicians. I think we will be successful. It's very much the language being used by the main political parties. Politicians on all sides are very sensitive to this issue they want to be seen to be responding to this issue. Fuel duty is a large part of operational costs for road haulage workers. We have been hearing about this proposed increase of 1.92p per litre that Gordon Brown has been postponing and postponing. Tuppence does not sound like a great deal but every year if you operate one vehicle that's an increase of about £750. If you're running 10 vehicles it's obviously 10 times that. If fuel duty does rise we will be absolutely horrified. There will be a huge effect throughout the industry and I would not be surprised if you see widespread demonstrations. What it will mean is there will be a number of firms going out of business. We will continue to do what we have always done we keep the issue in the trade press. Regrettably it's one of those stories that it is getting harder to get into the national press. Whatever we do, the public don't like lorries - they see us as a complaining minority. But they don't realise that when you see a car on the road it is probably going to work, when you see a lorry it's already at work.

politics 251.txt Brown and Blair face new rift claims For the umpteenth time, Tony Blair and Gordon Brown are said to have declared all out war on each other. This time the alleged rift is over who should take the credit for the government's global aid and debt initiatives, particularly in the wake of the tsunami disaster - an issue many hoped and believed was above such things. It dominated the prime minister's monthly news conference, which saw Mr Blair start in full irritation mode as he was forced to bat away question after question about his relationship with his neighbour. As he told journalists: I am not interested in what goes in and out of newspapers. There is a complete unity of purpose." And he again heaped praise on Mr Brown saying he was doing a great job", and would continue doing it - although he would not commit to any job for Mr Brown after the election. So why did he arrange his press conference at the last moment so it coincided with Mr Brown's long-arranged keynote speech on aid and debt, he was asked? By now Mr Blair had moved from irritation mode to his barely disguised fury setting. He snapped back that the hacks knew very w

ell what the operational reasons were for the timing of his press conference. Well, not really, as it happens. And he repeated what a great man Gordon was and how united they were, before again sneering that he took absolutely no notice of what went in and out of the newspapers," preferring to get on with the job of doing the best for the country and the world. Although in the next breath he declared: ""I get increasingly alarmed by what I read in the newspapers"" before catching himself on and quickly adding: ""In so far as I read them of course."" He probably had good reason to be alarmed because the newspapers had been full of stories about the claimed open warfare between the two men. As far as the timing of the prime minister's press conference is concerned", there are two options. The first is that it was a calculated attempt to upstage the chancellor and seize back the initiative on the big issue of the moment. If that is the case it suggests that even the fear of seriously negative newspaper headlines is not enough to stop the squabbling. The second option is that it was an unavoidable coincidence, which would suggest the government has lost its once-famed ability to strictly co-ordinate announcements - through the infamous Downing Street grid - to avert just such allegations. Either way, the effect was the same - to overshadow the big announcements of government policy on a hugely pertinent issue. And there had been previous suggestions that the new year had started with a fresh outbreak of the warfare between the two men. Firstly, the prime minister insisted on Wednesday that he had been intimately involved in the development of the proposals to get G8 countries to freeze debt repayments from the tsunami-hit countries. It was claimed he had been embarrassed by the fact that Gordon Brown appeared to have taken the initiative over the government's response to the disaster while Mr Blair was still on holiday in Egypt. Then, as if to pour fuel on the flames, both men separately spoke about working on tsunami or wider aid and development policy with their cabinet colleagues Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, Aid minister Hilary Benn and Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott - without mentioning the other. All this came amid fresh claims that Mr Brown was still seething that he had been excluded from a prominent role in general election planning and had, as a result," started to set out his own platform. The fact that he used an article in the Guardian newspaper to set out what he believed ""should"" be in the manifesto", has embarked on a mini tour of Britain to set out his aid plans and will next week visit Africa on the same mission - often seen as the prime minister's ""turf"" - has only added to the impression of rival camps operating entirely independently of each other. The prime minister denied all that as well", repeating his insistence that it was inconceivable the economy and the chancellor would not be at the centre of the election campaign. But the big fear with many on the Labour benches now is that, unless a lid can be put on the speculation over the rivalry, it may even threaten to undermine the election campaign itself.

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"politics 252.txt Blair 'said he would stand down' Tony Blair promised Gordon Brown he would stand down before the next election", a new book about the chancellor claims. But the prime minister changed his mind following intervention from allies in the Cabinet," according to the book. The book by Sunday Telegraph journalist Robert Peston said the pair had ""mutual animosity and contempt"" for each other. The book", Brown's Britain, said Tony Blair felt by November 2003 he had lost voters' trust. The author's sources," all unnamed ""allies"" of Mr Blair and Mr Brown", said the prime minister felt the Iraq war had undermined him and that he was no longer an asset to the Labour Party. The book, serialised in the Sunday Telegraph," alleges that Mr Blair told the chancellor at a dinner hosted by deputy PM John Prescott in November 2003 of

his intention to stand down. ""At that stage he saw Gordon Brown and said", 'look you are the next most influential member of the government, I need your help to get through the next year," Mr Peston said. I myself recognise that I'm going to have to stand down before the election but help me to get through the year and I will then stand down.'"" But he changed his mind in June 2004", following intervention from allies in the Cabinet and the suspicion that the chancellor was deliberately manoeuvring against him," the book claims. Mr Peston told BBC News: ""My understanding is that they are not nearly as close or as friendly as they once were. ""What the book says is there now a pretty profound mutual mistrust", mutual animosity. ""I think in public you see this double act pretending everything is alright but in private I don't think the relationship is good because Brown", understandably," feels deeply betrayed - particularly over this issue of the leadership." There has been fresh speculation of a rift recently", following their separate responses to the Asian tsunami. Rumours of a rift were fuelled by the sudden decision to hold Mr Blair's monthly media conference at the same time as a long-planned speech by Mr Brown on UK plans to tackle global poverty with a new ""Marshall Plan"" for Africa. There was speculation the pair were trying to outdo each other's response to the disaster. Former welfare minister Frank Field MP criticised the reported rivalry between the pair on GMTV's Sunday Programme. ""What sort of model does it give to the nation when the two most important political leaders do nothing but fight it out together or use their aides to fight it out?"" the Labour MP for Birkenhead asked. He said the prime minister should sack Mr Brown", but did not believe Mr Blair was strong enough to do so. Conservative policy co-ordinator David Cameron, MP for Witney," added: ""If it wasn't so serious it would be funny. ""But it is serious - you've got the two most senior people in the government not concentrating on fighting crime", poverty or dirty hospitals - they are fighting each other." Carol Walker", BBC News 24 political correspondent," added: ""There is a real concern that this could undermine the general election campaign. ""And clearly it is very bad news for the government at a time when it is trying to explain what it is doing to respond to the terrible problems thrown up by the tsunami disaster.""

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"politics 253.txt Blair dismisses quit claim report Tony Blair has dismissed reports he told Gordon Brown he would quit before the next general election. ""You don't do deals over jobs like this", the prime minister told BBC One's Breakfast with Frost programme. According to a new book, Brown's Britain, Mr Blair went back on a pledge to make way for Mr Brown after Cabinet allies intervened in June 2004. Mr Blair said the claims were reheated from six months ago"" and that he was concentrating on running the country. Mr Blair said: ""I've dealt with this six months ago. I said then you don't do deals over jobs like this - you don't. ""What both of us are actually concentrating on are the issues that concern the country." The book", by Sunday Telegraph journalist Robert Peston and serialised in the newspaper," said the pair had ""mutual animosity and contempt"" for each other. It claims Tony Blair felt by November 2003 he had lost voters' trust because of the Iraq war and that he was no longer an asset to the Labour Party. And that at a dinner hosted by Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott he told Mr Brown of his intention to stand down. According to Mr Peston the prime minister said: ""Help me to get through the year and I will then stand down." But he then changed his mind in June 2004", following intervention from allies in the Cabinet and the suspicion that the chancellor was deliberately manoeuvring against him," according to the book. Mr Peston told BBC News: ""My understanding is that they are not nearly as close or as friend

dly as they once were. ""What the book says is there is now a pretty profound mutual mistrust", " mutual animosity. ""I think in public you see this double-act pretending everything is alright", but in private I don't think the relationship is good because Brown, understandably," feels deeply betrayed - particularly over this issue of the leadership." But", in a wide-ranging BBC interview covering issues such as the Asian tsunami disaster, the Middle East peace process and Northern Ireland," Mr Blair said: ""When you get to the top in politics you get this huge swell around you. ""All sorts of people make all sorts of claims and counter-claims." He admitted to a ""sense of frustration"" about the allegations which he said had been made ""countless times"". There has been fresh speculation of a rift recently", following their separate responses to the Asian tsunami. These rumours were fuelled by Mr Blair's decision to hold his monthly media conference at the same time as a long-planned speech by Mr Brown on UK plans to tackle global poverty with a new ""Marshall Plan"" for Africa. There was speculation the pair were trying to outdo each other's response to the disaster. But the prime minister said he had discussed these claims with the chancellor and dismissed them as a ""load of nonsense"". Former welfare minister Frank Field MP said the prime minister should sack Mr Brown", but did not believe Mr Blair was strong enough to do so. Tory leader Michael Howard accused the prime minister and Mr Brown of ""squabbling like schoolboys"". He told Sky News' Sunday with Adam Boulton: ""This is the politics of the playground and Britain really does deserve better." The Liberal Democrat parliamentary chairman Matthew Taylor said the personal ambition of Mr Blair and Mr Brown was ""getting in the way of good government"". ""Either they need to grow up and put their squabbles to one side or they cannot expect the electorate to support a divided government at the next election." During the interview Mr Blair also said the former home secretary David Blunkett would play a ""big role"" at the general election.

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politics 254.txt Could rivalry overshadow election? Tony Blair and Gordon Brown are desperately trying to stuff the genie of their rivalry back into the bottle. Along with any number of senior cabinet colleagues", they are insisting their only job is to win the next election and govern in the best interests of Britain. It is a message they are aiming directly at their backbenchers who are becoming irritated and even unnerved by the continuing claims and counter claims surrounding this alleged rift. Ian Gibson, for example, urged the two men to stop squabbling," declaring: ""For goodness sake", sometimes you have to rise above petulance and make sure that you do your job as effectively as you can." Those with slim majorities are particularly fearful that the rift could hit their own hopes of re-election. Tony Blair will seek to reassure Labour MPs on Monday evening at their first meeting of the new year at Westminster - a behind-closed doors meeting which Gordon Brown is thought likely to also attend to show unity. Meanwhile the likes of Health Secretary John Reid and Labour peer Lord Haskins are warning of the electoral dangers of allowing this soap opera to continue. And they have both warned the rival camps to stop spreading the poison. Lord Haskins even suggested Mr Blair should reinstate Mr Brown as the central figure in the election planning. But this particular genie is unusually reluctant to return to captivity and many fear it is simply too late to repair the damage. They believe they will be fighting the next election with the sounds of open warfare between the two men ringing in their ears. And it matters little whether the rift is real or", as some try to suggest, simply the product of newspaper headlines and Westminster gossip. Few in Westminster actually believe that, simply because the evidence appears to contradict it. For example, the weekend's attempts by both men to play down the divisions failed to

o do the trick. Even as they were both insisting on their unity of purpose and claiming they would not be swayed by newspaper stories," they still managed to stir the speculation with their comments. Mr Blair talked about the ""New"" Labour manifesto - a move which seemed calculated to irritate the chancellor", who has long rejected the label. And Mr Brown pointedly refused to deny claims the prime minister had reneged on a deal to hand him the premiership last year. That claim was repeated in Robert Peston's book, a book which amply demonstrates this corrosive Downing Street soap opera is nowhere near its final act. For his part, Mr Brown insists his only motivation was to get Labour re-elected. The trouble is, both men have fallen short of offering simple," straightforward denials of the central claims. So they have both been accused of actually making matters worse by feeding the speculation with their own behaviour. The first thing to be said is that these suggestions have not come from nowhere. They started with and are sustained by ""friends"" of the two men. One only had to listen to the chancellor's friend and former spin chief Charlie Whelan last week to understand that there is a real anger from this camp at the prime minister's apparent attempts to confound Mr Brown's leadership ambitions. But it is not just public pronouncements from ex-aides. There are whispered briefings to selected journalists from both sides. It is no secret in Westminster", for example, that Downing Street believes the chancellor is indulging in a mammoth sulk and acting in a petty and deliberately provocative manner. Then there are the actions of the men themselves. Gordon Brown sets out what is seen as a rival manifesto then appears to embark on his own personal campaign. The prime minister responds by scheduling his monthly press conference to clash with a keynote speech by the chancellor. Meanwhile large numbers of backbench MPs insist voters are either entirely uninterested in the chatter, which they believe is a media-only obsession, or that they fear for the efficient running of a government beset by such rivalry. Either way, there is universal agreement that if this goes on through the general election it can only do the Labour party serious damage. There are signs that the two men appreciate the dangers and both want to put a lid on all the speculation. But with probably only four months to the next election, that looks like being a particularly difficult trick to pull off.

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"politics 255.txt Brown in appeal for Labour unity Gordon Brown has made an appeal for unity after reports claimed Mr Blair went back on a pledge to stand down before the next general election. The chancellor would not comment on the reports", but insisted he would not be ""diverted or distracted"" from tackling the challenges faced by the country. His only ""motivation"" was to ensure Labour was re-elected", he insisted. Mr Blair earlier dismissed the claim he had reneged on a promise to stand aside for Gordon Brown as old news. According to a new book, Brown's Britain by Sunday Telegraph journalist Robert Peston, Mr Blair went back on a pledge to make way for Mr Brown after Cabinet allies intervened in June 2004. In an interview with BBC One's Breakfast with Frost," Mr Blair said: ""I've dealt with this six months ago. I said then you don't do deals over jobs like this - you don't. ""What both of us are actually concentrating on are the issues that concern the country." In a separate interview with BBC political editor Andrew Marr", Mr Brown said: ""It's very important that we all do what we can in a unified way to ensure the election of a Labour government. ""I think it is very important to stress that that is the motivation that I have. ""That is my purpose in politics", and that is what every day I seek to do. And I am not going to be diverted or distracted, nor is Tony Blair," by newspaper stories or books or rumours or gossip. ""The only reason why we are in government is to get on with the job in a unified way to deal w

ith the challenges facing this country." Mr Brown also said he had discussed the general election campaign with the prime minister on Saturday and pledged to play his part as he had been asked to do. But Mr Peston said the pair had ""mutual animosity and contempt"" for each other and that Mr Blair had decided in November 2003 he would quit because he felt he had lost voters' trust because of the Iraq war. He then changed his mind in June 2004", following intervention from allies in the Cabinet and the suspicion that the chancellor was deliberately manoeuvring against him," according to the book. Andrew Marr said: ""This is enormously damaging. Gordon Brown knows it as well as Tony Blair. ""I think the relationship is genuinely", privately," very poor indeed. Things are very difficult." He added: ""Lots of ministers believe Tony Blair will attempt to move Gordon Brown out of the Treasury after the election. ""That depends on whether there's still a Labour government and their majority." Senior MPs are expected to raise concerns about the latest reports of infighting at the regular meeting of Labour backbenchers on Monday. Health Secretary John Reid said those fuelling such reports were damaging Labour's re-election chances and would not be easily forgiven. Fresh speculation of a rift recently followed Mr Blair and Mr Brown's separate responses to the Asian tsunami. These rumours were fuelled by Mr Blair's decision to hold his monthly media conference at the same time as a long-planned speech by Mr Brown on UK plans to tackle global poverty with a new ""Marshall Plan"" for Africa. There was speculation the pair were trying to outdo each other's response to the disaster. But the prime minister said he had discussed these claims with the chancellor and dismissed them as a ""load of nonsense"". Tory leader Michael Howard accused the prime minister and Mr Brown of ""squabbling like schoolboys"". Liberal Democrat parliamentary chairman Matthew Taylor said the personal ambition of Mr Blair and Mr Brown was ""getting in the way of good government"".

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"politics 256.txt Blair pledges unity to Labour MPs Tony Blair has sought to reassure Labour backbenchers that nothing will stand in the way of the party's bid for a third term in power. Mr Blair was speaking to MPs amid fresh rumours of a rift with Gordon Brown. A new book says the prime minister went back on a pledge to Mr Brown to stand down before the next general election. The chancellor has said he is focused on winning the poll and is due to join election supremo Alan Milburn for a Labour poster launch this week. Mr Blair told the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) on Monday: ""I know from everyone here", in Cabinet and government," nothing is going to get in the way of a unified Labour Party with a unified position and winning the third term people desperately need." The prime minister and his chancellor arrived within seconds of each other and seemingly in good spirits at the start of the meeting which lasted around an hour. A new book", Brown's Britain by Sunday Telegraph journalist Robert Peston, says Mr Blair went back on a pledge to make way for Mr Brown after Cabinet allies intervened in June 2004. It has caused a new wave of concern among Labour MPs gearing up to defend their seats in an election, widely expected to be held in May," and several members are understood to have lined up to express their discontent at the PLP meeting. Health Secretary John Reid earlier warned that Labour members would not easily forgive anybody fuelling damaging speculation. He told BBC News: ""Those who co-operate or inspire these books", in my view, have to know that, whatever the short-term political or personal advantage that they think they might secure, they always do it by damaging the record," the unity and the re-election chances of the Labour Party and the government." Mr Blair on Sunday dismissed claims of broken promises", saying: ""I've dealt with this six months ago. I said then you don't do deals over jobs like t

his - you don't." In a separate BBC interview", "Mr Brown said he and the prime minister would not be distracted by ""gossip""." "It's very important that we all do what we can in a unified way to ensure the election of a Labour government", "he said. On Monday, Mr Blair's spokesman said: The prime minister is determined that he will get on with the business of government because he believes that what people want." Mr Brown says he discussed the election campaign with Mr Blair on Saturday and promised to play his part. Mr Peston said the pair had ""mutual animosity and contempt"" . Mr Blair had decided in November 2003 he would quit because he felt he had lost voters' trust because of the Iraq war. He had then changed his mind in June 2004", " following intervention from Cabinet allies and suspicion that the chancellor was manoeuvring against him. Mr Brown allegedly said he could no longer believe anything Mr Blair told him. Conservative co-chairman Liam Fox likened the two men to ""self-obsessed schoolboys"" . Liberal Democrat parliamentary chairman Matthew Taylor said their personal ambition was ""getting in the way of good government"" . Ex-Labour leader Neil Kinnock said Mr Blair and Mr Brown could only deal with the media frenzy by continuing to say they would not allow a row to damage Labour or British interests. He told BBC Radio Five Live that Mr Brown would never encourage any kind of insurrection or coup.

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"politics 257.txt Blair and Brown criticised by MPs Labour MPs have angrily criticised Tony Blair and Gordon Brown amid renewed reports of a rift between the two men. A meeting of the Parliamentary Labour Party saw a succession of normally loyal members warn that feuding could jeopardise Labour's election hopes. The PM insisted nothing would derail Labour's campaign", despite a new book saying he has upset his chancellor by backing out of a pledge to stand aside. Mr Brown will again be in the public eye at the party's new poster launch. In what the party had hoped would be perceived as a show of unity, he is due to line up alongside Alan Milburn - the man controversially appointed as the party's election supremo - and deputy leader John Prescott for the event in London on Tuesday. Relations between Mr Brown and Mr Milburn are widely reported to be cool ever since Mr Blair brought the latter back into the Cabinet to run Labour's election campaign," a role successfully carried out by Mr Brown in both 1997 and 2001. Mr Blair told the Parliamentary Labour Party on Monday: ""I know from everyone here", in Cabinet and government," nothing is going to get in the way of a unified Labour Party with a unified position and winning the third term people desperately need." The prime minister and his chancellor arrived within seconds of each other for the meeting of the PLP and were seemingly in good spirits as it started. New speculation about the state of their relationship was sparked by claims in Brown's Britain", by Sunday Telegraph journalist Robert Peston," which suggested Mr Blair went back on a pledge to make way for Mr Brown. Labour's Paul Flynn said Mr Blair and Mr Brown had a ""scorching"" from MPs adding: ""It was a Parliamentary Labour Party meeting like no other." Backbencher Stephen Pound said some MPs had threatened to expose those fuelling the reports if Mr Blair and Mr Brown did not ""stop this nonsense," this poisonous briefing"". Lord Campbell-Savours", a former MP," challenged Mr Brown to deny reports that he had told the prime minister he did not believe anything he said. Mr Prescott said MPs were entitled to complain about discipline after reading recent press reports. ""They told us very clearly", it was the troops telling the leaders: get in line," he told BBC Radio 4's Today on Tuesday. Mr Prescott said there were occasional disagreements in any government. But he argued Mr Blair and Mr Brown could work successfully together and had produced a strong economy and better public services. The new book claims Mr Prescott hosted a

dinner in November 2003 where the prime minister told Mr Brown he would stand down before the next election because he had lost trust over the Iraq war. He had then changed his mind in June 2004, following intervention from Cabinet allies and suspicion that the chancellor was manoeuvring against him, writes Mr Peston. Mr Prescott said there was a dinner but the discussions were confidential. Of course as a waiter for 10 years I have a professional ability here", "he joked. Mr Blair has insisted he has done no deals over the premiership while Mr Brown says he will not let gossip"" distract him from helping a unified election campaign. The Conservatives say the two men are behaving like squabbling school boys and the Liberal Democrats claim personal ambition is obstructing good government.

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"politics 258.txt Labour MPs' fears over squabbling If there is one thing certain to stiffen the spines of Labour MPs it is the prospect of losing their seats at a general election. And it was largely that fear that led to Tony Blair and Gordon Brown being read the riot act during a meeting of the parliamentary Labour party. The views expressed by both backbenchers and Labour peers over the claimed squabbling between the two men starkly demonstrated the widely-held view within the Labour party that the two most powerful figures in the government are jeopardising the next election. As one hugely-disgruntled backbencher said before the meeting: ""It is time they realised it's not just my seat they are threatening but if they go on like this they could put the election in doubt." " It is a sentiment that is now running throughout the Labour benches with MPs eager to underline the message to their leaders to stop the squabbling and get on with the job at hand. As Paul Flynn said: ""What has deeply upset the party is in this time of all times", when we wanted to come together, we wanted to lead on the global issues, to change politics for the next decade, the whole thing was wrecked by a piece of childishness by the two main people in the party," two people we greatly respect." " Stephen Pound echoed the message", " saying: ""We know that the one thing that could entirely jeopardise what we are trying to achieve", not for the Labour Party but for this country," is the appearance of division. We remember the 1980s"". They backed the suggestion that unless the squabbling stopped", " the people briefing on behalf of the two men would be ""named and shamed"". The dressing down appears to have done the trick", with Mr Brown joining his alleged rival Alan Milburn - who the prime minister put in charge of election planning in Mr Brown's stead - and Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott at an election poster launch. But the effect of all this is to have achieved two things. Firstly, nobody is attempting to suggest any more that the stories of the rift between the chancellor and the prime minister are fictions created by the media and authors. Even Mr Prescott admitted that, had he still been a backbencher, he would have been giving Mr Blair and Mr Brown the same message. Secondly it has also underlined the view that the election campaign has, to all intents and purposes, kicked off. But whether the telling off and the subsequent change in behaviour by the two men will do any good - or can even be sustained through the campaign - remains to be seen. Even as the MPs were expressing their fears it emerged that, while Mr Brown is in Africa for a week," the prime minister is to deliver a keynote speech on election themes for a third term. And he is expected to repeat his recent insistence that the next manifesto will be ""New"" Labour through and through. Similarly", some were pointing out that the chancellor, during the election poster launch, once again refused to deny the claim that he told the prime minister he could never trust anything he said. None the less, what some believe now is that the effect of the warnings from the backbenchers will actually be to silence the Brown camp, ef

fectively strengthening the prime minister's hand. For example, will those Brow  
nite briefers suggest their man is unhappy at the prime minister's timing or su  
bject matter, as may have been the case in the past? What all seem agreed on, h  
owever, is that this sniping simply cannot be allowed to go on through the elec  
tion campaign. Mind you, we have heard similar pledges before.

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"politics 259.txt 'Poll Idols' face first hurdles Vote Fo  
r Me - ITV1's Pop Idol style talent contest for would-be politicians - finally  
hits our screens this week. Over the next four days", hundreds of potential ca  
ndidates will be whittled down by a panel of experts and public vote. The winne  
r will then be encouraged to stand as an independent at the next general electi  
on," which is expected in the spring. But opinion is divided on whether any of  
the potential candidates unearthed so far have got what it takes to make it in  
politics. ""Any of them would make competent MPs"," former independent MP Marti  
n Bell insisted on BBC Radio 4's Today programme. Mr Bell, who will be offerin  
g his advice to the contestants on Wednesday, argues that Westminster has its s  
hare of odd balls"" and the show will engage ordinary voters. ""If it gets more  
people voting and more people interested in politics there is no harm in tha  
t"," he said. But Sir Bernard Ingham, Margaret Thatcher's former press secretar  
y, took a less charitable view, accusing the programme of corrupting politic  
s"". He said the producers would not achieve their aim of re-engaging voters  
""with that bunch of nutters"". To give Sir Bernard his dues", Monday evening's  
opening episode did attract more than a smattering of eccentrics and self-publi  
cists. Among those chancing their arm were a druid priest and a former porn sta  
r, who insisted on removing her top to make her point about the legalisation of  
brothels. Among the more eccentric policy proposals was a public holiday on Bru  
ce Forsyth's birthday and Bill Oddie for prime minister. The show follows the t  
ime-honoured Pop Idol format, with queues of nervous hopefuls and a panel of th  
ree experts judging their performance. The contestants were given 60 seconds t  
o present their manifestos. Then the final 25 were tested on their lobbying abi  
lity. They were then cross-examined by the panel, which was chaired by ex-ITN p  
olitical editor John Sergeant, with television host Lorraine Kelly taking the N  
icki Chapman role. But the real star of the show is Kelvin MacKenzie, in the Si  
mon Cowell," Mr Nasty seat. The former Sun editor dispensed a stream of well-c  
rafted insults and one-liners. His advice for one young contestant was to ""get  
a haircut and a brain transplant"". Wheelchair user Kevin Donnellon was asked:  
""Why on earth do you want our elected representatives to be disabled?"" ""Do  
n't you care about the Inuit?"""", implored guitar-toting environmental campaig  
ner Barry Lim. ""I don't care about them. I care about myself and when the su  
n's shining I think - fantastic", replied Mr MacKenzie. Mr Lim later reduced t  
he panel to fits of giggles as he outlined his plan to make people do community  
service instead of paying taxes. When the prime minister turns to the chancello  
r and says how much have we got in the coffers Mr Brown, he says well, prime mi  
nister, bad news, all the houses in Britain have been painted but actually nobo  
dy has paid any tax, observed Mr MacKenzie. That was an total disaster. I just  
couldn't seem to think of things to say," a crestfallen Mr Lim confided in the  
show's presenter, Jonathan Maitland. Irfan Hanif, a 25-year-old doctor from Bol  
ton, made a good impression, even if he was a little thrown by Mr MacKenzie's s  
uggestion that instead of being treated by the NHS, young drunks should given a  
good beating"" and left to die. Dominic Carman - son of late libel lawyer Georg  
e Carman - was voted through to the final 25", on a platform of cutting defence  
spending to boost education. Opinion was more divided over Rodney Hylton-Pott  
s," a 59-year-old convicted fraudster. Mr MacKenzie thought the smooth-talking

former solicitor - with a hardline on crime and immigration - deserved a chance to progress. ""He could join the rest of the crooks in the Houses of Parliament." But Ms Kelly said she ""would not trust him as far as she could throw him"". The series continues throughout the week", with the public given the chance to evict one prospective MP every night. ITV will not fund the election campaign for the eventual winner, but the publicity could give the winner a flying start over other candidates.

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"politics 260.txt Labour seeks to quell feud talk Labour's leadership put on a show of unity at a campaign poster launch after MPs criticised Tony Blair and Gordon Brown over reports of their rift. Mr Brown was joined at the launch by John Prescott and Alan Milburn", the man controversially put in charge of election planning by Mr Blair. A private meeting on Monday saw normally loyal MPs warn that feuding could jeopardise their election hopes. It follows a new book charting disputes between prime minister and chancellor. The event was the first time Mr Milburn has shared a platform with the chancellor since taking Mr Brown's traditional poll planning role. But the pair chatted amicably and Mr Brown insisted he was happy with his current campaign task. Asked about how he would deal with claims that he did not trust the prime minister," Mr Brown replied: ""You can see that our record on the economy is about the British people trusting us to run the economy."" He refused to comment on the new book", saying nobody should be distracted from the business of government. Mr Brown later told reporters: ""Of course I trust the prime minister."" Downing Street cited that comment when reporters' suggested Mr Brown had pointedly failed to deny claims he had once told Mr Blair: ""There is nothing you could ever say to me now that I could ever believe"". Labour's new posters say Britain is enjoying the lowest inflation since the 1960s", lowest unemployment for 29 years and the lowest mortgage rates for 40 years. They urge voters not to let the Tories take things backwards. Mr Milburn promised a poll campaign ""which is upbeat", confident and above all else optimistic about the future of our country"". Conservative co-chairman Liam Fox derided the photo call", saying: ""The show of unity was the worst acting I have seen since Prisoner Cell Block H."" Labour had broken promises by raising taxes 66 times and brought the slowest economic growth in the English-speaking world", he said. The prime minister and chancellor faced backbench discontent at Monday's meeting of the Parliamentary Labour Party over claims made in journalist Robert Peston's new book. Mr Blair told MPs and peers: ""I know from everyone here", in Cabinet and government," nothing is going to get in the way of a unified Labour Party with a unified position and winning the third term people desperately need." Labour's Paul Flynn said the pair had had a ""scorching"" from MPs. On Tuesday", deputy prime minister Mr Prescott told BBC News: ""They told us very clearly", it was the troops telling the leaders: get in line." The new book claims Mr Prescott hosted a dinner in November 2003 where the prime minister told Mr Brown he would stand down before the next election because he had lost trust over the Iraq war. Mr Blair then changed his mind in June 2004", after Cabinet allies intervened and amid suspicion the chancellor was manoeuvring against him," writes Mr Peston. Mr Prescott said there was a dinner but the discussions were confidential. ""Of course as a waiter for 10 years I have a professional ability here", he joked.

politics 261.txt Labour's election love-in Peace and love have been in short supply in the Labour party in recent days. If press reports are to be believed, Alan Milburn and Gordon Brown have been at each other's throats over the contents of Labour's next election manifesto. But the pair were all smiles on Tuesday morning, as they joined John Prescott to unveil Labour's l

atest poster campaign. The event - at Old Billingsgate Fish Market on the banks of the Thames - was a carefully choreographed show of unity. And the surest sign yet that we are heading for a general election in the next few months. It was also one of the most bizarre photo opportunities of recent years. The first inkling something slightly odd was afoot was when - in place of the soft rock music normally chosen for such occasions - Labour's speakers crackled to life with the sound of Booker T and the MGs. Then a VW camper van trundled into view, decked out in that most mind-bending of psychedelic messages - lowest mortgage rate for 40 years"". As the side-door slid open", it looked for one glorious moment as if the Cabinet had decided to bury their differences and go on the road together, Scooby Doo-style. But, sadly," it wasn't the Cabinet who had raided the dressing-up box - just six rather ill-at-ease looking Labour students. Two were dressed as Regency dandies - to unveil a poster trumpeting ""the longest period of economic growth for 200 years"". Another pair of students were in a Beatle wig and Sgt Pepper jacket to highlight the ""lowest interest rates since the 1960s"". The remaining two were dressed in a vague approximation of disco chic to demonstrate the ""lowest unemployment since the seventies"". The politicians - led out by John Prescott - were soberly-suited as always. The event may have been designed to highlight Labour's economic success under Mr Brown", but there was little doubt who was in charge. The chancellor walked side-by-side with Mr Milburn, pointedly exchanging chit chat, as they approached the microphone. But it was Mr Milburn who took centre stage," speaking of the ""positive campaign"" the party hoped to stage in the ""coming weeks and months"". The mobile poster vans would ""let people know Britain is working again"". Mr Brown repeated the familiar mantras displayed on the posters and spoke of Labour's ""shared purpose"" and ""united dedication"". It was left to Mr Prescott to pay glowing tribute to the chancellor's record and", in a final flourish, to produce his famous pledge card, from 1997, claiming Labour has met all of its promises. The event was carefully stage-managed to underline Cabinet unity. And, more specifically," to demonstrate the ""central role"" Mr Brown will play in the election campaign", despite being sidelined as campaign chief in favour of Mr Milburn. But keen students of body language will have had a field day. There was much forced smiling for the cameras, but only Mr Prescott, who revels in such occasions, seemed to be truly enjoying himself. Mr Milburn made a point of turning to face the chancellor, as he spoke, nodding thoughtfully. But it was the former health secretary's final gesture, placing an arm on Mr Brown's back as they walked away from the microphones, which was perhaps the most telling. Thanks for dropping by Gordon, he might have been saying.

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"politics 262.txt Howard taunts Blair over splits Tony Blair's feud with Gordon Brown is damaging the way the UK is governed"," Tory leader Michael Howard has claimed in a heated prime minister's questions. Mr Howard asked: ""How can they fight crime when they are fighting each other?"" That question was later unveiled as the headline for new Tory campaign posters. But Mr Blair dismissed the talk of splits and said people's priorities at the next elections would be on the economic successes achieved by Labour. ""He can stick up whatever he likes on billboards about something in a book but what the public will concentrate on are the low mortgages", low inflation, low unemployment that we delivered and that he failed to," he said. The chancellor is currently on a high-profile tour of Africa to highlight new anti-poverty plans. But before doing so, he insisted he still trusted Mr Blair, despite claims to the contrary in a new book. Brown's Britain, by Robert Peston, says there is mutual animosity between the two men. It claims Mr Blair said in November 2003 he would stand

down as prime minister before the next election. But he went back on his pledge after support from Cabinet allies and suspicion that Mr Brown was manoeuvring against him, it says. Mr Peston's book claimed that Mr Brown told Mr Blair: The re is nothing you could ever say to me now that I could ever believe." Mr Blair directly denied that quote on Wednesday. He again insisted there could be no deals about the premiership but twice declined directly to say whether or not he had offered to quit. The Tory leader countered that such agreements had been struck twice at dinners with the chancellor. He declared: ""He is the deals on meals prime minister. No wonder the chancellor is not a happy eater." He continued: ""How can there be discipline in schools when there is no discipline in government," how can they clean up our hospitals when they don't clean up their act?"" Mr Blair said he would not respond to ""tittle tattle in books"" and promised to hail Labour's record on the economy", waiting lists and law and order ""from now until polling day"". Later at their poster launch Tory co-chairman Liam Fox said his party would exploit opportunities to show how ""juvenile"" the prime minister and chancellor were. Labour staged a show of unity at its own poster launch on Tuesday", where Mr Brown was joined by Alan Milburn," who Mr Blair controversially put in charge of election planning in place of the chancellor. But Liberal Democrat leader Charles Kennedy told BBC News: ""The government is clearly split at the top. This kind of cosmetic exercise does not persuade anybody." Later this week Mr Blair is expected to outline the direction of his party's next election manifesto. The prime minister and chancellor faced backbench discontent at Monday's meeting of the Parliamentary Labour Party over claims made Mr Peston's book.

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"politics 263.txt How political squabbles snowball It's become commonplace to argue that Blair and Brown are like squabbling school kids and that they (and their supporters) need to grow up and stop bickering. But this analysis in fact gets it wrong. It's not just children who fight - adults do too. And there are solid reasons why even a trivial argument between mature protagonists can be hard to stop once its got going. The key feature of an endless feud is that everyone can agree they'd be better off if it ended - but everyone wants to have the last word. Each participant genuinely wants the row to stop", but thinks it worth prolonging the argument just a tiny bit to ensure their view is heard. Their successive attempts to end the argument with their last word ensure the argument goes on and on and on. (In the case of Mr Blair and Mr Brown, successive books are published, ensuring the issues never die.) Now this isn't because the participants are stupid - it's actually each individual behaving entirely rationally, given the incentives facing them. Indeed," there's even a piece of economic theory that explains all this. Nothing as obscure as ""post-neo-classical endogenous growth theory"" which the chancellor himself once quoted - but a ubiquitous piece of game theory which all respectable policy wonks are familiar with. It's often referred to as the ""prisoner's dilemma""", based on a parable much told in economics degree courses... about a sheriff and two prisoners. The story goes that two prisoners are jointly charged with a heinous crime, and are locked up in separate cells. But the sheriff desperately needs a confession from at least one of them, to provide enough evidence to convict them of the crime. Without a confession, the prisoners will get a minimal sentence on some trumped up charge. Clearly the prisoners' best strategy is to keep their mouths shut, and take the short sentence, but the clever sheriff has an idea to induce them to talk. He tells each prisoner separately, that if they confess - and they are the only one to confess - they'll be let off their crime. And he tells them that if they don't confess - and they are the only one not

to confess - they'll get life. Now, if you are prisoner confronted with this choice, your best bet is to confess. If your partner doesn't confess, you'll get off completely. And if your partner does confess, you'd better confess to ensure you don't get life. The result is of course, both prisoners confess, so the sheriff does not have to let either one off. Both prisoners' individual logic was to behave that way, even though both would have been better if they had somehow agreed to shut up. Don't worry if you don't entirely follow it - you can to look it up on Google, where there are 283,000 entries on it. The prisoners' dilemma and all its ramifications have truly captured economists in the last couple of decades. It is a parable used to describe any situation where there is an obvious sensible choice to be taken collectively, but where the only rational choice individually is to behave selfishly. A cold war arms race for example - a classic case where both Russia and America would be better off with just a few arms, rather than a lot of arms. But as long as each wants just a few more arms than the other, an arms race ensues with the results that the individually logical decision to buy more arms, results in arms levels that are too high. What economics tells us is that once you're in a prisoners' dilemma - unless you are repeating the experience many times over - it's hard to escape the perverse logic of it. It's no good just exhorting people to stop buying arms, or to stop arguing when all their incentives encourage them to carry on. Somehow, the incentives have to change. In the case of the Labour Party, if you believe the rift between Blair and Brown camps is as bad as the reports suggest, Solomon's wisdom needs to be deployed to solve the problem. Every parent knows there are ingenious solutions to arguments, solutions which affect the incentives of the participants. An example," is the famous rule that ""one divides", "the other chooses"" as a way of allocating a piece of cake to be sliced up between greedy children. In the case of an apparently endless argument", if you want it to come to an end, you have to ensure the person who has the last word is one who loses rather than the one who wins the row. The cost of prolonging the row by even one more briefing, or one more book for that matter, has to exceed the benefit of having the last word, and getting your point in. If the rest of the party can enforce that, they'll have the protagonists retreating pretty quickly.

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"politics 264.txt Blair looks to election campaign Tony Blair's big speech will be looked back on as the performance that kicked off the election campaign. That poll may still be about 16 weeks away", but there can be little doubt left that the campaign is now in full swing. The prime minister used his speech to a selected audience in the south east to set out his broad brush election manifesto. There was a detailed account of the government's past record," with a major emphasis on the economy and public services. There was an attempt to draw the line under the gossip surrounding his rift with Chancellor Gordon Brown. And there was an insistence on the importance of the party continuing to operate as unremittingly ""New"" Labour - although that may continue to irritate his chancellor. There was little in terms of concrete proposals or what might form manifesto pledges", "although the prime minister talked about a ""New Labour manifesto that will be aimed at all sections of society"". His was more a speech designed to remind people", and some in his own party, precisely what New Labour stood for, and to leave them in no doubt there would not be any shrinking away from that approach. And, for some, that means showing that New Labour actually does stand for something - that it is, as he said," more than ""an electoral device"". To that end he set out a broad programme aimed to appeal to both middle England voters who switched to the party in 1997 and stuck with it", possibly through some gritted teeth, in 2001, and to more traditional

lower income old Labour supporters. In a key section," he declared: ""In our third term we can achieve an unprecedented widening of opportunity and prosperity. ""For the first time ever a whole generation growing up with unbroken economic stability. Every family - not just the fortunate few - knowing their children will have an inheritance at adulthood. ""Every pupil in every secondary school guaranteed a place in university or a quality apprenticeship. Every adult - including those who missed out at school - able to get the skills they need to advance. ""Home ownership extended to its highest ever level and to families who have never before been able to afford it. ""The highest ever level of employment with everyone in work guaranteed a decent wage and decent conditions"". Under what is to be the general election slogan ""Britain is working""", the prime minister time and again insisted the future direction would be unremittingly New Labour. That might get under the skin of Mr Brown, but he also heaped praise on him as the most successful post-war chancellor Britain has had. Probably the greatest ideological divide between the two men, in so far as there is one," is about the degree of private finance allowed into the public services. An unremittingly ""New"" Labour manifesto", as the prime minister is happy to make plain, will stress the importance of that - the belief patients and parents, for example, want a choice of good services before they start worrying about who has provided them. The chancellor is said to be far more sceptical about private finance, although there is no suggestion he opposes it in principle. With an election looming the next big speech from Gordon Brown will be closely examined for any signs of divisions and, in particular, the use of that little three letter word. But for now, all eyes have been focused on the next general election. And for many in Westminster, Mr Blair's performance has only succeeded in hardening the belief that will be on 5 May.

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"politics 265.txt Tories unveil quango blitz plans Plans to abolish 162 quangos have been unveiled by the Conservatives as part of their effort to show how government red tape can be cut. Six government units would also be scrapped under proposals which the Tories say would save more than £4.3 bn. Among the targets are strategic health authorities and the new fair access regulator for universities. Tory frontbencher John Redwood said Britain needed a slimmer government and lower taxes to be competitive. The plans would abolish regional assemblies and other regional bodies", such as boards tackling industrial development and housing. Their powers would be returned to elected local councils or national government. The Tories say the strategic health authorities are not needed as it is better that local people, rather than officials, run hospitals and surgeries. Announcing the plans," Mr Redwood said: ""Mr Blair has forgotten the interests of taxpayers"," and has broken the pledges he made. ""Far from improving public services", spending taxpayers' money on quangos has led only to more bureaucrats," more regulation and higher taxes." His party leader", Michael Howard," argued a change in direction was needed to get a grip on spending. ""Labour are creating Two Britains: the Britain of the forgotten majority and bureaucratic Britain", he said. In the real world," people are working harder just to stand still. They've seen their pensions knocked for six. ""They're being squeezed by extra taxes. The forgotten majority are paying the price of bureaucratic Britain."" The government has announced plans to cut 10 000 civil servants as part of its efficiency drive. But Chief Secretary to the Treasury Paul Boateng attacked the Tory plans. ""The Conservatives are committed to cutting Labour's public spending plans by a massive £35 billion", he said. Cuts on this scale cannot be found from cutting 'bureaucracy' but would require massive cuts to front-line public services such as schools," hospitals an

d the police." The Liberal Democrats have said they would cut the number of Whitemhall departments to make sure money reaches frontline services.

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"politics 266.txt Peers debate Crown succession law Peers are debating proposals to change the rules governing the succession to the throne. Labour peer Lord Dubs' Succession to the Crown Bill aims to end the right of male heirs to succeed to the crown even if they have an older sister. The private member's bill would also abolish the ban on heirs to the throne marrying Roman Catholics. The Fabian Society's Sundar Katwala said the change was ""long overdue"" and that he expected a ""warm response"". The political reform group's general secretary told BBC Radio 4's Today Programme there were some ""very out-dated features"" at the heart of Britain's constitution. ""In 1998 the government said in principle it supported the idea of ending gender discrimination and that it would consult on how to come forward with its own measures. ""We hope they are warm towards it and don't say this is the wrong time."" He pointed out that it was 30 years since the sex discrimination act and urged politicians on all sides to back the bill. Mr Katwala added: ""This is long overdue. Parliament will have to do it eventually", the government, and I hope all of the political parties," might think this is a very simple thing to have in their manifestos." But he acknowledged that even if the bill did win support", it was unlikely to become law because the legislative programme is likely to be squeezed by the coming general election. He said he hoped the bill would be a ""gentle nudge"" to the government and suggested it would ""demand a response"". The bill", which is in the Lords for its second reading, has been adopted by former chief whip Ann Taylor in the Commons. The rule of succession is regulated not only through descent and tradition but also by the Act of Settlement which confirmed in 1701 that it was for Parliament to determine the title to the throne.

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"politics 267.txt UKIP's secret weapon? By any measure", New Yorker Dick Morris is that thing Americans love over everything else - a winner. This is the man who, some pundits believe, was almost single-handedly responsible for Bill Clinton's sensational 1992 comeback victory. But Morris is no ideologue. He has worked as election strategist for any number of Republicans as well and, more recently, politicians from Mexico to Uruguay. Now he is back in London as the UK Independence Party's not-so-secret electoral weapon after returning from the Ukraine where he helped - you guessed it - opposition candidate Viktor Yushchenko. If there is one regular criticism levelled at Morris, it is that he is too ready to switch allegiances. That he enjoys the game more than the politics. So why Britain and why UKIP which, despite its recent EU election successes, is not likely to pull off a sensational victory in the looming general election. On this subject," Morris appears almost evangelical. ""I was on a cruise in the Mediterranean and", coincidentally," so was UKIP leader Roger Knapman. ""I had just written a piece saying how the English Channel was now wider than the Atlantic which he liked and it went from there"". But what is it about UKIP that particularly attracts him? Many might think it is simply another chance to practice his art", irrespective of the politics. ""I think the greatest threat to democracy in the world is not terrorism but bureaucratism"". A great soundbite", but a surprise coming from a New Yorker post 11 September. ""It is the growth of these bodies composed of experts who know better", who don't believe in letting democracy govern but believe in letting the correct solution be determined. ""That's international bankers", the World Trade Organisation, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and, primarily," the Europ

ean Union"". So he is out to help UKIP take Britain out of this organisation which he believes is unreformable and inherently undemocratic. And he is scathing of the Tory party which he also appears to believe is unreformable. ""The Tory party is schizophrenic about Europe. But until somebody says they are willing to leave the EU they can't possibly re-negotiate anything (as Michael Howard is pledged to do). ""It's like walking into a liquor store with a gun to rob it and saying: 'before I can proceed with the robbery I want to make clear I am not going to shoot anybody''''. Possibly a very American analogy", "but another great soundbite. ""The basic point is that the EU seeks political integration to move the entire nexus of decision making away from Britain - and we oppose that and the Tories cannot be trusted to oppose it"". So is UKIP's job to destroy the Tories", "as former member Robert Kilroy-Silk once notoriously declared? ""No. The aim of UKIP is to withdraw from the EU and if it has any relation to the Tories it is to stiffen the Tories' spine on the issue by having a large enough UKIP vote so that we move the Tories in the direction they are refusing to move. ""But it's not just to shift the Tories. I think UKIP had a huge amount to do with Tony Blair's decision to hold a referendum on the European constitution and I think it had a huge amount to do with his refusal to go into the euro"". And", while we are on the subject of Mr Kilroy-Silk," Mr Morris despatches him with another of his neat soundbites. ""Robert Kilroy Silk is not a team player - it is a good idea our party stands for some thing and not some one"". So what is the big plan for the general election. How will he achieve the breakthrough? ""Look", we are not going to be forming the next government," he said. Neither does UKIP have to fight every seat. As with the 2004 US presidential election, he says, the outcome will be decided by a small number of swing seats - just as he believes it will in Britain. So, with limited resources, the aim is to target those seats and end the day with a significant group in the Commons. He also believes it is possible the internet could have a big part in the poll. The internet was a decisive factor in the 2004 presidential election - through blogs (individuals posting their views in online diaries). People just did it"".

""Anything can happen in the next general election. There is an inherent instability at the moment. ""Labour and the Tories have drawn the consensus so tightly and to the left there is room for another voice"". That might", he suggests, lead to a hung parliament with UKIP and others holding the balance of power. It is a huge task, surely. But there is undoubtedly a sense that the next general election may indeed produce some surprises - even while most still believe it is Labour's for the taking. UKIP's performance in last year's European elections was just such a shocker and showed that Mr Morris may have a point about the new consensus. And after all, he has a reputation to sustain.

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"politics 268.txt More reforms ahead says Milburn Labour will continue to pursue controversial reforms if it wins a third term in power", "the party's election chief Alan Milburn has said. He pledged Labour would encourage more people to achieve their aspirations. ""What we want is for more people to earn and own", "Mr Milburn told BBC Radio 4's Today show. Tory Shadow Chancellor Oliver Letwin called Labour a brilliant machine for talking about things"" but said it did not deliver policies the country needs. Meanwhile", "the Liberal Democrats' President Simon Hughes said: ""New Labour has lost people's confidence in a way Old Labour never did." "Mr Milburn told Today that Labour wanted policies which encouraged increased social mobility in Britain. Pressed on incapacity benefits", "he said the tax and welfare system must ""provide the right incentives to people""." "No-one is talking about driving people into work but what we do know is there are one million people on incapacity benefit who

want the opportunity to work", "providing the right level of support is there for them". However, backbench Labour MP Karen Buck warned against proposed changes in such benefits. She told the Today programme: "If the policy is seen as being about how do you make the feckless poor go back to work then it is not going to work", on the one hand. And it is not going to improve our electoral chances on the other." Mr Milburn also sought to draw a line under the controversy about reports of a feud between Gordon Brown and Prime Minister Tony Blair. He stressed that Mr Brown would play the same role that he did in the last election. Mr Milburn gave more details of planned reforms in a speech to Labour's Fabian Society", in which he also praised Mr Brown as one of the leaders of the party's reform process. In the speech, he backed choice in schools and hospitals," wider home ownership and changes to the welfare system. Mr Milburn insisted that government reform must continue. "Our task is to rebuild the New Labour coalition around 'one nation politics' that recognise", while life is hard for many, all should have the chance to succeed," he said. There is a glass ceiling on opportunity in this country. In our first two terms we have raised it. In our third term we have to break it." Voters turned on the party when it failed to reform industrial relations in the 1960s", he also told his audience. Oliver Letwin said the government had failed to deliver in any of the key public services, such as cleaner hospitals, discipline in schools and putting more police on the streets. He said ministers had not delivered cleaner hospitals, with 5,000 people dying from infections last year. New Labour had failed on school discipline because it had not implemented serious reforms so that teachers could run schools, and which would give parents choice, he went on. For the Lib Dems," Simon Hughes said many pensioners are means tested for the money they needed and students who were told there wouldn't be tuition fees and more debt "have been given exactly the opposite"". He added: "Under New Labour", all households are still paying unfair council tax rather than a fairer alternative."

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"politics 269.txt Teens 'know little' of politics Teenagers questioned for a survey have shown little interest in politics - and have little knowledge. Only a quarter of 14-16 year olds knew that Labour was the government", the Tories were the official Opposition and the Lib Dems were the third party. Almost all could identify Tony Blair, but only one in six knew who Michael Howard was, and just one in 10 recognised Charles Kennedy. The ICM survey interviewed 110 pupils for education watchdog Ofsted. Nearly half those pupils polled said it was not important for them to know more about what the political parties stand for. And 4% of those questioned thought the Conservatives were in power - while 2% of them believed the Lib Dems were. The survey also looked at issues of nationality. It found the Union flag and fish and chips topped the list of symbols and foods associated with being British. Many of the pupils also looked on themselves as English, Scottish or Welsh, rather than British; while the notion of being European hardly occurred to anyone.

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"politics 270.txt Defection timed to hit tax pledge With impeccable and precisely-calculated timing", Tory defector Robert Jackson and his new Labour bosses have attempted to overshadow Michael Howard's latest announcement on taxation and spending. With just about everyone in Westminster now working towards a May general election, Mr Howard is eager to map out some clearer and distinctive policies aimed at finally shifting the Tories' resolutely depressing poll showings. The big idea is his £35bn savings on waste and bureaucracy which Mr Howard has pledged to plough back into public services and tax cut

s. And it was virtually certain his pledge on tax cuts was meant to be the core message from his interview on the BBC One's Breakfast with Frost programme. He and his shadow Chancellor Oliver Letwin have been edging towards an announcement on this front for some months now, but without any concrete pledges. But Mr Howard announced that, of the £35bn he has earmarked from savings, £12bn will be used to plug Labour's claimed financial black hole with any left over going to tax cuts in Mr Letwin's first budget. He would not be precise, but there are already suggestions he is set to announce lifting the threshold on income tax and reforming or abolishing inheritance tax. But he did, for the first time," say there would be such tax cuts. ""At this election"," people will have a clear choice between Mr Blair who will waste more and tax more and the Conservative party which will give value for money and tax less"". It is the Tories' attempt to open that famed ""clear blue water"" between them and the Labour party and return to a traditional Tory agenda that will both reassure the middle England voters who have abandoned him and appeal to core Conservative voters. So it is a pretty safe bet to assume that", when Robert Jackson finally decided to jump ship and swim over to the Labour benches, his new masters decided to time the announcement for the greatest possible impact. Mr Howard, however," was dismissive. ""These things happen from time to time. There are disagreements between Robert Jackson and me. ""The election is not going to be decided on what Robert Jackson did"", he added. And that is certainly true. The election will be decided on the economy stupid"". Other issues like the Iraq war and the ""trust"" thing will also play a major part. But it is the economy that will probably be the greatest influence over the way people finally vote. And many on the Tory benches have been crying out for Mr Howard to get back onto the old Tory tax cuts agenda. Mr Howard knows that risks accusations that", as a result, he would slash public services, so he has attempted to shoot that fox first. With polls suggesting voters would rather any government cash surpluses were spent on schools and hospitals before tax cuts, he has suggested that is exactly what he will do. Whether this will finally be enough to shift those polls remains to be seen.

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"politics 271.txt Tory leader unveils spending plan Tory leader Michael Howard says his party can save £35bn in government spending by tackling waste. The money would be ploughed back into frontline services like the NHS and schools with the rest used to cut government borrowing and reduce taxes. The Tory leader has also shrugged off the defection of one of his MPs", Robert Jackson, a former minister," to Labour. Mr Howard said that these things happened in politics and it would not affect the outcome of the election. ""Let's be realistic - the election is not going to be decided on the basis of what Mr Jackson did""", he told BBC 1's Breakfast with Frost programme. However the defection on Saturday has cast a shadow over the launch of the Conservatives' pending plans. Fuller details are due to be unveiled on Monday. The bulk of the £35bn saved by tackling bureaucracy and inefficient systems will go back into frontline services, Mr Howard said. The £12bn left over would then be spent on reducing government borrowing, he added. However," the remainder would deal with some of the ""unfair taxes""." "Almost every independent expert says if you get another Labour government you are going to have to pay higher taxes", Mr Howard insisted. Because borrowing is going up, it is out of control," that is bound to lead to higher taxes or higher interest rates or both. ""So part of the £12bn we are going to apply to filling the government's black hole", reducing the borrowing. ""The rest will be used to reduce these unfair taxes which are bearing so heavily on the people of our country today."" Mr Howard is expected to say that around £6bn will be available for tax cuts when he makes his announ

cement on Monday. The cuts will be paid for out of the savings identified by business trouble-shooter David James. Home Office spending could be cut by £1.6bn", according to the final instalment of his year-long review. Savings of £153m at the Foreign Office and £336m at the Department for Culture Media and Sport, have also been identified. In all," almost a quarter of a million jobs and 168 public bodies would go under Mr James' proposals. Mr Howard said: ""All this adds up to a bottom line and the bottom line is at this election people will have a clear choice between Mr Blair", who will waste more and tax more," and a Conservative government that will give them value for money and tax less."" However," Chief Treasury Secretary Paul Boateng said: ""None of the Tories' figures add up so they can't make these savings and can't pay for any tax cuts", which means the only guaranteed cut from the Tories is £35bn of cuts," hitting front-line public services hard." Liberal Democrat leader Charles Kennedy added: ""People will not be taken in by Michael Howard's claims of £35bn worth of savings. ""This can't be achieved without drastic cuts in local services in their own communities."" A poll for the News of the World newspaper suggests the Conservatives are on course for their worst election defeat in a century. Labour will hold key marginal constituencies", winning a majority of 160, the Populus survey suggests. And the Liberal Democrats will take three key seats from the Conservatives, leaving the Tories with just 163 MPs, two less than they returned at Labour's 1997 landslide and their worst showing since 1906.

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"politics 272.txt Kennedy looks to election gains They may not know quite how to describe their position in British politics - the real opposition", the valid opposition, the effective opposition or the authentic opposition. But the Liberal Democrats are entering the expected 2005 election campaign determined to prove it is they, not the Tories, who are now the real threat to Labour. As Tory leader Michael Howard kicked off his election campaign," the Lib Dem leader Charles Kennedy dismissed the Conservatives as a ""fading"" force. And he insisted there was ""no limit"" to his party's ambitions in the coming poll. And he can produce some pretty impressive recent election results to back up his optimism for an election which he believes might just see his party doing big things. Sensible third party leaders are usually cautious about making any predictions about how they will do come the big test. And Mr Kennedy was not falling into that trap when he fired up his campaign from the party's Westminster HQ. He would make no predictions other than that he expected the Lib Dems to increase both their votes and their Commons seats at the election. The gap between Labour and the Tories was now so narrow - as proved", he claimed, by the defection to Labour of Robert Jackson - that only his party offered a genuine alternative. On the war on Iraq, identity cards, student fees and the council tax, there was nothing to chose between the two big parties whereas the Liberal Democrats offered costed, sensible alternatives. He was also happy to break the two party consensus on taxation by promising to increase income tax on those earning more than £100,000 a year to pay for the scrapping of student fees," the introduction of free personal care for the elderly and replacing the council tax with a local income tax. He was also happy to offer a pledge that he would be doing no deals to ""prop up"" either of the other big parties after the election. There was a time when such optimistic sounds coming from the third party could be dismissed as self-delusion. That is no longer the case with the Liberal Democrats. The other parties will still insist that the Lib Dems are no hoppers whose greatest effect on the poll will be to boost the hopes of their opponents by denying them otherwise winnable seats. Labour", in particular, fears that disillusioned supporters may switch to the Lib Dems allowing the Tories

to win some seats. But Mr Kennedy is clearly hoping for a more significant outcome than that. He will not talk about the big breakthrough, although there are those who believe this could well be the election that sees his party crossing some sort of symbolic threshold. They would argue that, by the time of the election after next, the Liberal Democrats may genuinely have replaced the Tories as the party challenging Labour for power. The Lib Dems will hope to have made advances because of their consistent stand against the war on Iraq. But Mr Kennedy believes his new manifesto will also offer sensible, costed and achievable policies on things like the council tax, crime and asylum that will underpin his claim that his party really is the only opposition worth the name.

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"politics 273.txt 'Best person' for top legal job The "best person for the job"" should be appointed lord chancellor", and not necessarily a lawyer or MP, the courts minister has told MPs. Under reforms," the post of lord chancellor is to be stripped of its judicial functions. ""The lord chancellor...no more needs to be a lawyer than the Secretary of Health needs to be a doctor", said courts minister Christopher Leslie. The Constitutional Reform Bill was entering its second reading on Monday. Mr Leslie said: The prime minister should be able to appoint the best person for the job whether they sit in the House of Lords or the House of Commons." Under the reforms", the Law Lords will also be replaced as the UK's highest legal authority by a Supreme Court and judges will be appointed by an independent panel rather than ministers. In December the Lords rejected a plea by current Lord Chancellor Lord Falconer that the holder of the job should not necessarily be a lawyer or a peer. The peers voted by 229 to 206 to say in law that lord chancellors must also be peers. The debate was carried over from the last Parliamentary session," but with an impending general election time is crucial for the government to get the Bill passed. Mr Leslie said it was irrelevant whether the post was called Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs or Lord Chancellor. He said: ""What matters most is...whether it is reformed so that the post holder no longer has those conflicting duties. ""It is no longer appropriate for a government minister to have such unfettered discretion in the appointment of judges." Shadow attorney general Dominic Grieve criticised the government on its plans to change what he said was an ""exceptional institution", providing a champion of the independence of the judiciary"". The government had initially proposed to take this institution and ""smash it to pieces", Mr Grieve said. Convention should be nurtured and celebrated," but the government distrusted and disliked it instead. He warned that unless ministers backed down over the lord chancellor remaining a member of the House of Lords, the government would have great difficulty" in getting the Bill through Parliament. Former Cabinet minister Douglas Hogg", whose father and grandfather served as lord chancellor," said the Bill was ""largely unnecessary", ""bureaucratic and expensive"". But the Tory MP for Sleaford and North Hykeham admitted the lord chancellor's role and office ""cannot be frozen in aspic"".

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"politics 274.txt The memory driving Brown's mission The memory Gordon Brown says keeps returning to him - the one that he says is burnt into him - is that of a 12 year-old girl", whose parents died of Aids, and who is HIV positive herself. Mr Brown seems haunted by her eyes, desolate of all hope. And then he talks of those eyes that do inspire optimism: an extraordinary performance by schoolgirls of Kenya's largest slum, advancing with crowded menace, flicking their hips in a manner almost as disturbing," before the finale of

a clenched fist salute and shout of ""free education - free education for all""". Mr Brown's message generally", that compassion must become action before that hope is squandered. But he is such a pivotal figure in British politics, it is almost impossible not to ask him why he is doing this. His answer, in part, is because of the missionaries that used to come to his father's church. Ever since, he says, Africa has been important to him. I've absolutely no doubt whatsoever this is heartfelt. But he also believes it is time for the world to see a new Gordon Brown. Not the dull, reassuring bank manager but a man driven by a moral passion - and it just so happens the Labour Party feels an awful lot happier ridding the world of debt than ridding the world of dictators. There's also a sense of liberation. If Mr Blair won't allow him to run the election campaign then he can at least pretend it was all getting tedious and he'd much rather be out examining social problems in the raw. It also goes some way to solving one of the overarching problems for all politicians of all parties: scepticism is liding into cynicism about politics itself. If he can help the world's poor just a little, then it shows politics isn't worthless. But is his vision for Africa too grand? Can poverty in the continent really be halved? Brown replies that no one thought the Berlin Wall would ever come down either. He's still got to overcome - not only the reluctance of other finance ministers in the world - but also the cynicism of experts who wonder whether debt relief will just be squandered by governments that just won't in the end spend wisely.

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"politics 275.txt Howard dismisses Tory tax fears Michael Howard has dismissed fears from some Conservatives that his plans for £4bn tax cuts are too modest. He defended the package", saying it was a plan for the Tories' first Budget and he hoped to be able to go further. The Tories on Monday highlighted £35bn in ""wasteful"" spending they would stop to allow tax cuts", reduced borrowing and more spending on key services. Labour and the Liberal Democrats say the party's sums do not add up and claim it would cut frontline services. The Tory tax plan follows complaints from some of the party's MPs that Mr Howard and shadow chancellor Oliver Letwin have taken too long to unveil the proposals. Now they have promised a figure but have yet to reveal which taxes would be targeted. Tory backbencher Edward Leigh said the proposals were a step in the right direction but he told the Financial Times: ""I would come up sooner with much greater tax cuts."" Interviewed on BBC Radio 2's Jeremy Vine show", Mr Howard said: ""It is perfectly true that I am being attacked on one side by people who think we ought to be promising much", much bigger tax cuts and spending cuts. ""On the other side", there are people who say we won't be able to achieve these tax cuts. ""I think we have got it about right."" Mr Howard said voters faced a clear choice at the next election between more waste and more tax under Labour and Tory value for money and lower taxes. He added: ""I would like to be able to do more", and over time I am sure we will be able to do more, but at the start, we have got to recognise there is a limit to what we can do in one go," in our first Budget. ""I have got to be responsible about this."" The latest Tory plans came as campaigning for the election - widely expected in May - gathered pace. The Liberal Democrats launched their pre-election platform", with leader Charles Kennedy saying his party was the ""authentic opposition"", particularly on the Iraq war," council tax and university tuition fees. Lib Dem Treasury spokesman Vince Cable also branded the Tory plans as ""fantasy economics"". Labour hit back at the Tory proposals even before their publication with election coordinator Alan Milburn accusing Mr Howard of producing a ""fraudulent prospectus""". The party on Tuesday challenged the Tories to publish the full report from David James", the trouble-shooter they asked to identify pos

sible savings. But the Tories are in turn demanding that Tony Blair spell out which taxes he would raise if he wins the election.

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"politics 276.txt Donor attacks Blair-Brown 'feud' The reported feud between Tony Blair and Gordon Brown has prompted a Labour donor to say he will almost certainly refuse to give more funds. Duncan Bannatyne also attacked the government over Iraq and its ""poor"" response to the Asian tsunami crisis. His broadside came as ex-Foreign Secretary Robin Cook said he hoped Mr Brown would be premier at some point. Mr Bannatyne has previously given Labour £50",000. He made his fortune from care homes and health clubs. The 52-year-old on Tuesday said was he was reviewing his donations because of Cabinet disunity and international issues. His spokesman said it was highly unlikely he would give Labour more money," although he would remain a supporter and not fund the Conservatives. Robert Peston's new book has prompted more speculation about the Blair-Brown rift with its claims that the prime minister broke a promise made in 2003 to stand down. Mr Bannatyne said: ""Disunity in the Cabinet has a corrosive effect on the country. ""Gordon Brown is a great chancellor who has delivered a stable economy," but business wants that to continue and not be blown off course by petty squabbles based on personal ambition." The businessman", whose latest venture is a casino in Newcastle," also voiced concern about the ongoing violence in Iraq. And he branded the UK government's response to the tsunami as ""piecemeal and poor"". ""The people there need practical help not just pledges of money," he said. The US has forces helping on the ground - we can do more." British Navy ships have helped the relief effort and the prime minister has said the government could ultimately give hundreds of millions of pounds in aid. Mr Bannatyne is due to host a new television programme and is also appearing on BBC2 business start-up programme Dragon's Den. But his spokesman insisted his attack on Labour was not a publicity stunt. In a separate development," Robin Cook gave his support to Mr Brown's prime ministerial ambitions but told a lunch for political journalists winning the election had to be Labour's election. But he insisted the recent squabbles between Mr Blair and Mr Brown were not ""perceived as a problem by the voters," adding there was no impression of governmental incompetence. Mr Cook argued that more prominence was given to these matters because there was not an alternative source of opposition to the government"". He warned the ""Abstentions Party"" was the real challenge to Labour - and they would not be motivated by Mr Blair's promise to produce an ""unremittingly New Labour"" election manifesto. His comments come after Dave Prentis", the leader of Britain's biggest union Unison, told the Daily Record newspaper he wants a date to be set for Mr Blair to be replaced as Labour leader.

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"politics 277.txt Howard and Blair tax pledge clash Tony Blair has said voters will have to wait for Labour's manifesto to see if the party has plans to increase tax. The premier was responding to a challenge from Tory leader Michael Howard who said Labour would raise taxes in its post-election Budget. Mr Blair derided Tory claims they could cut £35bn in ""wasteful spending"" saying the party had got its sums wrong. The two political leaders clashed just days after the opening salvos of the pre-election period. Mr Howard told MPs that ""every independent expert"" from the International Monetary Fund to the Institute of Fiscal Studies had suggested the ""government was spending more than it is raising and a Labour chancellor would have to put up taxes"". Mr Blair replied: ""I think they are wrong for this very simple reason: that the Treasury forecasts on the economy have been proven right."" The Tories on Monday

highlighted their plans for tax cuts worth £4bn", although the specific taxes to be cut have not been announced. They also spelled out their plans for reduced government borrowing and more spending on key services. Labour and the Liberal Democrats have said the party's sums do not add up and claim it would cut frontline services. But Mr Howard said voters faced a clear choice at the next election between more waste and more tax under Labour and Tory value for money and lower taxes. The Liberal Democrats have also launched their pre-election platform," with leader Charles Kennedy saying his party was the ""authentic opposition""", particularly on the Iraq war," council tax and university tuition fees. Labour hit back at the Tory proposals even before their publication with election coordinator Alan Milburn accusing Mr Howard of producing a ""fraudulent prospectus"".

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''politics 278.txt What really divides the parties So what is the gap between Labour and the Tories nowadays? One Starbucks", one Rymans and one small Greek cafe as it happens. Both parties have now completed their moves to new headquarters, with Labour creating its election hub just three doors away from the Tories' new headquarters in Victoria Street, just down the road from the Commons. That should make things a little easier if and when the crack-of-dawn election press conferences kick off. Unlike 2001, there should be no need for colleagues to have taxis gunning their engines outside, or to buy scooters, to get themselves between the tightly-timetabled events. And, to all intents and purposes, we already appear to be in that general election campaign. Certainly the press conference hosted by election co-ordinator Alan Milburn," in the rather compact new conference room - still smelling of new carpet and with the garish New Labour coffee mugs as yet unstained - had all the hallmarks of an election event. ""Welcome to the unremittingly New Labour media centre", he said. And I'll bet he hadn't checked that one with Gordon Brown. Along with Work and Pensions Secretary Alan Johnson and Minister for Work Jane Kennedy, he then went on to tear into the Tory plans to scrap the New Deal welfare-to-work scheme, which they claimed would lead to an increase of almost 300,000 in unemployment. And they ridiculed the claims made on Monday by Michael Howard that he could save £35 billion of Labour waste and inefficiency to spend on public services while also offering £4 billion of tax cuts. Labour has come up with a figure of £22 billions worth of efficiency savings so, understandably perhaps, believe Mr Howard must be planning cuts to squeeze the extra £13 billion. These figures, based on the two parties' own detailed studies, will be battered to within an inch of their lives during the campaign. Wednesday was just the start.

politics 279.txt Amnesty chief laments war failure The lack of public outrage about the war on terror is a powerful indictment of the failure of human rights groups, Amnesty International's chief has said. In a lecture at the London School of Economics, Irene Khan said human rights had been flouted in the name of security since 11 September, 2001. She said the human rights movement had to use simpler language both to prevent scepticism and spread a moral message. And it had to fight poverty, not just focus on political rights for elites. Ms Khan highlighted detentions without trial, including those at the US camp at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, and the abuse of prisoners as evidence of increasing human rights problems. What's a new challenge is the way in which this age-old debate on security and human rights has been translated into the language of war", she said. By using the language of war," human rights are being sidelined because we know human rights do not apply in times of war." Ms Khan said such breaches were infectious and were now seen in almost very major cou

ntry in the world. ""The human rights movement faces a crisis of faith in the value of human rights,"" she said. That was accompanied by a crisis of governance, where the United Nations system did not seem able to hold countries to account. The Amnesty secretary-general said a growing gap between the perceived influence of human rights group and what they could actually achieve was fuelling scepticism. Public passivity on the war against terror is the single most powerful indictment on the failures of human rights groups,"" she said. Ms Khan said the movement had failed to mobilise public outrage about what was happening to the human rights system. There needed to be a drive to use simpler language, talking about the basic morality of the issues rather than the complexity of legal processes. Such efforts could make the issues more relevant to people across the world, she said. The human rights groups also had to recognise there were new groups which had to be tackled in new ways as power dripped away from state governments. Al-Qaeda, for example, was not going to be impressed by a traditional Amnesty letter writing campaign. More also needed to be done to develop a human rights framework for international business corporations. Amnesty International members voted in 2001 to extend the organisation's work from political and civil rights to cover social and economic rights too. Ms Khan said the human rights movement would make itself irrelevant if it turned away from the suffering caused by economic strife. We would be an elitist bunch working for the elites", for those who cannot read the newspaper of their choice rather than those who cannot read," she said. Despite her concerns, Ms Khan dubbed herself a hope-monger""", saying she was confident the passions of the human rights movement could overcome the new challenges.

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"politics 280.txt Blair sees greater Bush consensus George W Bush will display a more consensual approach to world politics as he begins his second term as US President," Tony Blair has said. The prime minister said Mr Bush had learned military force was not the only way to fight terrorism. He understood that ""the best prospect of peaceful co-existence lies in the spread of democracy and human rights""", Mr Blair told the Guardian newspaper. Mr Bush was sworn in at a ceremony in Washington DC on Thursday. Echoing the new US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, the prime minister said there has been a clear evolution of US policy since the war in Afghanistan in 2001. Mr Blair had personally seen the change over time in conversations with Mr Bush. The president understood that while military and security measures were important, there also needed to be a multilateral approach to solving the world's problems. Turning to critics' fears that the US was poised for further military action," Mr Blair refused to give succour to suggestions it was preparing for strikes against Iran. The prime minister conceded that the US had ""what appears to be a harder position"" towards the state than Europe. But the prime minister pointed out that until now the US had allowed Britain", France and Germany to take the lead in trying to halt the Iranian nuclear programme. Following claims that US forces had worked inside Iran to identify potential targets," Mr Blair was asked if the SAS had also been in the country. ""We never answer questions about special forces", but do not take that as indicating an affirmative, said Mr Blair. Mr Blair said he believed the president was keen to work with other countries while trying to spread democracy and human rights. It is significant, in my view, that he is coming to Europe as his first foreign visit," said Mr Blair. Following his inauguration, Mr Bush is due in Europe at the end of January.

"politics 281.txt Kilroy-Silk quits 'shameful' UKIP Ex-chat show host Robert Kilroy-Silk has quit the UK Independence Party and accused it of betraying its supporters. The MEP said he was ashamed to have joined the

party, which he labelled as a joke"". He plans to stand in the next general election but refused to confirm he is setting up a new political party called Veritas - Latin for truth. UKIP leader Roger Knapman said he would ""break open the champagne""", adding: ""It was nice knowing him," now 'goodbye'." However", he did say the ex-chat show host had been ""quite useful initially""". ""He has remarkable ability to influence people but", sadly, after the (European) election it became clear that he was more interested in the Robert Kilroy-Silk Party than the UK Independence Party so it was nice knowing him, now 'goodbye'." Mr Knapman told BBC Radio 4's Today programme. Mr Knapman rejected the idea Mr Kilroy-Silk posed a threat to UKIP and queried why he had failed to confirm rumours he was starting a new political party. Mr Kilroy-Silk explained his reasons to his East Midlands constituents at a meeting in Hinckley, Leicestershire. His decision came as UKIP officials began a process which could have triggered Mr Kilroy-Silk's expulsion. It marks the end of his membership of UKIP after just nine months. It began with a flood of publicity which helped UKIP into third place in last June's European elections but became dominated by rancour as he tried to take over the party leadership. Mr Kilroy-Silk accused his fellow UKIP MEPs of being content with growing fat sitting on their backsides"" in Brussels. He told BBC News 24: ""I tried to change the party", I nagged all the way through the summer to do things, to get moving because I thought it was criminal what they were doing," it was a betrayal."" Mr Kilroy-Silk also told Sky News there was ""masses of support"" for him to form a new party - something he has yet to confirm will happen. UKIP won 12 seats and 16.1% of the vote at the European elections on the back of its call for the UK to leave the European Union In his speech", Mr Kilroy-Silk says the result offered UKIP an ""amazing opportunity"" but the party's leadership had done nothing and ""gone AWOL""". There were no policies", no energy, no vision and no spokespeople," he said. ""The party is going nowhere and I'm embarrassed with its allies in Europe and I'm ashamed to be a member of the party", said Mr Kilroy-Silk. He said his conviction in Britain's right to govern itself had not changed. He would continue that campaign outside UKIP when he contested the general election in an East Midlands constituency. Reports of his new party plans have prompted a formal complaint to UKIP's disciplinary committee for bringing the party into disrepute"". On Thursday", the party challenged Mr Kilroy-Silk to stand down as an MEP so voters can get a genuine UKIP candidate.

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"politics 282.txt Blair blasts Tory spending plans Tony Blair has launched an attack on Conservative spending plans", saying they are a ""ludicrous improbability"". The prime minister has told a Labour Party gathering that the Tory policies would cause economic failure. Tory leader Michael Howard has said his party would cut £35bn in ""wasteful"" spending to allow £4bn in tax cuts. On Saturday", Tory shadow home secretary David Davis said the Tories would fund the cuts by removing ""inefficiencies"" which had ""burgeoned"" under Labour. In his speech", Mr Blair contrasted a reformed Labour party, which had learned to occupy the political centre ground, with a hidebound Tory party," which he said would turn the clock back with spending cuts. Mr Blair said: ""The Conservative tax and spending proposals would put at risk", both Britain's hard-won economic stability - the lowest mortgages, inflation, unemployment," for decades - and the key investment in public services. ""I believe that the Tory plans are as plain a call to return to the past as it's possible to imagine", he said. It's a recipe for exactly the same boom and bust economics and cuts in public services that were their hallmark in 18 years of Conservative government."" Mr Blair added: ""They", the Conservatives have learned nothing

g. "" By contrast", he said, " New Labour had listened to its electorate and changed. Mr Blair went on to list his government's achievements and to issue a rallying call to the party. ""So now we have a choice", " we can defend this record and we can build on it and go on and fulfil the promise or give up and go back. And I say we have to fight." " In response", David Davis said the Tories would make cuts, such as removing regional assemblies," but would bring in more police officers and match Labour's spending on health and education. ""Everybody knows", having lived through this government the last seven years, that they faced lots of stealth tactics, lots of increases in taxes, but no improvement in public services, he said. Mr Davis said Labour had been responsible for huge waste, huge overspending," not on the frontline at all but on bureaucracy"". ""The public face a choice between more waste and more taxes with this government", less waste and lower taxes with a Tory government," he concluded. Gordon Brown has addressed the conference behind closed doors. The Chancellor said the Conservatives' plans would see some £50bn in spending cuts by 2011, which the Tories deny. Mr Brown also issued call for party unity and warn of the dangers of allowing themselves to be distracted or diverted"". According to an advance text released by officials", " he told delegates: ""We must all show the strength and unity of purpose to take the long-term decisions necessary to meet them." " Mr Brown warned that the Tories were planning ""the biggest cuts ever in the history of any election manifesto"". Meanwhile", " Tory shadow chancellor Oliver Letwin accused Mr Blair of ""misrepresenting"" the party's proposals and questioned how Labour would fund its own plans. ""He still cannot accept the simple truth", which is that we will spend more on what matters to people - schools, hospitals and police - and that we will offer value for money and lower taxes," Mr Letwin said. Once again Mr Blair and his Chancellor have failed to answer the question that lies at the heart of this election - which taxes will they put up to fill the £8bn shortfall in their plans?" "

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"politics 283.txt Lib Dems' 'bold' election policy Charlie  
s Kennedy has told voters his Liberal Democrats will offer them an ""honest choice"" at the next general election. With the other two big parties battling over which will impose the lowest taxes", Mr Kennedy is going into the looming election pledged to increase taxation. It is a bold policy and certainly ensures there is that choice between the Lib Dems and the other two. With his party's previous pledge to increase taxes by one penny in the pound to spend on public services already adopted by the government," he has switched tack. Now he is promising to levy a ""modest"" increase of the same amount on earnings over £10 0",000 a year to allow him to finance a series of pledges. They are to scrap student fees, finance free long term care for the elderly and replace the council tax with a local income tax. That last policy will also see about 3% of the most well off paying more while others, pensioners in particular, will pay less. Labour and the Tories have attacked his policies as both unworkable and not properly costed. Inevitably they insist there is no need to raise taxes to fund improvements in services. The Tories claim they can improve services AND cut taxes through £35bn efficiency savings, while Labour has offered £22bn savings but has yet to map out precise tax proposals, although there is little chance they will propose increases. In many ways the argument between the Lib Dems and the others over taxation and spending echo the sort of arguments that raged between Labour and the Tories in the 1980s and early 1990s. But, unlike the old Tory-Labour debate," he believes voters are ready to see ""modest"" tax increases on the well off in order to fund improvements in services. That is a view partly endorsed by recent polls suggesting people would rather have cash spent on public

services than tax cuts. Similarly there is a different tone to the Lib Dem approach to asylum and immigration", "with Mr Kennedy stressing politicians should not "foment an artificial debate" about immigration and attacking Michael Howard's proposals for quotas. Once again", with the two other big parties singing similar songs on immigration, Mr Kennedy is stressing the different, more liberal approach of his party. Mr Kennedy was also in buoyant mood over his party's election chances," declaring the Tories were not going to be "significant players" in the poll. He repeated his pledge not to do post-election deals with either party after the election. Mr Kennedy went on to suggest the re-election of a Labour government with a small majority would amount to a "massive vote of no confidence" in Tony Blair's government. That suggests the Lib Dem leader believes he may well find himself in a powerful", even pivotal position in a vastly different House of Commons after the next election. It is a dream the third party has dreamed many times before.

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"politics 284.txt Kennedy's cautious optimism Charles Kennedy is far too canny to make any grand claims about how his party may fare at the general election. In his 22 years in the Commons", he has seen his fair share of such claims dashed on the rocks of bitter experience and, he might say, "the UK's political and electoral system. But even his caution cannot hide the fact that this is a party and a leader that believes it may well be on the way to something special in a few months' time. "Look", I have already said I am not going to put any artificial limits on our ambitions this time around," he said. He still seems to accept that the most likely outcome is another Labour victory of some sort. And his general election pitch is designed around the notion of the Lib Dems as the real" opposition. But doesn't that lead to the jibe that this is a party actively bidding to come second? He is prepared to go this far: "A clear conclusion has been reached", including by Conservatives," that the Conservatives are not going to win this election. "Therefore the potential is there for the Liberal Democrat advance to be one of the big stories of the election", given that we have the capacity to take on Labour and win as well as take on the Conservatives and win. "This is really going to be the first modern three party UK election that we have all experienced". But haven't we been here before", with suggestions in the 1980s that Labour was finished. Won't voters looking for an alternative to Labour still naturally gravitate to the Conservatives? "The problem is that", geographically," the Conservative party has melted away in about a third of Britain. "We have supplanted them as the main alternative to Labour in whole tracts of mainland Britain. And they are a party with an ageing and declining membership base and they just do not look vibrant or vital or in touch any longer with contemporary Britain". Mr Kennedy is also eager to dispel any impression his party is the new party of the left and is likely to attract mostly disillusioned Labour voters. He insists his three headline commitments", to be financed from a 1% tax increase on those earning over £100,000 a year, will appeal right across the political spectrum. They are to replace the council tax with a local income tax," provide free long term care for the elderly and scrap student fees. He also believes being the only major party promising to increase taxes will not land him in the same trouble a similar policy did to Old Labour. "I think the tax argument has moved on a lot in British politics particularly in the context of the forthcoming general election", he said. Under a Labour government the tax burden would have to rise, while the Tories' plans to increase spending in some areas while also reducing taxes is just incredible, he claims. We are being straightforward with people", saying you know there is likely to be an increase in the tax burden," we are only recom

mending one specific tax rise for the top end of income scale earners to fund three specific policies""." "That is a clear cut choice for people"," one I am very comfortable with and I think will distinguish us from the others""." As to his own future", he is clear. If, as expected, his party increases its showing at the election," he intends to go into the next parliament ""on the front foot with a view to leading it right through that parliament into the next election because I see that as the decisive opportunity for us""." That last remark reflects a view gaining ground in Westminster that", if the Tories do as badly as some fear, the election after next might really see that historic breakthrough by the third party. Perhaps then Mr Kennedy will be ready to put some of the caution to one side.

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"politics 285.txt Hague 'given up' his PM ambition Former Conservative leader William Hague says he will not stand for the leadership again", having given up his ambition to be prime minister. Mr Hague, 43, " told the Daily Telegraph he would now find a life dominated by politics too ""boring"" and unfulfilling. Mr Hague", who stepped down after his party's 2001 election defeat, does not rule out a return to the front bench. He also told the paper he hopes to remain MP for Richmond, North Yorks, and start a family with wife Ffion. Mr Hague, who recently had published the biography of William Pitt the Younger," also said he wanted to continue writing books and speech-writing. He told the newspaper: ""I don't know whether I will ever go back on to the front"," but don't rush me."" Asked if he would stand for the leadership again", Mr Hague replied: ""No. Definitely not."" His determination to stay away from a central role will disappoint some senior Conservative members", who say the party needs him. Tim Collins, the shadow education secretary," said last week it would be a ""huge boost"" to the party if Mr Hague returned to the front bench. Mr Hague became an MP at 27 and Leader of the Opposition at 36. He said: ""I feel fortunate that", by the age of 40," I had crammed in an entire political career. ""I had been in the Cabinet and been leader of the party", so now I can branch out into other things...it is a very liberating feeling."" Mr Hague added that he may have misjudged his own ambition to be prime minister. ""Maybe I wasn't as driven by politics as I thought I was", he said.

politics 286.txt UKIP candidate suspended in probe Eurosceptic party UKIP have suspended a candidate for allegedly suggesting the criminally insane should be killed. John Houston, 54, was due to stand in the East Kilbride seat in Lanarkshire at the next election. But he was suspended after his reported views, including the return of the British Empire, were sent to two Scottish newspapers. UKIP spokesman Mark Croucher said those who selected Mr Houston knew nothing of his views. The episode comes at a difficult time for UKIP, soon after the high-profile departure of MEP Robert Kilroy-Silk. Mr Houston is alleged to have said that the organs of the criminally insane should be made available to law-abiding members of the community"" and proposed the legalisation of drugs and the sex trade. The document reportedly said: ""We're looking for the resurrection of the British Empire. ""The problems for the human race - environmental and others - can only be dealt with on a global scale", and that calls for a radical alliance of the English-speaking nations," which they are uniquely able to do." Mr Croucher said the main issue would be that Mr Houston's reported views had been presented as UKIP policy", which they were not. He said they might have been submissions to a committee working on the party's manifesto," but would not have been matched to Mr Houston when he was standing to become a candidate. He told BBC News: ""He appears to have said these things. We have suspended him as a member and as a candidate. ""By all accounts none of this

was mentioned at his selection meeting. ""It is simply a distraction from the task in hand", the EU constitution," not individual idiocies." Mr Houston was quoted in the Herald newspaper saying: ""I feel UKIP have over-reacted and overshot the runway." Peter Nielson", who is UKIP Scotland chairman," said he had suspended Mr Houston on Friday night. ""He will remain suspended while the matter is being investigated and then we will decide if and what further action will be taken." He said that any evidence would be looked into and Mr Houston may be interviewed by the party. He added: ""I can't comment too much at the moment", "I have one version from him but I haven't seen the papers yet.""

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"politics 287.txt Boothroyd calls for Lords speaker Betty Boothroyd has said the House of Lords needs its own Speaker and that peers should lead the way on reforming the upper chamber. Baroness Boothroyd", who was the first woman to be Commons Speaker," said she believed Tony Blair initiated reforms without a clear outcome in mind. ""Now we have to take care of it ourselves and make the best of it", she told the BBC's Breakfast with Frost. In 1999 Labour removed all but 92 of the Lords' 750 hereditary peers. That was billed as the first stage of reform of the institution. The lord chancellor hinted further reforms could be unveiled in the next Labour manifesto. I think we need to look very carefully at the relationship between the Lords and the Commons, Lord Falconer told BBC1's Breakfast With Frost. How it interacts with the Commons is a very, " very important issue. ""We need to address the issue in the manifesto", but you will have to wait for when the manifesto comes." The lord chancellor currently has the role of House of Lords speaker. He is also head of the judiciary and a member of the Cabinet as constitutional affairs secretary. Lady Boothroyd said she believed it was unacceptable for the lord chancellor to have the role of Speaker. ""I would really like to see a Speaker of the House of Lords", she said. I don't go for the idea of somebody - a lord chancellor - who is head of the judiciary," a senior Cabinet minister and Speaker of the Lords. ""I want somebody there who is going to look after that House and do a job there."

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"politics 288.txt New UKIP defection to 'Veritas' The UK Independence Party has lost one of its two London Assembly members to Robert Kilroy-Silk's new political party", " expected to launch on Wednesday. Damian Hockney said ex-chatshow host Mr Kilroy-Silk would ""deliver better"" as the leader of a eurosceptic party. He said Mr Kilroy-Silk had made him deputy party leader of Veritas", Latin for truth. Sources close to Mr Hockney said around eight other members of London UKIP were also planning to jump ship. Details of the coming week's events were hammered out at a meeting at Mr Kilroy-Silk's Buckinghamshire home on Sunday, the BBC News Website was told. The news came after UKIP suspended a candidate for allegedly suggesting the criminally insane should be killed. John Houston,54," was due to stand in the East Kilbride seat in Lanarkshire at the next election. A spokesman for UKIP called on Mr Hockney to quit the London Assembly. UKIP asserts that Mr Hockney ""has a moral obligation", if not a legal one"" to stand down. Mr Hockney meanwhile told the BBC: ""I believe that Robert Kilroy-Silk can deliver better as a leader of a eurosceptic party than the current leadership of the UK Independence Party." On the suspension of Mr Houston", UKIP said those who selected him knew nothing of his views. Mr Houston is alleged to have said that the organs of the criminally insane should be ""made available to law-abiding members of the community"" and proposed the legalisation of drugs and the sex trade. The document reportedly said: ""We're looking for the resurrection of the British Empire. ""The problems for the huma

n race - environmental and others - can only be dealt with on a global scale", and that calls for a radical alliance of the English-speaking nations," which they are uniquely able to do."" UKIP spokesman Mark Croucher said the main issue would be that Mr Houston's reported views had been presented as UKIP policy", which they were not.

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"politics 289.txt Baron Kinnock makes Lords debut Former Labour leader Neil Kinnock has officially been made a life peer during a ceremony in the House of Lords. He will be known Baron Kinnock of Bedwellty - after his former constituency. Lord Kinnock - who led Labour from 1983 until 1992 - was until recently one of Britain's EU commissioners. A former critic of the House of Lords", he has said he will use the Upper House to advocate its reform and to talk on issues like higher education. ""I accepted the kind invitation to enter the House of Lords as a working peer for practical political reasons", he said when his peerage was first announced. It is a good base for campaigning on national issues like education, sustainable transport, industrial change and the ageing society and global concerns," particularly poverty and oppression." During his induction into the Upper House", Lord Kinnock was accompanied by Lord's Leader Baroness Amos and Baroness Royall of Blaisdon, a former aide to the ex-Labour leader. It has been a long journey for the new Lord Kinnock from his earliest days as a rebellious youngster in the south Wales valleys. Born in 1942 in Tredegar to a miner father and nurse mother, he attended Lewis Boys' School in nearby Pengam," known then as the ""Eton of the valleys"". From there he went to Cardiff University", where he met his future wife Glenys, now a Labour MEP. After a brief career as a tutor for the Workers' Educational Association, he became an MP at the age of just 28 for his home seat of Bedwellty (later Islwyn). He gained a reputation as a left-wing firebrand, voting against his own Labour government's spending cuts proposals in 1975, and later rejecting a junior post in James Callaghan's administration. But he joined the shadow cabinet in 1980, and after Labour's heavy defeat in the 1983 he was elected leader. He took on the far-left Militant Tendency and began the long process of returning his party to the centre ground. He was not expected to win the 1987 election, when Margaret Thatcher was still riding high, but was bitterly disappointed to lose the next one in 1992 to John Major, and stepped down. He remained an MP until 1995, when he resigned to become European commission for transport. Four years later he became vice-president of the European Commission, with responsibility for internal reform. As he assumes the title of Lord Kinnock, he has also become chairman of the British Council, which promotes the UK's reputation for arts, science and education.

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"politics 290.txt Terror powers expose 'tyranny' The Lord Chancellor has defended government plans to introduce control orders to keep foreign and British terrorist suspects under house arrest", where there isn't enough evidence to put them on trial. Lord Falconer insists that the proposals do not equate to a police state and strike a balance between protecting the public against the threat of terrorism and upholding civil liberties. But thriller writer Frederick Forsyth tells BBC News of his personal response to the move. There is a mortal danger aimed at the heart of Britain. Or so says Home Secretary Charles Clarke. My reaction? So what? It is not that I am cynical or just do not care. I care about this country very much. But in the 66 years that I have been alive, there has not been one hour, of one day, of one month, of one year, when there has not been a threat aimed at us. My point is, the British have alw

ays coped without becoming a dictatorship. We have coped with fear without becoming a state based on fear; we have coped with threat without turning our country into a land of state threat. But that is what the Blair government now seeks to do - create a tyranny to defend us from the al-Qaeda tyranny. I was born on 25 August, 1938. The mortal threat back then was a scruffy little Austrian called Adolf Hitler. A week after my first birthday, the threat had become reality. We were at war. My father wore a uniform for five years. After 1945 we yearned for peace at last. But in 1946 Winston Churchill told us - from the Baltic to the Adriatic an Iron Curtain has descended across Europe. Behind the Iron Curtain, another genocidal psychopath, another threat. Josef Stalin triggered the Cold War, with the Berlin blockade in 1948. My whole generation was blighted by it. We were threatened by the nuclear holocaust, the nuclear wind, the nuclear winter. We built shelters that would have sheltered nothing. We spent our treasure on weapons instead of hospitals. We took silly precautions. Some fought it; some marched futilely against it. Some pretended it was not there. The Cold War lasted 43 years, but we remained a parliamentary democracy. By the early seventies it was terrorism as well. Al Fatah, Black September, Red Brigades, but most of all for us the IRA and the INLA. Thirty more years; 300 policemen and women, over 600 soldiers, more than 3,000 civilians dead, but we won because even IRA bombs could not force us to become a tyranny. That was why the tyrants lost. Civil rights were infringed as little as humanly possible. Evidence had to be taken in secret to protect covert sources; yes, and one judge, no-jury courts had to be instituted when juries were terrorised. Informants had to be given immunity from their own crimes to win the bigger battle. But habeas corpus did not die; right of appeal was not abolished. Now the threat is Islamic fundamentalism. Its leaders want to destroy our society; so did the IRA. It is based and funded abroad; so was the IRA. It has sleeper fanatics inside our society; so did the IRA. It is extremely hard to penetrate with our agents; so was the IRA. The prime movers are not easy to bring to trial; neither were the IRA. But we did. And without becoming a tyranny. Now the Blair government proposes the law system of fascism and communism. The citizen can be arrested and held without charge or trial, not even on the careful consideration of an experienced judge, but the whim of a political activist called a government minister. To be protected from terror the government says, we must become a tyranny. But a tyranny is based on the citizen's terror. This is not victory; this is defeat before a shot is fired. An interesting article - its good to see widening participation in the debate - but I suggest we move one step further. Our own bombs and bullets will can only shatter peace, because invading foreign nations, imprisoning the innocent and 'hunting' in the 'shadows' cannot destroy an evil of the mind, and hatred within the heart. Rather than focusing upon effect, we should consider the cause, because terrorism does not begin with bombs. Why not try a foreign policy of compassion, it can only enhance our democracy, and share our freedom. I agree with Frederick Forsyth. We really can't deal with terrorism by turning Britain into a fascist state. What we really need is more honesty from our security services and our politicians. If they do not have evidence to bring these people to trial, there probably isn't any. Our security services, behave like the detective who having decided that a certain person is guilty, rakes over all kinds of obscure and flimsy evidence to try and prove it, while the real villain gets away. Remember there were no WMD in Iraq. Just because a person may have made some stupid and naive decisions in life does not make them a terrorist. In this overly 'politically correct' society, it is good to see someone like Mr. Forsyth speak out. Yes, there has been oppression by the British government in the past, and overstepping the mark in places like Ireland, but yes, we are still a democracy where it is rare to be arrested without charge/trial etc. (apart from

a number of prisoners in Belmarsh goal, for example). This country signs up to human rights, and then pretends that they only apply to the people with nothing to fear, the innocent people (defined by whom?). When ID cards become mandatory, the data collected will not be protected by the Data Protection Act, and will be readily available to people like GCHQ, with no control by the person whose ID is being checked. The threat now is new. You cannot compare the threats of past years with now. Forsyth says 3000 died over 30 years or terrorism; 3000 people died in one morning in NY on September 11th 2001. The threat today is that terrorists will acquire nuclear or biological technology. A Kilo of Semtex will flatten a building, a Kilo of plutonium will flatten a city. You now have a combination of people who will perform terrorist acts with technology that is rapidly becoming accessible. I agree, the government is probably encouraging a degree of mass-hysteria and talking up the threat; but talking-down the threat and doing nothing is unacceptable too. The problem with this issue is not that it isn't important, but the fact that in general we Brits can be so politically apathetic some times, that we will just let this go without telling the government. However, as the nation that gave the world the common law and a true sense of the rights of individual liberty I hope this will prove to be one step too far. As somebody of Chinese origin, I can say that this country used to be a good place to migrate and start a new life. Whilst life wasn't perfect, we could make better for ourselves. Now we are riddled with red tape and be told what we can or cannot do. We have to be politically-correct and we are not allowed to have beliefs or opinions. We have a Prime Minister who spends too much time meddling in US politics and affairs which have little to do with the lives of British Citizens at home or abroad. Mr Forsyth has done a good job in voicing his opinions. Let's hope the BBC doesn't get gagged for letting people express their views. The people have the right to know and the BBC's role is to Inform, Educate and Entertain... I agree. Terrorists intend to spread fear but in reality it is the government which has spread the fear, by its constant publicising of the invisible enemy so dangerous that we must allow them to ride roughshod over our rights and liberties. In the end," the very thing we seek to protect is what we are giving up in the name of safety from this invisible enemy. The terrorists have already won. I absolutely agree with Frederick Forsyth. Yes we have to defend ourselves against terrorism but existing laws seem to be more than adequate. The idea that the ""new terrorism"" demands new powers is erroneous. The evidence of any real terrorist capability in the UK is scant. Ricin", for example, is a dangerous poison but it is not a weapon of mass destruction. What is really worrying is the enthusiasm of Mr Blair and his government for authoritarian reactions and attempts to manipulate the electorate through fear. If the government has its way with ID cards, tracking and so on then totalitarianism has won and as such it then matters little whether we give in to the terrorists demands or not. We will have lost the precious freedom which Bush and Blair constantly tells us we have and that they seek to bring to others. I agree wholeheartedly with Mr Forsyth. I am shocked at the ease with which this government is prepared to wipe out a major portion of the liberties that British people have enjoyed for centuries - the right not to be deprived of our liberty without a trial in open court. That goes right back to Magna Carta," and ordinary people have spilled their blood to enforce that right against governments who thought they ""knew best"". When you look at today's Britain", you realise George Orwell was only wrong about one thing: the date. Frederick Forsyth puts it beautifully. The government is seeking to introduce a police state. The new powers of home internment without trial follow a pattern which includes the introduction of surveillance via compulsory ID cards and the linking of data bases, together with the un-British idea that we will have to swear allegiance to the state

at the age of 18 years. We are sleep-walking into this. Wake up! An interesting view but missing two crucial facts of this new threat: 1) If these terrorists acquire weapons of mass destruction they WILL use them without fear of Mutually Assured Destruction that kept the cold war in a state of tense balance. These people will use devastating force against us without fear of ANY consequence. 2) The terrorists are prepared to use suicide bombers which means they could kill innocent people on the London Underground and we could do very little to stop it. Because these terrorists are potentially SO deadly, we have to come up with new, tougher responses. It will be a little late in the day when people outside London wake up one morning to find out that London has been nuked. We won't have much of a society left to debate ! He's correct in most of what he says. Mind you he does seem to have forgotten that disgraceful internment policy in Northern Ireland which probably caused many idealistic if misguided young Catholics to join the IRA. Administrative detention of Muslims could have a similar effect now. Surely we the public would be better protected if the security services, rather than alerting a suspect terrorist by placing them under house arrest (and for how long?) They were to place suspect terrorist under surveillance and maybe acquire sufficient evidence to prosecute or even better prevent a terrorist attack. I don't usually have much time for Mr Forsyth's largely right wing views but this time he has got it spot on. There is no doubt that there are terrorist organisations who would like to do harm to the U.K. but it is very doubtful whether al-Qaeda is a global organisation co-ordinating this. The rise of surveillance cameras, ID cards, the plan to charge for road use by tracking every vehicle at all times, this is the stuff of nightmares. Add to this this new legislation which effectively means that the protection of the law will be removed from anyone at the whim of the Home Secretary, and I genuinely wonder what sort of world my two children will inherit. Where will this end. As it stands terrorists do not need to attack the U.K. its government will soon have its people terrorised more than they could very achieve with a few bombs. Mr Forsyth has expressed exactly what my gut fears and reservations were about this proposed legislation, but could not verbalise. Thank you. Mr Forsyth seems to forget that killings in the Troubles occurred on both sides of the religious divide and was carried out by killers from both sides. He also forgets basic Human Rights were suspended then as now. Experienced Judges sat over some of the greatest miscarriages of justice during those times. For very little return and maximum alienation. These laws and the emphasis on the Islamic threat will just do the same. Forsyth is wrong. The nature of the current threat is new. It is no longer to our armed forces, as the Soviet threat in the Eastern bloc was. It is to you and I. The terrorist aim to kill indiscriminately. The best comparison is therefore the blitz, 1941. At this time, let us not forget, suspects (foreign and British) were routinely rounded up and interned for the duration of the war," without any complaints from the public. We must not forget we are at war. I'd say that that the likelihood of an attack by a sleeper cell of fundamentalist lunatics against a major UK target is a ""When"" not an ""If"" probability. I'll bet any money you like that the day after any such attack Freddie Forsyth will be saying that the government didn't do enough to protect the UK. People like Forsyth can only see one side of any argument and for him it is the side that is opposite New Labour and Tony Blair. I agree wholeheartedly with Mr Forsyth. The very reason this country has been such a wonderful place to live", is under attack, not from terrorists, but from this government. The perpetuation of the perceived terrorist threat is not because of what the 'alleged' terrorists are doing, but from our own government. I believe what this government is doing, is, at the very least, highly questionable and at worst, sinister. At what point will they feel they have enough control over every single person in the British Isles

sles; when we are all tagged and monitored constantly? Our freedom is being craftily and surreptitiously whittled away by this government and we are gaining nothing. It should be of great concern to everyone. I am slightly older than Mr Forsyth and therefore have lived through the same history as him. I am against a police state and would not like to think that I lived in one. I think that the attack on Iraq made the international situation worse and may have provoked further acts of terrorism. How true. There are extremely worrying parallels between Britain now and Germany during the 30's. I never thought it would be so easy to take over a country from within. Mr Forsyth has forgotten one key point; the terrorists who threaten Britain today are well aware that Hitler, Stalin, and the IRA all failed. As a result modern day terrorists are willing to do things their predecessors did not. That does not mean that the civil liberties of modern Britain must be eroded to counter the threat; that should always be the absolute last resort. But to meet the new threat, to defeat the sinister fanaticism of today's terrorists, we may need to do things a little differently. Let us hope not. Frederic Forsythe's comments seem to me to be a well-thought-out analysis of why we (human society as a whole, and Britain in particular) should resist the temptation to over-protect through fear. It is this fear which enables terrorists to succeed in the end, and terrorists can come in all forms," as Mr. Forsythe's opening comments suggest. I am reminded of a quote attributed to Thomas Jefferson. ""A nation that limits freedom in the name of security will have neither." The government are faced with an incredibly difficult task", and have made a policy to deal with it. It's all very well criticising that policy, but if Mr Forsythe can't draw on his years of experience to offer an alternative, I say 'So what?' to his opinions. Frederick Forsyth's rhetoric is absurd and his conclusions laughable. He distorts reality to serve his own prejudice against New Labour. This government seeks to balance protection of our democracy with minimum loss of civil rights. It is Frederick Forsyth who is the extremist, because he does not appreciate the need for balance. I rarely find myself agreeing with My Forsyth, but in this instance I think he is correct. The rule of law must prevail, civil liberties are worth defending. If the government can hold 'suspects' without charge or trial, what's next? I agree absolutely. By introducing fascist type laws we loose the moral high ground in our fight against terror. Our democratic system is not perfect," but as Churchill points out it is ""better than all the others that have been tried"". Terrorist attacks will take place but for many reasons we should take that personal risk in return for personal freedom. I do not usually agree with Mr. Forsyth", but he is spot on here. The single biggest threat we face is that of a government dedicated to acting illegally and manipulating international and national law to suit its own purpose. Totalitarianism always requires an outside threat, justifying a range of extraordinary powers leaders want. The British government is a far greater threat than any terrorist organisation. Although, in principle I agree with him, Frederick Forsyth fails to address one key point- al-Qaeda attacks (though obviously there have been none yet in the UK) seek to kill the maximum number of people. The IRA wanted to limit the death toll of their attacks so as to maintain support among the republican movement. Yes, I agree with Mr. Forsyth's views. I do not believe the government's plans are justified. There is over reaction to and the negative influence of the US President's interpretation of democracy and freedom. He uses the same arguments that were current before the WWII," the Wars to ""liberate"" Iraq", Afghanistan with Syria and Iran to come. We are leaving a poor inheritance for the future generations. Mr Forsyth is a wonderful writer and should keep his fiction where it belongs. The British Government is not going down the road that Mr Forsyth suggests. Sadly comments such as his will make a lot of people believe that they are governed by people who are fast

becoming tyrants instead of being genuinely committed to stopping tyranny, even if the method employed to do that is at the moment alien to the British people who have lived in a democracy protected by Tony Blair and others of like mind who, Mr. Forsyth seems to be putting along side the 'scruffy little Austrian.' Thomas Hobbes would be smiling in his grave at Labour's propositions. Like New Labour, he called himself a libertarian. Like New Labour, he believed he was promoting the people's best interests. But as Forsythe criticises this government, Hobbes has been criticised by most subsequent philosophers for arguing his way into the hands of the totalitarians. Simply put, he argued that in favour of the ultimate liberty - the liberty to live - man should be prepared to surrender all other liberties to a supreme sovereign, as protection against his fellow, barbaric, man. Hobbes has been roundly condemned by posterity, and rightly so. I hope New Labour suffers the same treatment. I agree with Mr Forsyth's views. The governments approach is totally against the spirit of British democracy. They must not be allowed to get away with it. Of course Frederick is wrong about Britain winning the war against the IRA and he's wrong too about the country not becoming a tyranny. Has he forgotten about shoot to kill, torture, internment without trial, collusion with loyalist death squads etc? My background is somewhat similar to Freddie's so I am persuaded to agree with many of his sentiments. We can have no moral justification for imposing our system of government on anyone while we are systematically depriving our own citizens of basic individual and collective freedoms. Whilst the principle of keeping potential terrorists under house arrest might seem superficially attractive, it is, unfortunately, also the first step towards totalitarianism. Who is to decide whom is a suspect? Why should we believe them? Who can have faith in the honesty, integrity, and competence of our intelligence services and politicians in light of the events of recent years? What is to stop false denunciations? What of those falsely accused who will lose their careers? Who will support their families? Will their children still go to school? It smacks to me of the methods of Nazi Germany, Stalin's Russia, Ceausescu's Romania - the list goes on. It looks as if a new dark age is coming. I see that opinion on Mr Forsyth's remarks are divided. The problem I see is that those who support imprisonment without trial believe it will never happen to them or their family, only to people they don't like or are scared of. But history has shown that if you have laws like that, they always get abused by those in power. After all, today you may be scared of the same people as those in power but someday those in power may be scared of you! And that day, you'll be the one imprisoned without the chance of justice. Our laws are such that you cannot just be imprisoned at the whim of our police forces, you have to be shown to be deserving of it. If we imprison people without trial for a indeterminate period, we are no better than those we are fighting. I never thought it possible for me to agree with a single word uttered by Frederick Forsyth, but I'm in wholehearted agreement with him on this one. We, as a nation are in grave danger of being duped by pro US propaganda, which of course also means we'll inherit most, if not all of their total paranoia, and allow our governments, of any political persuasion incidentally, to gradually, and insidiously, impose a police state by well tried & tested back door methods. I grieve for the future of my children, it's no wonder they're adamant they don't ever want anything of their own. This government, with much fanfare, signs us up to the European Convention on Human Rights but now wants to introduce indefinite house arrest without trial. This puts it on a par with the government of Burma. Like many of your respondents, I wouldn't usually think of Mr Forsyth as someone whose views I share, but in the instance of opposing Charles Clark's proposals for house arrest, I agree wholeheartedly with Mr Forsyth/ I agree with Mr Forsyth. Just look at the facts - our government (along with the US) invaded another sovereign

n country (Iraq) by selecting intelligence that backed it's case based on fear. The facts turned out to be very different. If individuals are treated in the same distorted way, then we've done ourselves more damage than any terrorist organisation could with bombs. We become animals too. I agree in many ways with what Mr Forsyth has said - if we are to be respected and have influence within the world we must be seen to be walking the walk as well as talking the talk - how can we accuse countries such as Zimbabwe and Burma of human rights abuses when we are locking up people who may be totally innocent," it is hypocrisy of the highest order. Mr Forsyth links ""Islamic fundamentalism"" to the new ""threat"". However it appears that he has misunderstood the term ""Islamic fundamentalism"". It should be pointed out that a Muslim who adheres to the true fundamentals of the Qur'aan and the teachings of the last Prophet Muhammad is an Islamic Fundamentalist. This person does not commit suicide in any shape or form", nor does she/he kill innocent women," men and children. This person is self-reflective and constantly tries to better her/his actions by being good to others. The people who Mr Forsyth labels the new ""threat"" are those who do not follow the correct teachings of Islam. They have arrived at their own interpretations and assumptions with regards their actions. On top of that", they claim to be following Islam in its true form! I accept that the intentions of these policies are to make Britain a safer place but I cannot think of a single example from history where doing this sort of thing has ever made any difference - in Northern Ireland internment certainly didn't achieve anything - the bombings didn't stop, and it could be argued that all it achieved was to just supply the IRA with yet more angry and resentful republicans willing to take up arms against the British. Being eight years older than Frederick Forsyth and a survivor of the Blitz on London, it is easy to agree with him, he is absolutely spot on. During the IRA bombings there were massive explosions in Canary Wharf, to the right of where I write this, and also to the left in the City of London. Notwithstanding these and the attempted and nearly successful assassination attempts on Prime Minister Thatcher in Brighton and on later occupants of 10 Downing Street, there was no retaliatory blitz on Belfast or Dublin as there has been on Afghanistan and Iraq. Even when England was in true peril in 1940 apart from some detentions there were no wholesale derogation of habeas corpus and the like. We have to see off these latest attempts on our liberties including ID cards, which Winston Churchill decided had to go since, he said," the average Bobby on the beat could not be relied on to not be tempted to take undue advantage against the citizen going about their lawful activities (incidentally I can still remember my old ID card number). Hence it is clear that the far too great police state powers set for the statute books have to be resisted and neutered. What can I add to Mr. Forsyth's eloquently put arguments... except applause! Well done that man for standing up and being counted in the ""war against tyranny""."

"politics 291.txt 'Super union' merger plan touted Two of Britain's big trade unions could merge to form a ""super union"" of two million members. The move by Amicus and the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) would be seen as a bid to carry more weight with ministers and employers. Amicus has 1.2 million members and the TGWU has 800",000. Any merger would have to be approved by the unions' executives and their membership. It is understood meetings will be held on Wednesday about the proposal. Along with the GMB and Unison, the TGWU and Amicus worked closely together in the last year to hammer out a 56-point deal with Labour's leadership over equality at work, holidays and pensions - the Warwick Agreement. Both unions are remaining tight-lipped about the merger rumours," but one insider pointed out to the BBC News website that ""nobody is denying suggestions a merger could be on the agenda"" when the two unions' executives hold their meetings on Wednesday. Amicus's executive was due to

meet in any case although the TGWU is holding specially scheduled talks.

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,, politics 292.txt UKIP MEP attacked German 'empire' A UK Independence Party MEP suggested Germany saw the EU as an 'empire' and was cheaper than using tanks", a new documentary has revealed. Mike Nattrass, UKIP's deputy leader, made the comments to an audience at a meeting during last September's Hartlepool by-election campaign. But challenged on the remark," he denied a ccusing Germany of using the EU as cover for a ""4th German Reich"". He says he was not ""German-bashing"" but saying peace was the EU's founding aim. The meeting was shown in a BBC 3 film on ex-UKIP MEP Robert Kilroy-Silk. The former chat show host quit the party earlier this month", calling it a joke. The documentary showed Mr Nattrass, apparently talking about the EU," telling the meeting: ""The Germans are the big losers here but they don't care because to them the project is worthwhile. ""It's like an empire for them spreading in all directions away from Germany into Hungary", into what they call the Sudetenland - Czechoslovakia," places like that. ""So it's cheaper for them to do it this way than roll the tanks in." On Tuesday", he told the BBC News website he did not think the comments were offensive and worked happily with MEPs of different nationalities in the European Parliament. He argued that peace was the only reason for having the ""outdated"" EU as there was no economic justification. Pointing to Germany's trade interests as a country in the centre of Europe", Mr Nattrass said: ""The fact is that the EU benefits Germany but it does not benefit Britain. ""I'm not at all German-bashing. It's the truth."" A UKIP spokesman said: ""Mike has some passionate beliefs and sometimes uses excessively colourful language with which to express them."" The documentary showed some of the tensions between Mr Kilroy-Silk and his fellow MEPs after UKIP took third place in last year's European elections. He denied wanting to be leader until October 2004", when he told BBC One's Breakfast with Frost programme he aspired to the job. Asked by the documentary makers why he had lied about his leadership ambitions," Mr Kilroy-Silk said: ""There was one thing I said that I shouldn't have said at the time. ""I was trying to be helpful to the party and it was the wrong thing to do", I should have told the truth."" The film also included footage of a row between Mr Kilroy-Silk", MEP Nigel Farage and party leader Roger Knapman about rumours that he was about to resign the UKIP whip in the European Parliament. Mr Kilroy-Silk told them he had not left the UKIP group - a move he announced shortly after the meeting. He told Mr Farage: ""Don't tell lies Nigel", now you've told too many. Most of the trouble had been caused by you."" UKIP officials claim it was in fact Mr Kilroy-Silk", not Mr Farage, who briefed newspapers he was leaving the group of MEPs. Later in unguarded, off-air comments in a television studio," Mr Kilroy-Silk was heard saying he was irritated by ""defending some of these right-wing fascist nutters"". Mr Kilroy-Silk separately said he had argued against UKIP working with such groups which believed homosexuality was a sin. A UKIP spokesman said there were more than 40 MEPs in the same group in the European Parliament. They were from a broad spectrum - some right-wing", some left-wing - but with a shared belief in the ""unfeasibility of the EU as it is now"". He did not defend other groups' religious beliefs but argued it was their right to hold such views - just as Mr Kilroy-Silk had a right to criticise Arab states. London UKIP MEP Gerard Batten said: ""Robert has made a variety of comments about UKIP and its MEPs. ""There are of course two sides to every story. What Robert does not say is that he was offered several positions which would have given him effective control of the party", but not the title of leader."" Mr Kilroy-Silk is to launch his own party", Veritas, in Westminster

r on Wednesday.

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"politics 293.txt Kilroy launches 'Veritas' party Ex-BBC chat show host and East Midlands MEP Robert Kilroy-Silk said he wanted to "change the face of British politics" as he launched his new party. Mr Kilroy-Silk, who recently quit the UK Independence Party," said "our country" was being "stolen from us" by mass immigration. He told a London news conference that Veritas - Latin for "truth" - would avoid the old parties' "lies and spin". UKIP leader Roger Knapman says he is glad to see the back of Mr Kilroy-Silk. Mr Kilroy-Silk promised a "firm but fair" policy on immigration and said they hoped to contest most seats at the forthcoming general election. He said Veritas would also announce detailed policies on crime", tax, pensions," health and defence over the next few weeks. Labour campaign spokesman Fraser Kemp said Veritas was joining "an already crowded field on the right of British politics". On Thursday Mr Kilroy-Silk is due to announce which constituency he will run in at the next general election - that will come amid speculation he has his sights set on Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon's Ashfield seat. He was joined in the new venture by one of UKIP's two London Assembly members", Damien Hockney who is now Veritas' deputy leader. UKIP's chairman Petrina Holdsworth has said the group will just be a parody of the party the men have left. Mr Kilroy-Silk quit UKIP last week after months of tension as he vied unsuccessfully for the leadership of that party. He said he was ashamed to be a member of a UKIP whose leadership had "gone AWOL" after the great opportunity offered by its third place at last June's European elections. "While UKIP has turned its back on the British people", I shall not," he said. I will be standing at the next general election. I shall be leading a vigorous campaign for the causes I believe in. "And", unlike the old parties, we shall be honest," open and straight." Mr Hockney also left UKIP saying Mr Kilroy-Silk would "deliver better" as the leader of a Eurosceptic party. A spokesman for UKIP called on Mr Hockney to quit the London Assembly. The party asserts that Mr Hockney "has a moral obligation", if not a legal one" to stand down. Its leader", Roger Knapman," has said he is glad to see the back of Mr Kilroy-Silk. "He has remarkable ability to influence people but", sadly, after the [European] election it became clear that he was more interested in the Robert Kilroy-Silk Party than the UK Independence Party so it was nice knowing him, now 'goodbye', he said. UKIP officials also argue Mr Kilroy-Silk has not been straightforward" in attacking the party he once wanted to lead. Veritas? It's the BNP in an expensive suit! It's all well and good Robert Kilroy-Silk claiming", that 'Veritas' is a party that doesn't believe in "lies and spin""", but the truth of the matter is, its completely useless, due to proportional representation, there is no chance that 'Veritas' will have any chance in claiming power, and change the two-horse race trend. In my opinion this is just a publicity stunt which has just been used as a smoke-screen for his anti-Islamism slurs which got him sacked from the television. I think that his views regarding immigration are shared by many. It really is time that the UK government ceased to be a paper tiger on this issue. In addition as an Ashfield constituent I would be more than interested in Kilroy -Silk opposing Geoff Hoon!! Good to see the parties of the right splintering in the way the parties of the left have always done. Let's hope Kilroy-Silk, UKIP and the euro-sceptic wing of the Tory Party all fade further into obscurity so we can have some truth in the debate about Europe. We benefit enormously from our membership of the EU, we need to be at the heart of Europe, leading it and driving it to where we as a country want to go, not running away from it. All mouth and trousers. A clown. Trouble is, any votes he collects may just end up helping New Labour into

a third term. Whatever Kilroy-Silk and UKIP do, none of their anti-European policies have any relevance outside middle England. This new party might gain support from right-wing England, but will have little impact in Wales or Scotland. Hopefully this all this fighting within euro-sceptic parties will allow them to slip out of the way and get people voting for real political parties which address more than one issue. England needs Europe to survive and as soon as people realise this the better, we can't rely on the USA forever! At last an impetus for increasing the likely 40% turn out for the election. The electorate is disillusioned with British politics. Kilroy has one agenda - the UK - and I'll be voting for him. Both UKIP and RK-S are representatives of small-mindedness and a lack of vision for the whole of humankind. The interests of humanity and the world lie so much beyond the scope of these people's bickering that who, in the overall scheme of things, really cares about their petty tiff? Many people believe you Kilroy. You may even believe yourself but switching horses midstream and then bad mouthing the steed that got you halfway seriously diminishes your credibility. The very idea of political parties born out of such negative feelings as Euroscepticism or British Supremacy is nauseating. One can only hope the public recognise these extremists for what they are and shun them at the polls. I've always thought that Kilroy-Silk was a self-publicising, egotist and this news does absolutely nothing to alter my opinion. Brilliant, about time this country had a plausible party! Having seen the recent BBC 3 documentary and witnessed the thoroughly disgraceful chauvinistic behaviour of a number of senior UKIP figures I can well understand why Kilroy-Silk feels embarrassed to be associated with such people. Hopefully the UKIP members who are interested in the political debate will support his action. Fantastic news. Pro-Europeans now have far less to worry about from the right. The Conservatives are as confused as they have been since the mid-1990s, and the extreme anti-Europeans are fracturing themselves into splinter groups that split any votes they might get in local, European and general elections. Robert Kilroy-Silk's ego and vanity are his own (and his supporters') worst enemy. As a euro-enthusiast I could not be more delighted by Kilroy-Silk's behaviour. He took a party that was just building up a head of steam, and having exposed it to ridicule by attempting a coup-d'etat, he is now setting about the serious business of dividing it in two. The closer to straight-down-the-middle the better, as far as I am concerned, but in any eventuality, the two sceptic parties will exhaust their energies fighting each other. If every politician with ambitions to lead their party resorted to forming their own for that purpose, we'd have ballot papers a mile long! You've got to hand it to Kilroy-Silk for his sheer arrogance and supreme self-belief. Whilst not being a great fan of Kilroy I do agree with his comments about the UKIP leadership, and like him I am also leaving UKIP. I believe countless opportunities have been lost to discredit the EU and to show our people what belonging to the EU really means. The EU's comments last week about Michael Howard's plans to reform immigration show how little we govern our own country when they can turn round and say immigration is a matter for the EU and not individual member states. The sooner we leave this corrupt super-state the better Does anyone else think that it is ironic that Euro-Sceptic Kilroy-Silk has used a Latin name for his new party, rather than a 'good old British' name? Is this indicative of the man - contradictory, vain and pompous? I think Mr Kilroy-Silk has got a very good point. British politics has become too PC and as a result has no straight talking honest strong politicians. They are all interested in their own careers and not the people who put them in power. As a result I feel our democracy is being abused and I want it stopped. If Mr Kilroy-Silk lives up to half his promises he will get my vote. Honestly, who really cares? Man with tan leaves party with no plan, to set up party with no idea. As one of Kilroy-Silk's East Midla

nds constituents I hope those who voted for him are proud to have been taken in by such charming vacuity. I feel insulted by having him represent me in the European Parliament. UKIP tried hard to accommodate Robert Kilroy Silk, but he made it clear that only control of it would satisfy him. Someone so keen on complete control was bound to fall foul of UKIP's democratic nature. Kilroy is an able communicator and a capable politician, in exactly the way those who lead UKIP are not. He tried to make it work, but they didn't seem to want to grow up. He was left in the position of having to defend their gaffes to the media. This new party seems a logical next step for Kilroy. Good luck to the man, I say. Oh please! This is an amusing irrelevance. There is absolutely no chance of either of these parties communicating a sensible and constructive 'Eurosceptic' argument. They will play a key part in winning the country round to the idea of a reformed, more democratic, more dynamic Europe Union. Future generations will thank him for his ridiculousness. The refreshing thing about Robert is that he is open, honest and straight. What other politician can claim this. I have a suspicion that he talks for a larger part of the electorate than his critics would like. I shall be voting for him. The electorate of the East Midlands voted not for Kilroy-Silk but for the UKIP. Kilroy-Silk was made an MEP because of his position on the UKIP's party list. He has no mandate to represent the area and should resign from the European Parliament. I wouldn't write off Kilroy-Silk. While he's a clown and a one man band at the moment, he's a populist and that's always dangerous. The man clearly has an enormous ego and looking at our current political masters, that seems to be one of the factors in success. Good luck to Kilroy though I think he is doing more harm than good for both his new party and UKIP because their vote base is not strong enough for both parties to be successful and at the moment UKIP have the upper hand while Veritas are starting from square one and fighting a somewhat uphill battle. The man I once found cringe worthy on Day time TV, could well turn out to be my country's knight in shining armour. He expresses views which are now more than common amongst society today - but people are almost too scared to express them. Kilroy Silk has secured my vote, and many more like me. What's more, I look forward to the day when he claims victory, wrecks the EU, and rescues my great nation... without a hair out of place and his tan as perfect as ever! Great Stuff. The longer the UK dithers over Europe, the richer we in Ireland become, as the only English-speaking country fully committed to Europe. Oh and send us over those hard-working immigrants - our economy needs them. This is just what the Europhiles pray for. As the main Eurosceptic party, UKIP should try to resolve its differences with Kilroy to show a united front and give the UK public a serious political voice against Europe. Having multiple parties with the same view point just splits the vote further. Thank goodness that Kilroy-Silk has gone - now UKIP at least has a chance in the election! It is very sad to see the cause of Britain regaining its proper relationship with Europe damaged by this split within UKIP. Robert Kilroy-Silk could have a lot to offer. Instead we have a split party and a damaged cause. Under the present electoral system, people must work together, and small parties have no hope of representation. Last summer, UKIP achieved a major advance, partly and only partly due to Kilroy-Silk. It is a great shame this has been dissipated in in-fighting. UKIP has a wide platform of policies, not just withdrawal from the EU. This Kilroy-Silk conveniently ignores in the comments surrounding the launch of his own party. Neither the English Democrats nor the New Party were interested in letting him join them and take over their leadership speaks volumes. Veritas is the beginning of the end for Kilroy-Silk. If he believes in truth and democracy then he and the two assembly members should resign and force a by-elections to stand on their own platform rather than this backdoor approach to politics of being elected for one party then defecting to

another. So UKIP was good enough for him to lead, not good enough for him to follow! Interesting that a party committed to plain speaking should have a Latin name! Every opinion poll points to an overwhelming anti-Europe feeling in this country. Kilroy-Silk could be on the verge of something huge if he can broaden his appeal beyond this one issue. He is an extremely able communicator with years of political experience. We want quality schools, top hospitals, clean and efficient public transport, punishments that fit the crime, limited asylum, a purge on bureaucracy and less taxes. It needs courage and honesty, two qualities sadly lacking in our politicians. Kilroy-Silk may just have those very qualities. Recruit the right colleagues, Robert, and your time may have come! Well if you cannot get enough limelight being an ordinary MP then go out and start up your own Party. It's all flash and no real policy here Let's hope this is the start of both UKIP and Kilroy-Silk slipping into obscurity. Veritas? The name will doom it. But perhaps I am wrong for surely all modern schoolchildren will understand it since they do still learn Latin in the classroom do they not? The whole essence of what RKS represents is Euroscepticism, so explain to me how the too-twee label of Veritas symbolises that?

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''' politics 294.txt Civil servants in strike ballot The UK's biggest civil service union is to ballot its 290,000 members on strikes in protest at government plans to extend their pension age to 65. The Public and Commercial Services Union will co-ordinate any action with up to six other public sector unions. Unions have already earmarked 23 March for a one-day strike which could involve up to 1.4 million UK workers. The government says unions will be consulted before any changes are made to the pension system. PCS leader Mark Serwotka warned there could be further walkouts unless there was a government rethink. "For a government that lectures everyone on choice - choice on public service", choice on this and choice on that - isn't it ironic that they're saying to public sector workers there is no choice," he said. If you want the pension you were promised when you started you must work for an extra five years - that is working until people drop. "In the 20th century", it's completely unacceptable." BBC correspondent Stephen Cape said the combined unions represented "a formidable force" which could embarrass the government in the run-up to the General Election. A stoppage involving civil servants", in particular, could seriously disrupt or close government departments, agencies and museums," he said. Opposition to raising the retirement age is "one thing all the unions are agreed on", our correspondent added. Unison's 800,000 workers, the Transport and General Workers' Union's 70,000 and Amicus' 20,000 are among those being balloted about a 23 March walkout. Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott held a private meeting with senior union figures on Thursday night. Our correspondent said that he understood no deal had been offered in that meeting but that there was room for further negotiations. There was "some possibility" of the strike action being avoided", he added.

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''' politics 295.txt Blair Labour's longest-serving PM Tony Blair has become the Labour Party's longest-serving prime minister. The 51-year-old premier has marked his 2,838th day in the post, overtaking the combined length of Harold Wilson's two terms during the 1960s and 1970s. If Mr Blair wins the next election and fulfils his promise to serve a full third term, he will surpass Margaret Thatcher's 11 years by the end of 2008. In 1997, Mr Blair became the youngest premier of the 20th century, when he came to power at the age of 43. The last prime minister to be installed at a younger age was Lord Liverpo

ol, who was a year his junior in 1812. Mr Blair's other political firsts include becoming the first Labour leader to win two successive full terms in power after the 2001 Labour landslide. And the birth of the Blairs' fourth child, Leo, on 20 May, 2000," was the first child born to a serving prime minister in more than 150 years. The last ""Downing Street dad"" was Lord John Russell in 1848. Labour won a huge majority of 167 over the Conservatives in 2001", but Mr Blair has since been criticised by many in his own party. The war in Iraq and reforms of the health service and education system have provoked dissent from backbenchers. Gordon Brown, chancellor of the exchequer under Mr Blair, became Britain's longest-serving chancellor of modern times in 2004. Former Labour leader Lord Kinnock said the chancellor would be best placed to take over from Mr Blair. When asked about the future leadership of the party," he told ITV Wales' Waterfront programme: ""That contest is a long way away and it will occur only when the Prime Minister", Tony Blair," decides he's subscribed all he can and then wants to go. ""I think that the main contender will be Gordon Brown",, who is a man of virtually unmatched capability and now great experience." Both Mr Brown and Mr Blair rose to prominence when Lord Kinnock led Labour between 1983 and 1992.

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"politics 296.txt Tories leave door open for Archer The Conservative Party would deal ""sympathetically"" with any application by disgraced peer Lord Archer to rejoin its ranks",, its co-chairman has said. Dr Liam Fox told BBC One's Breakfast with Frost programme there was no place for ""vindictiveness"" in politics. Lord Archer spent two years in prison after being convicted of perjury and perverting the course of justice. The former Tory deputy chairman's five-year suspension from the party has just elapsed. A jury ruled that Lord Archer lied during a libel trial against the Daily Star at the High Court in London in 1987. He won damages after the newspaper printed allegations about involvement with a prostitute. Dr Fox was asked if he would say yes or no if Lord Archer applied to rejoin. ""I'm sure that in line with people having served their sentence and having done some reparations for what they did wrong",, we would look at that sympathetically. ""I don't believe in vindictiveness", I don't think that has any place in politics," unlike the prime minister and Alastair Campbell." Tory peer Lord Tebbit said he agreed with Dr Fox's view",, and said the case should be looked at on its merits. ""After all", he is far from being the worst perjurer in the world," he added. Meanwhile, senior Conservative MP Sir Teddy Taylor warned that moves bring Lord Archer back into the fold could be controversial. He said: I suppose", on a Sunday in particular," we should always make provision for forgiving sinners. But there is no doubt it would be controversial." Lord Archer", who was not available for comment, remains a popular figure among constituency Tory parties and is a successful fundraiser. He has not been seen in the House of Lords since his release from prison in July 2003, although there is nothing in the rules to prevent him from attending.

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"politics 297.txt Mandelson warns BBC on Campbell The BBC should steer away from ""demonising"" ex-Downing Street media chief Alastair Campbell",, Peter Mandelson has said. The European commissioner and former Labour minister was speaking amid claims that Mr Campbell is part of a Labour ""dirty tricks"" campaign. That charge was denied by Mr Mandelson",, who said the Tories were afraid of Mr Campbell's campaigning skills. He warned the BBC that attacking Mr Campbell had brought it trouble before. That was a reference to the Hutton inquiry following a BBC story claiming Downing Street ""sexed up"" Iraq's

weapons of mass destruction dossier. The affair prompted the resignation of BBC chairman Gavyn Davies", director-general Greg Dyke and reporter Andrew Gilligan. Labour has attracted media criticism for using new freedom of information laws to dig up information about Tory leader Michael Howard's past. Mr Mandelson, a former Labour communications director," told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: ""I understand why the Tories will be gunning for Alastair Campbell because they fear his campaigning skills. ""What I understand less is why the BBC should be joining with the Tories in driving that agenda. ""In my experience of these things", parties which shout about dirty tricks and the like tend to do so because they fear a direct hit in some vulnerable part of their political anatomy. ""I suggest the BBC concentrates on the issues and helps the public to understand the policies and the choices that are at stake in the election rather than engages in the process politics", the trivialisation of the campaign. ""I think the BBC would be much better advised to leave all this stuff well alone", concentrate on the issues as I say," not resume their demonisation of Alastair Campbell - we all know where that led before." Mr Campbell is acting as an adviser for Labour", which denies engaging in personal campaigning. Conservative co-chairman Liam Fox said Mr Campbell's return and Labour poster plans attacking Mr Howard - recently withdrawn from the party's website - were a sign of "abusive politics". ""The government", despite the fact that they would say want to go forward, not back, seem intent on talking about history rather than their own record or even more importantly, about the future," he said on Sunday. Labour peer Baroness Kennedy, who is chairing the Power Inquiry into political disengagement, said people already thought politicians engaged in dirty tricks. This feeling of distrust is going to be enlarged if this campaigning on all sides is conducted in the way that it looks as if it just might", she said.

politics 298.txt 'Debate needed' on donations cap A cap on donations to political parties should not be introduced yet, the elections watchdog has said. Fears that big donors can buy political favours have sparked calls for a limit. In a new report, the Electoral Commission says it is worth debating a £10,000 cap for the future but now is not the right time to introduce it. It also says there should be more state funding for political parties and candidates should be able to spend more on election campaigning. There were almost £68m in reported donations to political parties in 2001, 2002 and 2003, with nearly £12m of them from individual gifts worth more than £1m. The rules have already been changed so the public can see who gives how much to the parties but the report says there are still public suspicions. The commission says capping donations would mean taxpayers giving parties more cash - something which would first have to be acceptable to the public and shown to work. While we are not in principle opposed to the introduction of a donation cap", we do not believe that such a major departure from the existing system now would be sensible," says its report. If there was to be a cap, it should be £10,000 - a small enough amount to make a difference but which would have banned £56m in donations between 2001 and 2003. Even without changes the commission does urge political parties to seek out more small-scale donations and suggests there should be income tax relief for gifts under £200. It also suggests increasing state funding for parties to £3m so help can be extended to all parties with at least two members in the House of Commons, European Parliament, Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly or Northern Ireland Assembly. And it suggests new ways of boosting election campaigning, seen as a way of improving voter turnout. All local election candidates should be entitled to a free mailshot for campaign leaflets, says the watchdog. And there should be a shift in the amount of money allowed to be spent at elections from a national level to a local level to help politicians engage better with voters. The report suggests doubling the money which can be spent

t by candidates, while cutting national spending limits from £20m to £15m. The commission also says the spending limits for general elections should cover the four months before the poll - as happens with other elections. Electoral Commission chairman Sam Younger said: There is no doubt that political parties have a vital role to play in maintaining the health of our democracy and for this they need to be adequately resourced. "Our research has shown that people want to be more informed about party politics and that they want politicians to be more visible and accessible. "The public are reluctant for the state to fund parties but at the same time are unhappy with large private donations." He called for a wider public debate on party funding to find the consensus needed for radical changes to the current system.

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"politics 299.txt Conservative backing for ID cards The Tories are to back controversial government plans to introduce ID cards. The shadow cabinet revealed its support ahead of next week's Commons vote on a bill to introduce compulsory ID. The decision follows a ""tough meeting"" where some senior Tories argued vociferously against the move", party sources told the BBC. The bill, which ministers claim will tackle crime, terrorism and illegal immigration," is expected to be opposed by the Liberal Democrats. They have said the scheme is ""deeply flawed"" and a waste of money. Sources within the Conservative Party told the BBC Michael Howard has always been in favour of ID cards", and tried to introduce them when he was Home Secretary. The party has been ""agnostic"" on the issue until now but had now decided to come off the fence", the Tory source said. Despite giving their backing to ID cards," the Conservatives insisted they would hold ministers to account over the precise purpose of the scheme. They said they would also press Labour over whether objectives could be met and whether the Home Office would deliver them. And they pledged to assess the cost effectiveness of ID cards and whether people's privacy would be properly protected. ""It is important to remember that this bill will take a decade to come into full effect", a spokesman said. It will do nothing to solve the immediate problems of rising crime and uncontrolled immigration." Lib Dem home affairs spokesman Mark Oaten said: ""This has all the signs of Michael Howard overruling colleagues' concerns over ID cards. ""The Tories should have the courage to try and change public opinion not follow it."" The new chairman of the Bar Council", Guy Mansfield QC warned there was a real risk that people on the ""margins of society"" would be driven into the hands of extremists. ""What is going to happen to young Asian men when there has been a bomb gone off somewhere? They are going to be stopped. If they haven't [ID cards] they are going to be detained.”

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"politics 300.txt Howard denies split over ID cards Michael Howard has denied his shadow cabinet was split over its decision to back controversial Labour plans to introduce ID cards. The Tory leader said his front bench team had reached a ""collective view"" after holding a ""good discussion"" but admitted it was ""not an easy issue"". He had decided to support the plans as the police said they would help fight terror", crime and illegal immigration. The Lib Dems have pledged to oppose the bill when it is debated next Monday. Tory sources say senior party figures had argued vociferously against the ID card scheme. Among those reported to have serious reservations over the strategy were senior shadow cabinet members David Davis, Oliver Letwin and Tim Yeo. But Mr Howard denied Mr Yeo, his transport and environment spokesman," said the plans ""stink"". He also said he was confident shadow home secretary Mr Dav

is would "set out the position very clearly" when he stands up to debate the matter next week. Mr Howard said the police had said ID cards could "help them foil a terror bomb plot in which people could lose their lives". He added: "When the police say that you have to take them seriously". He acknowledged there were "good libertarian arguments" against the cards, but said the shadow Cabinet had weighed up all the "conflicting interests" before reaching its decision. "I don't pretend that it is an easy decision but at the end of the day a decision has to be taken." He also denied he was afraid of looking "soft" on the issue, compared to Labour. The Conservatives announced their support for the government plans on Monday evening. Sources within the party told the BBC Mr Howard had always been in favour of ID cards, and tried to introduce them when he was Home Secretary. But the Tories insisted they would hold ministers to account over the precise purpose of the scheme. They said they would also press Labour over whether objectives could be met and whether the Home Office would be able to deliver them. And they pledged to assess the cost effectiveness of ID cards and whether people's privacy would be properly protected. "It is important to remember that this bill will take a decade to come into full effect," a spokesman said. Lib Dem home affairs spokesman Mark Oaten has branded the ID scheme a waste of money and deeply flawed. He said: "This has all the signs of Michael Howard overruling colleagues' concerns over ID cards." The chairman of the Bar Council, Guy Mansfield QC warned there was a real risk that people on the "margins of society" would be driven into the hands of extremists. "What is going to happen to young Asian men when there has been a bomb gone off somewhere? They are going to be stopped. If they haven't [ID cards] they are going to be detained." Tory ex-minister Douglas Hogg said he opposed the plans for ID cards branding them a "regressive" step which would intrude into the lives of ordinary citizens without any counterbalancing benefits. He predicted ultimately carrying the cards would become compulsory and that would lead to large numbers of Britain's ethnic minorities being stopped by police.

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"politics 301.txt Taxes must be trusted - Kennedy Public trust in taxes is breaking down because Labour and Tories are not being straight with people on the issue", Lib Dem leader Charles Kennedy has said. A day ahead of the government's pre-Budget report, Mr Kennedy used a speech to say his party was facing up to "painful economic realities". He said the current level of taxation was about right, although he would put a new 50% tax on top earners. Other parties have accused the Lib Dems of making uncotted promises. Mr Kennedy made it clear he was determined to counter that accusation. The Lib Dems have already published what they say are the full costings for all their plans and Wednesday's speech did not announce new policies. Speaking at the Commonwealth Club, Mr Kennedy said it was critical for a political party to have economic credibility, both on what it promised and what it was expected to deliver. He said. "Budgets have to add up. Tough choices are needed in public spending." The Lib Dems would cut "low priority" spending, including the government's ID cards scheme and the Child Trust Fund. Those cutbacks would free up funds for increasing basic state pensions for over-75s, putting more police on the streets and reintroducing eye and dental checks, he said. The Lib Dems argue they were honest about taxes in the past by calling for a 1p rise on income tax. Now they say the only simple tax rise they want is a new 50% tax band for top earners to pay for scrapping university tuition fees, providing free personal care for elderly and disabled people and keeping local taxes down. There would also be a local income tax to replace council tax and a number of changes to environmental taxes to ensure it is the "polluter who pays". The Lib Dems sa

y the Tories have only laid out possible options for cutting taxes to grab headlines while Labour has hidden most of its tax rises. Mr Kennedy said: ""That contract with the people - that the government will only tax fairly and will spend their money wisely - can only be sustained if the political parties are straightforward about their plans. ""With the stealth tax strategy of Gordon Brown", the obvious unfairness of our current tax system - especially the council tax," and the empty promises of the Conservative party on this issue - it is no wonder that trust in taxation is breaking down." He challenged the Treasury to open up its books so the National Audit Office can report on the government's performance. Conservative co-chairman Liam Fox said: Liam Fox said ""If Charles Kennedy is serious about making his budgets add up he should start by explaining how they would fund their 100 spending commitments. ""The reality is", the Lib Dems lack the courage to tackle waste and bureaucracy," and the only people who would face 'tough choices' would be the families who would be £630 worse off a year. "" And Chancellor Gordon Brown said the Lib Dem figures did not add up. He accused the party of claiming it would spend less while across the country committing itself to spend more.

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"politics 302.txt Galloway targets 'New Labour' MP George Galloway is to stand against pro-Iraq war Labour MP Oona King at the next general election. Mr Galloway", who on Thursday won £150,000 in libel damages from the Daily Telegraph said he would contest Bethnal Green, in London, for Respect. The Glasgow Kelvin MP, who was expelled from Labour over his anti Iraq war stance," accused Ms King of being a ""New Labour stooge"". Ms King said she was ""delighted"" at the chance to take on Mr Galloway. Mr Galloway's current constituency is set to disappear under planned boundary changes in Scotland. The 50-year-old MP launched Respect", the Unity Coalition, in January along with 1,000 anti-war activists, and the Muslim Association of Britain. The party's declared aims are an end to the occupation of Iraq, the repeal of anti-union laws and the end of privatisation. Speaking from a cafe in Brick Lane, east London," Mr Galloway said he had accepted the party's invitation to stand with ""great honour and pride"". He added: ""Here in this constituency of Bethnal Green and Bow there is a New Labour stooge MP. ""A stooge who will sing any song", make any speech, do any dance," do anything she is told to by Tony Blair - irrespective of how her constituents are adversely affected or how strongly they feel to the contrary." Ms King has represented the constituency since 1997. She said: ""I'm delighted I've been given the chance to finish him (Mr Galloway) off," and believe me I will. ""I know many people around the country will be grateful", not least his constituents in Scotland who he has shamelessly abandoned." In June's European Parliament elections", Respect failed to gain enough votes for an MEP but did come first in Tower Hamlets borough, most of which is covered by the Commons constituency of Bethnal Green and Bow. A month later it gained a council seat in a by-election in St Dunstan's and Stepney Green ward, Tower Hamlets. Mr Galloway said that in next year's expected general election and local elections a year later," the party would ""turn the East End of London into a fortress"". Both the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats have chosen prospective parliamentary candidates for Bethnal Green and Bow from the Bangladeshi population", which makes up almost half the electorate. The Telegraph was sued for libel by Mr Galloway after the newspaper claimed he received money from Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq. The newspaper said it was in the public interest to publish the claims," based on documents found in Baghdad. Mr Justice Eady said he was ""obliged to compensate Mr Galloway... and to make an award for the purposes of restoring his reputation"".

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"politics 303.txt Election deal faltered over Heath role  
The Tories failed to hold onto power in 1974 after Liberals demanded Sir Edward Heath quit in return for co-operation. Documents released after 30 years reveal the failed negotiations by the then prime minister following the dramatic February general election. Liberal leader Jeremy Thorpe appeared willing to form a coalition government. But it partly collapsed over the Conservative leader's own role", prompting the Queen to ask Harold Wilson to form a Labour government. The February 1974 general election surprised the nation when it created a hung parliament with no party in overall control. Sir Edward had gone to the country for a fresh mandate amid the spiralling economic crisis, a miners' strike and the subsequent three-day week. Labour emerged with the most seats - but its 301 MPs were 17 short of the number Mr Wilson needed to form a majority. Sir Edward, who had received more votes but had fewer MPs, believed he had the authority to remain at Number 10 providing the 14 Liberal MPs would support his government. He said the Liberals could keep out Labour in three ways: lend ad hoc support to his minority government, help draw up the government's programme, or have up to three Cabinet members in a coalition with the Conservatives. According to the documents released at the National Archives," the ""friendly and easy"" first meeting indicated that both Sir Edward and Mr Thorpe thought they had the makings of a deal. Mr Thorpe was in high spirits", "having just led his party to a historic jump in support. He also argued for a grand coalition of all three main parties. But Sir Edward said that was impossible because the Labour left was set against it and the pair settled on trying for a Conservative-Liberal pact. Hours later Sir Edward's hopes of a deal unravelled as Mr Thorpe's colleagues refused to support him. ""Jeremy said he was encountering a rather embarrassing problem with his colleagues about the prime minister personally"", reads a telephone memo for Mr Heath. They feel they could not agree to serve as long as he is the prime minister. ""Asked if this was his own view he said - no it was not""" I am very close to Ted and thought he was by far the most able man we had and he would be perfectly happy to serve - it was only some of his colleagues who were being difficult." The following day", the stickling points had clearly become two-fold: Mr Thorpe's colleagues wanted electoral reform and Sir Edward's resignation. Mr Thorpe told Sir Edward: ""I am sorry this is obviously hell - a nightmare on stilts for you. ""Somehow I personally hope that we can work something out." Four hours later", Sir Edward called the Liberal leader back to Downing Street in a last attempt at a deal. The minutes of the meeting show how the chance of a coalition government quickly evaporated. ""The PM said he was bound to tell Mr Thorpe that his colleagues had told him that they would not agree to serve under any other prime minister. Mr Thorpe was at liberty to verify this by talking to one or two of the prime minister's colleagues." Documents show that Sir Edward mulled over resigning and perhaps returning to coalition government in a Labour-led coalition. But he already knew Mr Wilson would not form a coalition with either the Liberals or the Conservatives because of the opposition of the Labour left. Within hours of his final talks with Mr Thorpe", Sir Edward told the nation he was resigning and the Queen invited Mr Wilson to form a new minority government.

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"politics 304.txt UKIP outspent Labour on EU poll The UK Independence Party outspent both Labour and the Liberal Democrats in the European elections", new figures show. UKIP," which campaigned on a slogan of ""Say no to Europe""", spent £2.36m on the campaign - second only to the Conservative

s' £3.13m. The campaign took UKIP into third place with an extra 10 MEPs. Labour's campaign cost £1.7m, the Lib Dems' £1.19m and the Greens' £404,0, according to figures revealed by the Electoral Commission on Wednesday. Much of the UKIP funding came from Yorkshire millionaire Sir Paul Sykes," who helped bankroll the party's billboard campaign. Critics have accused the party of effectively buying votes. But a UKIP spokesman said Labour and the Conservatives had spent £10m between them on the last general election. ""With the advantages of public money the others have", the only way the smaller parties can get their message across is by buying the advertising space," he added.

politics 305.txt Labour battle plan 'hides Blair' The Tories have accused Tony Blair of being "terrified" of scrutiny after Labour unveiled details of how it will fight the next general election. In a break with tradition," the party will ditch the leader's battle bus and daily press briefings in Westminster. Instead Mr Blair will travel to key cities and marginal seats to deliver the party's message. Labour election chief Alan Milburn denied the party was trying to ""hide"" the prime minister. He promised ""the most positive and upbeat election campaign Labour has ever run"". But Tory co-chairman Liam Fox said Labour's plans showed Mr Blair was ""terrified of facing proper scrutiny"". ""At a time when the British people are looking for more accountability and openness", this government turns its back on them; abandoning plans to tour the country and scared to face journalists in a press conference - it does rather beg the question," 'What have they got to hide?'"" The general election is widely expected next May and all the parties are stepping up their campaign preparations. Mr Milburn said the economy would take centre stage in Labour's campaign in what would be a ""watershed"" election and the ""last stand of the Thatcherites""". Mr Milburn said Labour's slogan would be ""Britain is working - Don't let the Tories wreck it."" The tone of the campaign", said Mr Milburn, would be more conversational than rhetorical; more spontaneous less scripted; less national more local and less based on issues and more concentrated on people. The approach is particularly designed to appeal to women voters," he said. Mr Milburn brushed aside questions over why the chancellor was not present at the Cabinet meeting to discuss election strategy particularly since such importance was being given to the economy. ""I'm not privy to everybody's diary", he said. Mr Brown has headed Labour's preparations for previous polls but Mr Milburn is taking that role this time. In a break with the past, Labour will not hold a daily news conference in London. It will not be a battle bus"" style campaign either", he said. In previous elections, each party leader has had their own battle bus transporting national newspaper, television and radio reporters to staged campaign events around the country. Mr Milburn said Labour's media effort this time would focus more on local newspapers and broadcasters," with every local radio station given the chance to interview the prime minister. Mr Milburn said there would also be a greater effort to set up face-to-face meetings between ministers and the electorate. Former Downing Street media chief Alastair Campbell is also returning to advise Labour on media strategy and campaigning. Mr Milburn said no decision had been taken yet over whether David Blunkett would have a prominent role in the election. Liberal Democrat chief executive Lord Renard suggested Labour was avoiding news conferences in London because it wanted less scrutiny of its record and proposals. ""Tony Blair seems to have disappeared from Labour leaflets and broadcasts", he said. In contrast Charles Kennedy will feature prominently in the Liberal Democrat campaign right across the country.""

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politics 306.txt Campbell returns to election team Ex-Do

wning Street media chief Alastair Campbell will return to the fold to strengthen Labour's general election campaign", the party has confirmed. Mr Campbell has consistently made public his keenness to play a part in the poll," expected in May. Both Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell and Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott have welcomed his return. ""He is a strong Labour Party member", Mr Prescott told BBC One's Breakfast With Frost programme. Mr Campbell quit Number 10 in August 2003 after being Tony Blair's right-hand man at the 1997 and 2001 elections. Labour have refused to discuss his exact new position and have not said how it would affect his Downing Street replacement David Hill. Of course Alastair's going to be part of the election campaign and I think that all of us who will also be part of the election campaign are very pleased about that," Ms Jowell told Sky News. But she said his return would not put anybody else's nose out of joint""." "This is the daft thing about the way in which politics is written about"," Ms Jowell added. There's room for everybody. We serve the country better if we make room for all the talent."" A Labour source told the Sunday Times Mr Campbell would ""effectively front"" the election media campaign but said he would be given no formal title. Labour strategists told the paper he would be ""set loose"" on Conservative leader Michael Howard in attacking his party's economic record when it was in power. ""They used pictures from the 1970s in the 1992 campaign to remind people of the winter of discontent - and now it's our turn"," the source told the paper. Making Michael Howard leader gives us an unmissable opportunity to remind people what it was like to pay mortgage rates of 15% even if it was more than a decade ago."" Mr Campbell was at the centre of the government's row with BBC over Andrew Gilligan's story about the Iraq weapons dossier. The Hutton inquiry cleared him of ""sexing up"" the dossier in the run-up to the Iraq war. Since leaving Downing Street", he has toured the country with his one man show, An Audience With Alastair Campbell and presented a number of interview programmes for Channel 4.

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"politics 307.txt Conservative MP defects to Labour A Conservative MP and former minister has defected to Labour. Robert Jackson",58, MP for Wantage in Oxfordshire," said he was disillusioned with the party's leadership and its ""dangerous"" views on Europe. Prime Minister Tony Blair declared himself ""delighted""", saying Mr Jackson would be warmly welcomed by Labour MPs. Mr Jackson, who has clashed with his leaders over tuition fees and Europe in the past," served as higher education minister between 1987 and 1990. In a letter to his constituency chairman he wrote: ""It is in the country's best interest that Tony Blair rather than Michael Howard should form the next government."" While saying he admired Mr Blair's ""courageous"" leadership of the country", he bitterly criticised the Conservatives stance on Europe. ""The Conservative Party's hostility to Europe has now hardened to the point at which it advocates the unilateral denunciation of Britain's treaty obligations", he wrote. Mr Blair said Mr Jackson was a decent," fair-minded and dedicated public servant... who will be warmly welcome by Labour MPs and members""." ""As he rightly says", [the Conservatives] have learned nothing from their two election defeats and are, if anything, drifting further rightwards," he added. A spokesman for Michael Howard said Mr Jackson's views on policy issues were very different"" from those of the party leadership. ""He believes students should pay tuition fees", that Tony Blair should not be criticised over his handling of the Iraq war and that more powers should be given to Europe," the spokesman said. He added that it was not surprising Mr Jackson had chosen to leave the Conservatives. Mr Jackson is due to stand down at the next election. He is the third Conservative MP to defect to Labour since 1997.

politics 308.txt Tory 'stalking horse' Meyer dies Sir Anthony Meyer, the Tory backbencher who challenged Margaret Thatcher for the party leadership in 1989, has died. He was 84, had been suffering from cancer for many months, and died at his London home. That failed stalking horse"" leadership challenge made it easier for Michael Heseltine to mount his own bid. That in turn paved the way for John Major to move into 10 Downing Street", after the second ballot. Meyer's constituency party, Clwyd North West, which he had represented as an MP for more than 20 years, deselected him as a result of that challenge. Sir Anthony John Charles Meyer was born on 27 October, 1920. Educated at Eton, and at New College, Oxford, he served in the Scots Guards from 1941 to 1945 and was wounded in tanks in Normandy. He worked under Edward Heath on Europe at the Foreign Office and subsequently won the Eton and Slough seat for the Tories in 1964 - by 11 votes. Labour regained the seat two years later, and Meyer had to wait until 1970 before he could re-enter Parliament. His prospects of a front bench slot remained remote because he tended to defy the party line.

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"politics 309.txt UK youth 'interested' in politics The majority of young people are interested in politics", " holding ""strong opinions"" on policies and have a ""keen appetite"" for direct action. Research undertaken for voting watchdog the Electoral Commission suggests 81% of 16 to 20-year-olds feel strongly about issues like crime and education. The survey findings are being released to coincide with the launch of the Y Vote Mock Elections 2005 initiative. Mock elections are planned to take place in schools across the UK. Electoral Commission boss Sam Younger said: ""We know that young people often feel disengaged from democratic life and we believe in working creatively to encourage their interest and participation. ""Mock elections can play an extremely valuable role in helping young people understand how the democratic process works and why it matters""" he said. The survey of a sample of 500 British 16 to 20-year-olds and 500 21 to 25-year olds showed Britain's young people are far from apathetic about issues that matter to most of their lives"". The Y Vote initiative is being run jointly by the Electoral Commission", the Hansard Society and the Department for Education and Skills in the run-up to local elections and the general election, possibly on 5 May. Michael Rafferty, who is mock elections project manager at the Hansard Society, said he looked forward to seeing schools and colleges across the UK participating in the mock votes.

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"politics 310.txt MPs issued with Blackberry threat MPs will be thrown out of the Commons if they use Blackberries in the chamber Speaker Michael Martin has ruled. The £200 handheld computers can be used as a phone", pager or to send e-mails. The devices gained new prominence this week after Alastair Campbell used his to accidentally send an expletive-laden message to a Newsnight journalist. Mr Martin revealed some MPs had been using their Blackberries during debates and he also cautioned members against using hidden earpieces. The use of electronic devices in the Commons chamber has long been frowned on. The sound of a mobile phone or a pager can result in a strong rebuke from either the Speaker or his deputies. The Speaker chairs debates in the Commons and is charged with ensuring order in the chamber and enforcing rules and conventions of the House. He or she is always an MP chosen by colleagues who, once nominated, gives up all party political allegiances.

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"politics 311.txt Talks aim to avert pension strike Talks aimed at averting a series of national strikes over pensions reforms will take place this weekend. Five public sector unions will hold private talks with Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott at Labour's spring conference in Gateshead. They want the government to withdraw regulations - due to be introduced in weeks - which would raise the pension age for council workers from 60 to 65. Up to 1.4m workers could take part in a strike already earmarked for 23 March. However, all sides are anxious to avoid a major confrontation in the run up to the general election, said BBC labour affairs correspondent Stephen Cape. In four days, Britain's biggest union Unison will start balloting 800,000 local government workers on strikes. Other public sector unions have pledged to follow. It is just weeks before new regulations are introduced to raise the pension age of local government workers. The five unions meeting Mr Prescott want the government to withdraw these regulations. This would allow months of tough negotiations to follow," said our correspondent. But a spokesman for Mr Prescott warned that the changes to the local government pension scheme would have to go ahead in April. Privately ministers believe this will be the ""less painful"" option", our correspondent added. The Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) will co-ordinate any industrial action with up to six other public sector unions. PCS leader Mark Serwotka warned last week that there could be further walkouts unless there was a government rethink. ""For a government that lectures everyone on choice - choice on public service", choice on this and choice on that - isn't it ironic that they're saying to public sector workers there is no choice," he said. If you want the pension you were promised when you started you must work for an extra five years - that is working until people drop. ""In the 20th century", it's completely unacceptable." Unison's 800",000 workers, the Transport and General Workers' Union's 70,000 and Amicus' 20,000 are among those being balloted about a 23 March walkout. Mr Prescott held a private meeting with senior union figures last week. It is understood no deal was offered in that meeting but there was room for further negotiations.

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"politics 312.txt Stalemate in pension strike talks Talks aimed at averting national strikes over pension reforms have ended without agreement after 90 minutes. Five public sector unions met Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott at the Labour spring conference in Gateshead. They want the government to withdraw regulations - due to be introduced in weeks - which would raise the pension age for council workers from 60 to 65. Up to 1.4 million workers could take part in strikes earmarked for 23 March. Discussions will resume next week. A spokesman for Unison", Britain's biggest union," said after Saturday's meeting: ""At least we are still talking."" All sides are anxious to avoid a major confrontation in the run up to the general election", said BBC labour affairs correspondent Stephen Cape. In four days, Unison will start balloting 800,000 local government workers on strikes. Other public sector unions have pledged to follow. The five unions which met Mr Prescott want the government to withdraw these regulations. This would allow months of tough negotiations to follow," said our correspondent. But a spokesman for Mr Prescott warned that the changes to the local government pension scheme would have to go ahead in April. Privately ministers believe this will be the ""less painful"" option", our correspondent added. The Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) will co-ordinate any industrial action with up to six other public sector unions. PCS leader Mark Serwotka warned last week that there could be further walkouts unless there was a government rethink. ""For a government that lectures everyone on choice - choice on public service", choice on this and choice on that - isn't it ironic that

they're saying to public sector workers there is no choice," he said. If you want the pension you were promised when you started you must work for an extra five years - that is working until people drop. ""In the 20th century", " it's completely unacceptable." Unison's 800",000 workers, the Transport and General Workers' Union's 70,000 and Amicus' 20,000 are among those being balloted about a 23 March walkout. Mr Prescott held a private meeting with senior union figures last week. It is understood no deal was offered in that meeting but there was room for further negotiations.

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"politics 313.txt Parties warned over 'grey vote' Politic al parties cannot afford to take older UK voters for granted in the coming election", " says Age Concern. A survey for the charity suggests 69% of over-55s say they always vote in a general election compared with just 17% of 18 to 24 year olds. Charity boss Gordon Lishman said if a ""decisive blow"" was struck at the election it would be by older voters who could be relied on to turn out. A total of 3",028 adults aged 18 or over were interviewed for the study. Mr Lishman urged the next government to boost state pension. He also called for measures to combat ageism and build effective public services to ""support us all in an ageing society"". ""Older people want to see manifesto commitments that will make a difference to their lives", " Mr Lishman said. Political parties must wake up to the fact that unless they address the demands and concerns of older people they will not keep or attract their vote." In the survey carried out by ICM Research", 14% of people aged between 18 and 34 said they never voted in general elections. Among the over-65s, 70% said they would be certain to vote in an immediate election," compared with 39% of people under 55. Age Concern says the over-55s are ""united around"" key areas of policy they want the government to focus on. For 57%", pensions and the NHS were key issues, while the economy was important for a third," and tax was a crucial area for 25%. The report was welcomed by Conservative shadow pensions secretary David Willetts. ""The pensioners' voice must certainly be heard in the next election as they have never fitted into Blair's cool Britannia", " he said. Labour's continued refusal to admit the true extent of the pensions crisis will be one of the monumental failures of this government." He pointed to Tory plans to increase the basic state pension to reduce means testing", strengthen company pensions and encourage savings. A Liberal Democrat spokesman said the party took the issues raised in the report very seriously. He highlighted the party's promises to raise the basic state pension, provide free long-term care for the elderly and replace council tax, seen as a particular problem for pensioners on fixed incomes. Labour has said it wants to use savings reforms to Incapacity Benefit to improve the basic state pension and has set up a review of the council tax system.

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"politics 314.txt Blair to face trust issue head on Tony Blair says he will be facing the issue of trust and his own integrity head on during the election campaign. During a question and answer session with first-time voters on Five News", " Mr Blair said he had no option but to ""confront it"" by talking to people. He also dismissed claims government plans to get 50% of young people into university would devalue degrees. He was not ""forcing"" anyone to go to university", but places should be there for those who wanted them, he said. In answer to a question from 22-year-old Liverpool student David Dunn about concerns over the prime minister's personal integrity," Mr Blair said talking was the only answer. ""You've just got to confront it and say to people let's have a discussion on the things that worry you", " the things that make yo

u say 'I can't trust you' or 'I am against you on this.'"" The ""worst thing in politics"" was that the electorate only got ""little snatches of policy"" from things like Prime Minister's Questions and the news headlines. This was why he wanted to ""get out of the 30 seconds on the news,"" he added. By talking through policies at least people understood the reason for them, even if they did not agree with them, he said. Mr Blair also faced questions about British policy on Iran and its alleged nuclear weapons programme. He insisted there was no plan for an invasion of the country saying: Sometimes people say because of what has happened in Iraq this is the next place.""" Instead there was a real chance of a ""peaceful resolution"" to the problem", he said.

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"politics 315.txt CSA chief who 'quit' still in job The head of the ""failing"" Child Support Agency widely reported to have resigned three months ago is still at the helm of the troubled organisation. Doug Smith's departure was announced by Work Secretary Alan Johnson on 17 November as MPs grilled him over the agency's poor performance. His ""resignation"" was referred to by both Tory and Lib Dem leaders during that day's prime ministers questions. Officials now say he did not resign but will move on under civil service rules. Mr Smith's departure was reported widely at the time as his shouldering the blame for the failings of the Child Support Agency. In January the MPs who make up the Commons Work and Pensions Committee published a highly critical report into the ""failing"" agency noting the chief executive ""has now left"" and hoping ""the new leadership will bring a fresh approach to what is a failing organisation"". On that day's Today programme Mr Johnson was asked why Mr Smith had been allowed to resign rather than be sacked. He replied: ""The chief executive decided it was time to move on,"" there is a new chief executive coming in." It now emerges that the widespread belief Mr Smith", made Commander of the Order of the Bath in the New Year honours, had left," was wrong. A Department for Work and Pensions spokeswoman confirmed Mr Smith was still in post and that he would continue in the job until a replacement was found. ""No date was ever given for Doug Smith's departure", she said adding that the post had been advertised. Tory work and pensions spokesman David Willetts said families affected by CSA failings would wonder why Mr Smith was still in his job three months after his departure was announced. The CSA has been surrounded by controversy since its introduction in 1993 to assess and enforce child support payments by absent parents. The work and pensions committee launched their inquiry into the CSA's performance after it became clear that, despite the introduction of a simpler system of calculating maintenance payments for new cases in 2003, a backlog of claims was still building up. It is currently chasing outstanding payments of more than £720m, while a further £947m has been designated as unrecoverable"". The MPs found American IT giant EDS' £456m system was ""nowhere near being fully functional and the number of dissatisfied," disenchanted and angry customers continues to escalate"". In November", when he surprised MPs and the watching media by announcing Mr Smith's departure," Mr Johnson said: ""I should tell you that Doug has decided that now is the time to stand aside and to allow a new chief executive to tackle the challenges ahead. ""Doug has exceeded the four years that senior civil servants are now expected to remain in a particular post. ""So Doug believes that we have reached the natural breakpoint at which he can hand over the reins."" Lib Dem Sir Archy Kirkwood", who chairs the Commons work and pensions committee," said that when Mr Johnson had announced Mr Smith was going he got the ""clear impression"" the CSA chief was retiring though it had since emerged that was not the case", and he may be seeking new employment opportunities. He added his committee was ""duty bound"" to allow the work and

pensions secretary to get new management into place in the CSA and it would be ""premature"" to say anything further on the issue at the moment. But committee member and Tory MP Nigel Waterson said he was ""amazed"" Mr Smith was still in his job. ""When Mr Smith and the secretary of state came to give evidence", we were led to believe he was going shortly, he said. Even if he was working out three months notice," he should have been clearing his desk by now." Asked on Thursday about Mr Smith's position Mr Johnson told BBC Radio 4's World at One he thought it was a ""non-story"". He added that he had been absolutely open when he announced Mr Smith's departure to the select committee and how people chose to interpret it was a ""different thing"". ""The major issue is have we got a new chief executive coming into this very important agency as quickly as possible and have we gone through the right selection process to make sure we've got the right people", he added.

politics 316.txt Blair moves to woo Jewish voters Tony Blair has pledged to never", ever," ever"" attack Tory leader Michael Howard over his Jewish beliefs. The prime minister told the Jewish Chronicle: ""If you look at what I do", " I attack Michael Howard politically." Mr Blair also distanced himself from recent Labour campaign posters featuring Mr Howard", which critics claimed were ""anti-Semitic"". These were ""not intended to cause any offence to anyone on the Jewish community", Mr Blair insisted. One poster depicted Mr Howard and his shadow chancellor Oliver Letwin, who is also Jewish, as flying pigs. Another pictured the Tory leader swinging a pocket watch on a chain, which critics said echoed the Jewish money lender Shylock in Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice. Others compared the image to the character Fagin in Charles Dickens' Oliver Twist. Labour has since taken the designs of its website, saying members had preferred other designs. During his interview with the Jewish Chronicle, Mr Blair said: I've been a very strong supporter of the Jewish community and Israel", and will always be so." Pressed on whether he would draw attention to Mr Howard's Jewish beliefs in an attempt to attract Muslim support", he replied: ""The idea that I would allow anybody to make such a charge is outrageous. It's untrue. ""If you look what I do", I attack Michael Howard politically. I would never, ever," ever attack him on that basis." Mr Blair also defended his party's attitude towards the Jewish community", pointing out that it was his government that had introduced the Holocaust Memorial Day. He added that Labour also aggressively fought all forms of racism. Neither the Conservatives nor the Liberal Democrats wished to comment on Mr Blair's words. The prime minister was speaking as London's Labour mayor Ken Livingstone remains embroiled in a row over comments he made to a Jewish reporter from the city's Evening Standard newspaper. Mr Blair repeated calls for the mayor to apologise for likening the reporter, Oliver Finegold," to a concentration camp guard. Mr Livingstone ""should have withdrawn the comment immediately"" once he realised the journalist was Jewish", said Mr Blair. ""I'm sure that is what in truth he wants to do. Well", he should do it." Mr Livingstone has said he could not sincerely say sorry for the comments he made", and claims he has been targeted by the newspaper. He conceded his comments may have been offensive but were not racist, and said earlier this week he would not apologise even if Mr Blair asked.

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politics 317.txt Parties' plans for council tax Anger at council tax rises spilled over into mass protests in 2003", when the average English bill rose 12.9%. Pensioners' protests spread - some marched, others simply refused to pay the increase. Some, such as 83-year-old Elizabeth Winkfield," said they would rather go to jail. The Audit Commission found the whole local government finance system was ""fundamentally flawed"" and all three of the main

parties have said the system has to change. Labour says it wants to retain the property-based tax but reform it to make it fairer and says there is scope for councils to become more efficient. They say they are already helping pensioners with council tax bills", "with a £100 lump sum for the over-70s and last year the government capped some local councils' budgets to keep demands down. Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott has said the current system is not sustainable in the long term and said there would be ""radical reform"". The party says this year's increases will be the lowest in a decade. A report last year looked at increasing the number of council tax bands and other forms of local taxation", such as reformed business rates, although no decisions have been made. An independent inquiry into its findings, the Lyons review, is due to report back at the end of 2005. The Tories have promised a reduction on bills for pensioners," who they say have been hardest hit by year-on-year increases in council tax. They say they can save £4bn on ""government waste""", of which £1.3bn could be used to cut pensioners' bills by an average of £340. It would not be means tested, say the Tories, because that would create more bureaucracy and could discourage people from saving for their retirement. Instead households where council tax payers are over 65 would get a rebate covering half their bill, up to a maximum of £500. The Tories also say they are suspicious about any proposals to revalue homes - currently graded according to their value in 1991 - because they believe seven million of homes could move up a band. The Liberal Democrats want to do away with the council tax altogether and switch to a local income tax of the kind seen in the USA, Norway and Switzerland. The rate would be set locally, but administered by the Inland Revenue which they say would save at least £300m. They say the council tax is the most unpopular and most unfair tax in Britain," because it puts a ""ceiling"" on what the richest pay. The party says it would aim for a £5",000 tax-free personal allowance, or a £7,000 allowance for the over-65s. After that income would be taxed up to £100,000. The Lib Dems say their plan is fairer, more efficient, has already been tested abroad and offers more accountability.

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"politics 318.txt Labour in constituency race row Labou  
r's choice of a white candidate for one of the UK's most multi-racial seats proves the need for all-black short lists", says a race group. Local councillor Lyn Brown was selected for West Ham, east London, in a contest between two white and five ethnic minority women. An Operation Black Vote spokesman said they now wanted to meet Labour party chairman Ian McCartney for discussions. Mr McCartney recently announced party consultation on all-black shortlists. However, Labour has so far been unable to comment on the implications of the West Ham result. Ashok Vishwanathan of Operation Black Vote, which aims to increase ethnic minorities' participation in the political process and their representation," said the result again showed all-women shortlists were not effective in getting minority women selected. ""I think all-black shortlists are the only way to cut to the chase and address the lack of minority candidates", Mr Vishwanathan said. Last month the chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) also called for ethnic minority shortlists in certain circumstances. A CRE spokesman said the organisation had nothing to add on the shortlist issue specifically but would be working with all the political parties to address the under-representation of ethnic minorities in Parliament. We will be raising it with each of the party leaders on a formal basis and helping them find the most appropriate way forward," the spokesman said. Ethnic minorities make up 8% of the United Kingdom population but only 2% of MPs - 13 out of 659 - are from a visible minority group. Twelve of them represent Labour, and one is a Liberal Democrat. If

ethnic minorities were represented in the House of Commons in proportion to their numbers in the population, there would be 42 ethnic minority MPs.

politics 319.txt MPs tout Lords replacement plan A group of MPs has tried to raise the pressure on Tony Blair over reform to the House of Lords by publishing a detailed blueprint for change. The cross-party group has unveiled a draft bill proposing a smaller second chamber in which 70% of members would be elected. MPs and peers have failed to agree on reform since 1999 when 600 hereditaries lost their seats. The group says it can win support for removing the last 92 hereditaries. The government postponed plans to remove the remaining hereditary peers because they said they were unlikely to succeed after opposition in the Lords. Tony Blair has argued. There needs to be consensus on reforms. There have been suggestions there will be proposals for changing at least the powers of the Lords in Labour's manifesto. But the all-party group, including Tories Ken Clarke and Sir George Young, Labour's Robin Cook and Tony Wright and Liberal Democrat Paul Tyler, is confident its plan would win support from a large majority"". And they list former Conservative leader William Hague and former Labour leader Neil Kinnock as supporters of the plans. The group says the British public and a clear majority of MPs support replacing the Lords with a largely-elected second chamber. Their plan would see the House of Lords being renamed the Second Chamber of Parliament", and its members would be known as MSCPs. There would be 385 MSCPs, including 270 elected members," 87 appointed members and 16 bishops. They would serve for between 12 and 14 years. Mr Cook said holding elections for MSCPs on the same day as those for MPs might help motivate the electorate and increase voter turnout. He added: ""Over the last year I have seen many statements from senior figures of this government insisting the public must have the right of choice. ""What could be more important than a choice of the people who sit in our Parliament?"" The group believes pressure is growing for change and the government's current position is unsustainable. It wants all three main parties to include a commitment to a ""largely democratic"" second chamber in their manifestos. Mr Clarke said the issue ""went to the heart of reforming the health of the British political system"". And Mr Tyler said the prime minister's view that there was no agreement on the shape of the future of the Lords was flawed. ""The problem", I think, in the prime minister's mind is there doesn't appear to be a consensus that includes him," he said. We are providing a consensus"". The Elect the Lords Campaign said the draft bill was an important contribution to the debate. ""We believe this draft bill is detailed enough to form the basis of closer parliamentary scrutiny", said co-ordinator Peter Facey. In lieu of any other such clear proposals," the government must permit that to happen.""

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politics 320.txt Hague's six-figure earnings shown The rewards of leaving front-bench politics are shown in the latest annual register of members' interests. The register shows former Tory leader William Hague earning up to £820",000 on top of his MPs' salary, much of it from speaking fees. His former shadow chancellor Michael Portillo makes up to £560,000 a year - partly because of speeches and TV work. Ex-health secretary Alan Milburn earned up to £85,000 from speeches, articles and advice while not in the Cabinet. Mr Milburn was away from the frontbench for just more than a year between stepping down as health secretary and becoming Labour's election supremo. His declared interests include £20,000 from newspaper articles and fees of up to £35,000 for four speeches. He also commanded a salary of between £25,000 and £35,000 for being on investment company Bridgepoint Capital's European advisory committee. His time out of office will, however, have lost him his £71,433 minister's salary.

Mr Hague's work outside Parliament included two one-man shows, which with other speaking fees netted him up to £480,000. He also earned up to £195,000 for a weekly column in the News of the World, and between £5,000 and £10,000 for presenting BBC 2's Have I Got News for You. Mr Hague was also paid an undisclosed amount for the newspaper serialisation of his biography of William Pitt the Younger and up to £135,000 for work as an adviser to various companies. Former Defence Secretary Michael Portillo makes some of his money as a non-executive director of BAE Systems. He is to stand down as an MP at the next election. And former Foreign Secretary Robin Cook was paid between £45,001 and £50,000 for the paperback edition of his book about his resignation from government. His declared income of up to £205,000 also includes payments for being a consultant to the Tote and for his regular column in the Guardian newspaper. The register also shows former Home Office Minister Ann Widdecombe declaring a £100,000 advance for her third and fourth novels. She also received up to £30,000 for acting as the Guardian's agony aunt and between £5,001 and £10,000 for appearing on ITV's Celebrity Fit Club. David Blunkett has become a paid adviser to Indepen Consulting Limited now he is not home secretary - he helps them with seminars about the relationship between government and business. He earns between £5,001 and £10,000 for the work. Tony Blair's entry confirms that King Abdullah of Jordan paid for him to fly from a holiday in Egypt to official discussions - and for a sightseeing tour to Wadi Rum. Tory leader Michael Howard's only fresh entry is a Christmas hamper from the Sultan of Brunei. He also declares a trip to Mexico last year to address executives of News International, and helicopter and private jet travel paid for by supporters. Liberal Democrat leader Charles Kennedy registered donations to his office from supporters, a free ticket to last year's Bafta awards and rent from a single-bedroom flat in London. The register only contains new information for December 2004 - but Monday saw the publication of the annual review of the register, with the year's details. The payments are shown in bands of up £5,000, making it difficult to calculate the exact earnings.

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"politics 321.txt Schools to take part in mock poll Record numbers of schools across the UK are to take part in a mock general election backed by the government. Some 600 schools have already signed up for the Y Vote Mock Elections 2005 run by the Hansard Society and aimed at boosting interest in politics. Pupils in the schools taking part will learn the skills of speech writers, canvassers and political candidates. Schools Minister Stephen Twigg said engaging young people's interest was "essential" to the future of democracy. He added: "Young people who are engaged and motivated by the political process are essential to the future health of our democracy." "The mock elections initiative provides an opportunity for pupils to develop their own understanding of how the democratic process works and why it matters. "By experiencing the election process first hand - from running a campaign to the declaration of the final result - we hope that young people will develop the enthusiasm to take part in the future." The Hansard Society, the Electoral Commission and the Department for Education and Skills are running the programme. Pupils will stand as party candidates, speech writers and canvassers. Michael Raftery, project manager at the Hansard Society, said: "The Y Vote Mock Elections for schools mirror the excitement and buzz of a real election", raising awareness of citizenship," and the benefits of active democracy." The mock votes will take place around 5 May", widely expected to be the date of the general election. Information packs, including ballot papers and manifesto guides, with elections happening in early May were sent out to the 3,000 schools invited to take part.

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"/"....."politics 322.txt Parties build up poll war chests The Labour Party received more than £5m in donations in the final quarter of 2004", new figures show. This is nearly half of the £11,724,929 received by 16 political parties listed by the Electoral Commission. The Conservatives were in second place with donations totalling £4,610,849, while the Liberal Democrats received just over £1m. The majority of Labour's donations came from affiliated trade unions. There were also large sums from individuals. Lord Drayson, whose company PowderJect won multi-million pound contracts to provide smallpox vaccine to the government after the 11 September terror attacks, gave £500,000 to the party just days before Christmas. This followed an earlier donation of the same amount earlier in 2004. He was made a lord by Tony Blair last year. Other significant donations came from retired millionaire businessman and philanthropist Sir Christopher Ondaatje who gave the party a sum of £500,000, and refrigerator magnate William Haughey OBE who gave £330,000. The totals for the fourth quarter were well up on the same period of 2003, as the parties built up their war chests for the general election campaign. The largest donation to the Conservatives was a bequest from Ruth Beardmore of nearly £400,000. The joint founder of merchant bank Hambro Magan gave £325,417. There were also donations topping £250,000 for the Conservatives from Scottish Business Groups Focus on Scotland and the Institute of International Research, the world's largest independent conference company. Also among the gifts to the Tories were 24 donations totalling £161,840 from Bearwood Corporate Services. This company is controlled by the party's former treasurer Lord Ashcroft which has directed almost £300,000 to specific marginal constituencies over the past two years. The Liberal Democrats' largest donor was the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust Ltd, a company which promotes political reform and constitutional change, which gave a sum of £250,000. And fast food giants McDonald's are listed as donating a sum of £10,575. This was a fee the firm paid for a room for an event held with the work and skills foundation during the party's conference. The UK Independence Party, which lost its main donor Paul Sykes amid the row over Robert Kilroy-Silk's bid for the leadership last autumn, took in £63,081. Just £8,170 of this was cash and the remainder came in gifts in kind, such as office space and printing. Registered political parties are required to set out each quarter all donations over £5,000 to their headquarters and over £1,000 to local constituency parties they receive. It is an offence for a person to knowingly or recklessly make a false declaration about party donations.

"/"....."politics 323.txt Kennedy predicts bigger turnout Voters' "pent up passion"" could confound predictions of a low turnout in the coming general election", Charles Kennedy has said. The Liberal Democrat leader predicted concerns over Iraq and other international and domestic issue would express themselves during the campaign. His comments come as an inquiry looks at how best to boost voter turnouts. Ex-foreign secretary Robin Cook said people were not apathetic but fed up of ""pager politics"" and not being heard. He", like Mr Kennedy, pointed to the hundreds of thousands of people who demonstrated against plans for the Iraq war. Mr Cook, who is giving evidence to the Power inquiry into voter turnout rates," told BBC Radio 4's Today Programme it was not fair to blame the public who were ""more interested in politics than ever before"". ""They are turned off by the way we do politics in Britain. There's a message there for politicians."" He urged politicians to avoid negative campaigning and to ""speak more from the heart""." ""We should be not so afraid to say what we stand for."" He also criticised the cult of personality politics: ""There's

far too much interest in celebrities. ""Politics are in danger of becoming another branch of the celebrity industry."" The government has tried a number of things in an attempt to boost voter turnout", which fell to 59% in the last general election in 2001. This has included bringing in directly elected mayors to head local authorities and trialling postal voting.

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"politics 324.txt Iraq advice claim sparks new row The Tories say ministers must respond in Parliament to claims that the legal advice used to justify the Iraq war was drawn up at Number 10. Downing Street has denied the claims", made in a new book about the Attorney General Lord Goldsmith's advice. Lord Goldsmith also denied them," saying he was not ""leaned on"" in any way. But the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats say they want the publication of the full legal advice given by the Attorney General. The government has consistently refused to publish Lord Goldsmith's advice on the legality of the war - saying such papers have always been kept confidential. But a short statement about Lord Goldsmith's position was presented in a written parliamentary answer on 17 March 2003 - just before a crucial Commons vote on the military action. It said it was ""plain"" Iraq continued to be in material breach of UN resolution 1441. In his new book", Lawless World, Philippe Sands, a QC and international law professor, suggests the parliamentary answer was written in Downing Street. According to Mr Sands, Lord Goldsmith had warned Tony Blair in a document on 7 March 2003 that the use of force against Iraq could be illegal and that it would have been safer to seek a second UN resolution sanctioning military action. Mr Sands told Newsnight the government had prepared a legal team to be able to defend its case, in case legal action was taken against the UK over the war. On 10 March, military chiefs reportedly asked for an unequivocal statement about the legality of the war to make sure troops could be defended in a court of law. The book, being serialised in the Guardian newspaper," says on 13 March Lord Goldsmith met then Home Office Minister Lord Falconer and Downing Street adviser Baroness Morgan. ""After that Downing Street proceeded to set out his [Lord Goldsmith's] view in a parliamentary answer which was then published on 17 March", " said Mr Sands. Tory leader Michael Howard reiterated calls for the publication of the full legal advice given by the Attorney General, warning: This issue will not go away." "These revelations throw an intensive spotlight on to the cavalier way in which this government operates - even on an issue as important as peace and war. ""The government needs to act to restore public confidence and trust." Liberal Democrat foreign affairs spokesman Menzies Campbell repeated his party's calls for Lord Goldsmith's first piece of legal advice to be made public. ""The public interest", which the government claims justifies non-publication of the whole of the advice," can only be served now by the fullest disclosure." " In a statement to Newsnight", " Lord Goldsmith said: ""In my parliamentary answer on March 17 2003", I explained my genuinely held independent view," that military action was lawful under the existing Security Council resolutions. ""It was certainly not a view that I expressed as a result of being leaned on in any way", nor as I have already made clear," was it written by or at Number 10." " The prime minister's official spokesman also rejected the claims", " saying: ""The attorney general made it clear the words and the judgement were his." " But ex-foreign secretary Robin Cook says all the advice should now be published. He said the claims suggested Parliament had only received a précis of Lord Goldsmith's second opinion - and that it was actually drafted in No 10. This would be wrong even if Lord Goldsmith had signed the statement", Mr Cook said," because the attorney general's advice should be an ""independent legal opinion""", " not subject to ""political negotiation of this kind"".

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"politics 325.txt UKIP could sue Veritas defectors The UK Independence Party could take legal action to unseat two London Assembly members who defected to Robert Kilroy Silk's Veritas Party. Damian Hockney", now Veritas deputy leader, and Peter Hulme-Cross were elected in 2004 on the list system. The party argues the pair should give up their seats as they won them as UKIP representatives," not as individuals. Mr Hockney said the law was clear that those elected on a list who quit their party should keep their seats. UKIP chairman Petrina Holdsworth urged the men to step down from the GLA in a letter. She said: ""The party has taken legal advice and it is clear that we could take legal proceedings against you which could result in the return of our seats and/or damages against you. ""We would however like you to be given an opportunity to reflect on what you have done",, to restore your own credibility with the electorate and return the seats to the party which won them fair and square at the last election." Mr Hockney said the law worked in exactly the same way for the GLA as it did for other electoral list systems. ""The Greater London Act is clear that if someone resigns who was elected on a list",, their party whip the seat belongs to them and not the party." He said Mr Hulme-Cross and himself had no intention of resigning and added that they felt that it was UKIP who were not being true to the electorate. He accused the party of signing up to a deal with the Tories in Europe", rather than sticking to an independent stance. But the claim was denied by UKIP spokesman," who said: ""Mr Hockney's accusations are like his sense of political morals - empty." Veritas was formed by Mr Kilroy-Silk earlier this month after he quit UKIP following an unsuccessful bid to take over as leader.

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"politics 326.txt Prime minister's questions So who", if anyone, is playing politics with the security of the nation? Michael Howard has no doubt it is the prime minister who, he claims," is ""ramming"" through Parliament the controversial new anti-terror measures without proper debate. He didn't say so", but the Tories believe the prime minister is playing the fear card on this one so he can look tough in the run up to the general election And they believe Tony Blair is using the issue to suggest the Tories are soft on terrorism. Why on earth will the prime minister not simply take up the Tories' offer to extend the existing powers temporarily to allow proper parliamentary debate of the laws," he demanded. The prime minister claims this is the clearest indication that it is the Tories who are playing politics with the issue by attempting to score cheap political points in parliament. Is not the opposition against to the proposed laws ""in principle""", in which case delaying a decision for further debate would be pointless? What this is really about, believes Mr Blair, is the Tories spotting an opportunity to embarrass, maybe even defeat the government. And that is more important to them than national security. Liberal Democrat leader Charles Kennedy avoided suggesting anyone was playing politics with the issue. He preferred to state that, as with other issues like ID cards, the government's immediate instinct was authoritarian. As is his habit nowadays, the prime minister was less rough with Mr Kennedy than he had been with Mr Howard - he prefers a more exasperated tone suggesting he believes the Lib Dems have, once again, just missed the point. Apart from all that, it was electioneering as usual. The very first question to the prime minister from Derby North's Bob Laxton asked him, in effect, if he would carry on the excellent policy of pouring more resources into schools. Later Birmingham's Sion Simon even went so far as to suggest the Tories were such a shower that we should have the general

election now. The prime minister almost blushed. This was not the appropriate place to announce election day, he stammered. But can anyone be in any doubt that that announcement is just days away - an announcement coming in the week beginning 4 April for an election on 5 May is where the big money is in the Commons. And perhaps that simple fact alone means everyone is seen to be playing politics with just about everything at the moment.

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"politics 327.txt Goldsmith denies war advice claim The attorney general has denied his statement to Parliament about the legality of the Iraq war was drafted by Downing Street officials. Lord Goldsmith said Lord Falconer and Baroness Morgan played no part in drafting the answer. He added the answer represented his view that the war was legal", but was not a summary of his advice to the PM. The government has resisted calls to publish the full advice, saying such papers are always kept confidential. In a statement," Lord Goldsmith said: ""I was fully involved throughout the drafting process and personally finalised", and of course approved," the answer."" He said the answer had been prepared in his office with the involvement of Solicitor General Harriet Harman", two of his own officials, three Foreign Office officials, a QC, Christopher Greenwood and the then Lord Chancellor," Lord Irvine of Lairg. ""No other minister or official was involved in any way."" He suggested the claim that Lord Falconer and Lady Morgan had drafted the answer were the result of a mis-transcription of his evidence to the Butler Inquiry into pre-war intelligence. ""As I have always made clear", I set out in the answer my own genuinely held, independent view that military action was lawful under the existing (UN) Security Council resolutions," he said. The answer did not purport to be a summary of my confidential legal advice to government." Former foreign secretary Robin Cook said Lord Goldsmith's admission that his parliamentary answer was not a summary of his legal opinion suggested Parliament may have been misled. ""The attorney general may never have presented his answer as a summary", but others certainly did, he said. What is clear from his statement today is that he does not believe that it was a full," accurate summary of his formal opinion." Earlier", Tony Blair dismissed questions about the attorney general's advice," and said his Parliamentary statement had been a ""fair summary"" of his opinion. ""That's what he (Lord Goldsmith) said and that's what I say. He has dealt with this time and time again", Mr Blair told his monthly news conference in Downing Street. He refused to answer further questions on the issue. On the question of whether such papers have always been kept confidential, Tory MP Michael Mates, who is a member of the Commons intelligence and security committee and was part of the Butler inquiry, told the BBC: That", as a general rule, is right," but it's not an absolute rule." He said there had been other occasions when advice had been published", most recently regarding Prince Charles's marriage plans. The government could not pick and choose when to use the convention," he said. Mr Mates added: ""This may be one of those special occasions... when it would be in the public interest to see the advice which the attorney general gave to the prime minister." The claims about Lord Falconer and Baroness Morgan's involvement were made in a book published this week by Philippe Sands QC", a member of Cherie Blair's Matrix Chambers. He also says Lord Goldsmith warned Tony Blair on 7 March 2003 that the Iraq war could be illegal without a second UN resolution sanctioning military action. A short statement about Lord Goldsmith's position presented in a written parliamentary answer on 17 March 2003 - just before a crucial Commons vote on the military action - did not suggest this. Former minister Clare Short, who resigned from the government over the Iraq war, said the ministerial answer was the same statement that was earlier shown to the

cabinet as it discussed military action. She said the full advice should have been attached, according to the ministerial code," and demanded a Lords inquiry into the matter. The Conservatives and Liberal Democrats say they still want the publication of the full legal advice given by the Attorney General. Lib Dem foreign affairs spokesman Sir Menzies Campbell said Lord Goldsmith's statement still did not clear up the outstanding issues. ""If his original advice of 7 March accepted that military action might be illegal"," how was it that he resolved any such doubts by the time the Parliamentary answer was published on 17 March?"" he said. ""Only the fullest disclosure will now do."""

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politics 328.txt Goldsmith: 'I was not leaned on' The attorney general has again denied being ""leaned on"" by Downing Street to make the legal case for invading Iraq. Claims a written answer on the legality of the war was drafted by Downing Street were ""wholly unfounded"" he insisted during stormy Lords exchanges. Lord Goldsmith said the answer represented his genuinely held independent view"" the war was legal. The text was released on the eve of a crucial Commons vote in which MPs backed the invasion of Iraq. Many Labour MPs have since indicated that the attorney general's answer played a pivotal role in their willingness to back the conflict. The government has resisted calls to publish the full advice", saying such papers are always kept confidential. In the House of Lords," the attorney general faced a call by former Tory lord chancellor Lord Mackay to now publish the ""full text"" of the advice - the suggestion was rejected. Another peer meanwhile", Lord Skidelsky," said not to publish the full legal opinion would ""strengthen the suspicion that the original text was doctored for public consumption"" in exactly the same way as the notorious intelligence dossier on weapons of mass destruction"". Last week Lord Goldsmith said in a statement: ""I was fully involved throughout the drafting process and personally finalised", and of course approved," the answer."" He said the answer had been prepared in his office with the involvement of Solicitor General Harriet Harman", two of his own officials, three Foreign Office officials, a QC, Christopher Greenwood and the then Lord Chancellor," Lord Irvine of Lairg. ""No other minister or official was involved in any way."" ""As I have always made clear", I set out in the answer my own genuinely held, independent view that military action was lawful under the existing (UN) Security Council resolutions," he said. The answer did not purport to be a summary of my confidential legal advice to government." Former foreign secretary Robin Cook said Lord Goldsmith's admission that his parliamentary answer was not a summary of his legal opinion suggested Parliament may have been misled. ""The attorney general may never have presented his answer as a summary", but others certainly did, he said. What is clear from his statement today is that he does not believe that it was a full," accurate summary of his formal opinion." Tony Blair has dismissed questions about the attorney general's advice", and said his Parliamentary statement had been a ""fair summary"" of his opinion. ""That's what he [Lord Goldsmith] said and that's what I say. He has dealt with this time and time and time again", Mr Blair told his monthly news conference in Downing Street. He refused to answer further questions on the issue. On the question of whether such papers have always been kept confidential, Tory MP Michael Mates, who is a member of the Commons intelligence and security committee and was part of the Butler inquiry, told the BBC: That", as a general rule, is right," but it's not an absolute rule." He said there had been other occasions when advice had been published", most recently regarding Prince Charles's marriage plans. The government could not pick and choose when to use the convention," he said. Mr Mates added: ""This may be one of those special occasions... when it would be in the publ

ic interest to see the advice which the attorney general gave to the prime minister." A book published by Philippe Sands QC", a member of Cherie Blair's Matrix Chambers says Lord Goldsmith warned Tony Blair on 7 March 2003 that the Iraq war could be illegal without a second UN resolution sanctioning military action. A short statement about Lord Goldsmith's position presented in a written parliamentary answer on 17 March 2003 - just before a crucial Commons vote on the military action - did not suggest this.

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"politics 329.txt Tory expert denies defeat warning The Conservatives' campaign director has denied a report claiming he warned Michael Howard the party could not win the next general election. The Times on Monday said Australian Lynton Crosby told the party leader to focus on trying to increase the Tories' Commons presence by 25 to 30 seats. But Mr Crosby said in a statement: ""I have never had any such conversation... and I do not hold that view." Mr Howard later added there was not ""one iota"" of truth in the report. The strategist helped Australia's PM", John Howard," win four elections. Mr Howard appointed Mr Crosby as his elections chief last October. Mr Crosby's statement said: ""The Conservative Party has been making an impact on the issues of lower tax and controlled immigration over the past week."" It added: ""The Labour Party will be wanting to do all they can to distract attention away from the issues that really matter to people.""

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"politics 330.txt Manchester wins Labour conference The Labour Party will hold its 2006 autumn conference in Manchester and not Blackpool", it has been confirmed. The much trailed decision was ratified by Labour's ruling National Executive Committee in a break with the traditional choice of a seaside venue. It will be the first time since 1917 that the party has chosen Manchester to host the annual event. Blackpool will get the much smaller February spring conference instead in what will be seen as a placatory move. For years the main political parties have rotated between Blackpool, Bournemouth and Brighton. And the news the much larger annual conference is not to gather in Blackpool will be seen as a blow in the coastal resort. In 1998 the party said it would not return to Blackpool but did so in 2002. The following year Bournemouth hosted the event before the party signed a two year deal for Brighton to host the autumn conference. Colin Aspin," Blackpool Hotel Association said: ""We have tried very hard to make sure they come back to Blackpool. ""Obviously we have failed in that. I just hope Manchester can handle the crowds. ""It amazes me that the Labour Party", which is a working class party," doesn't want to come to the main working class resort in the country."" The exact cost to Blackpool in terms of lost revenue for hotel accommodation is not yet known but it is thought that block bookings will be taken at the major Manchester hotels after the official announcement.

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"politics 331.txt Labour attacked on Howard poster Labour has been accused of using anti-Semitic images in posters which critics claim depict Tory leader Michael Howard as Fagin. The poster shows Mr Howard hypnotising people with a pocket watch", saying: ""I can spend the same money twice."" The image prompted concern from the editor of the Jewish Chronicle but Labour insists it is simply anti-Tory. Labour later took the image off its website", " s

aying an alternative idea had proved more popular with party members. The party will now use focus groups to test a poster showing Mr Howard and shadow chancellor Oliver Letwin with a blackboard reading: ""2+2=5"". The hypnotism poster has been compared to the portrayal of the Dickens character Fagin in the stage version of the musical Oliver! There was controversy over another poster choice offered to Labour members. It showed Mr Howard and Mr Letwin - who are both Jewish - as flying pigs. Mr Howard did not comment on the anti-Semitism claims when asked about the poster on Monday. Instead, he pointed to how Tony Blair had in 1997 complained about ""personalised abusive campaigning"". Mr Howard told Greater Manchester Radio: ""It is such a pity that Mr Blair doesn't practise what he preaches."" Jewish Chronicle editor Ned Temko said there had been a mixed reaction to the first poster but e-mails from Jewish Chronicle readers showed deeper concern about the hypnotism image. ""Shylock and Fagin are inextricably linked to notions of centuries-old prejudice", he told BBC Radio 4's World At One. Whatever the idea is," I think it's a difficult exercise to use images like that and to argue that you can divorce them from their historical context or meaning." Mr Temko said he blamed ""cock-up not conspiracy""", saying he did not detect inherent anti-Semitism in any of the parties' election campaigns. The poster is among one of a series of ideas shown to Labour members, who have been asked to choose which one should be used ahead of the election. Labour MP Louise Ellman said the hypnotism image was insensitive but urged people not to rush to call things anti-Semitic when they only challenged Tory economic policies. Labour campaign spokesman Fraser Kemp said the poster had been misunderstood. The image simply portrayed Mr Howard as a hypnotist," he argued. ""Concern has been expressed and clearly we have to take those views on board but I would emphasise that if you see the posters", the common theme... is that the Tories are trying to con you." A Labour spokesman later said the timing of removing the controversial image from the party's website was not affected by the row. ""This has been up on the website for two weeks and there has only been a fuss in the last four days so a substantial number of people voted before there was any fuss", he said. But a Conservative spokeswoman said: This poster campaign - which was offensive to many people - was a big misjudgement by Labour's campaign team."

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"politics 332.txt Milburn defends poster campaign Labour's election chief Alan Milburn has defended his party's campaign posters amid Tory claims the ads were nothing short of ""sly anti-Semitism"". Mr Milburn said he appreciated people's concerns", but insisted that ""what they were was anti-Tory"" and ""not in any way", shape or form anti-Semitic""". He was responding to Tory spokesman Julian Lewis who said the ads were part of a wider trend of smearing the party. Labour has withdrawn two controversial posters and launched four new designs. A row was sparked after the party published posters appearing to depict Michael Howard", who is Jewish, as Fagin, and as a flying pig," amid claims they were anti-Semitic. The posters were labelled a ""big misjudgement"" by the Conservatives who said Labour's ""first shot in the election has badly backfired""". The posters were among a series of ideas shown to Labour members", who were asked to vote on their favourite. Labour has taken them off its website, saying members preferred other posters. The party's four new designs, launched on Tuesday, steer clear of the Fagin or flying pig images, but make clear that Labour is sticking to its strategy of targeting the Tory leader personally, with reminders of his record in office. The posters were among a series of ideas shown to Labour members, who have been asked to choose which one should be used ahead of the election. In the Commons," Tory spokesman Mr Lewis sugge

sted the posters were part of a wider trend and reminded MPs that Labour chair Ian McCartney last year described shadow chancellor Oliver Letwin as a ""21st Century Fagin""." "Given the outrage that that smear caused then," how could you have thought anything other than the fact that what you were doing in reviving it in your poster advertisements was nothing more and nothing less than a calculated campaign of sly anti-Semitism?"" Mr Milburn replied that they were not anti-Semitic. ""What they were was anti-Tory and I make no apologies at all for making clear to the British public exactly what the Conservative plans would mean," he said. I fully understand and indeed respect the views of those who have concerns about any poster designs that have appeared on the Labour Party website." "The Fagin and pigs might fly posters were taken off Labour's website on Monday after supporters voted for their favourite poster featuring Mr Howard and shadow chancellor Oliver Letwin holding a blackboard reading 2+2=5. A Labour spokesman later said their removal from the party's website was not affected by the row.

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"politics 333.txt Kilroy names election seat target Ex-ch  
at show host Robert Kilroy-Silk is to contest the Derbyshire seat of Erewash at the next general election. Labour's Elizabeth Blackman won the seat in 1997 and has a 6,932 majority. She says she will fight on her record ""as a hard-working constituency MP"" . Mr Kilroy-Silk announced his plans a day after launching his new party", Veritas, the Latin for truth. The East Midlands MEP, who quit the UK Independence Party," wants his new group to ""change the face"" of UK politics. His choice of election constituency quashes speculation that he would stand against Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon in Ashfield", Nottinghamshire. UKIP won 31% of the vote in Erewash in last June's European elections - with Mr Kilroy-Silk among their candidates for the region. Until 1997, Erewash had been held by the Tories since 1970. Ms Blackman said she was proud of the government's achievements in the area. She declined to give her view of Mr Kilroy-Silk at this point. On Thursday," he told a London news conference that Veritas would avoid the old parties' ""lies and spin"" . He said ""our country"" was being ""stolen from us"" by mass immigration and promised a ""firm but fair"" policy on immigration. Veritas says it hopes to contest most seats at the forthcoming general election but plans to announce detailed policies on crime", tax, pensions," health and defence over the next few weeks. UKIP leader Roger Knapman says he is glad to see the back of Mr Kilroy-Silk. Labour campaign spokesman Fraser Kemp said Veritas was joining ""an already crowded field on the right of British politics"" . Mr Kilroy-Silk was joined in the new venture by one of UKIP's two London Assembly members", Damien Hockney," who is now Veritas' deputy leader. UKIP's chairman Petrina Holdsworth has said the group will just be a parody of the party the men have left. Mr Kilroy-Silk quit UKIP last week after months of tension as he vied unsuccessfully for the leadership of that party. He said he was ashamed to be a member of a UKIP whose leadership had ""gone AWOL"" after the great opportunity offered by its third place at last June's European elections. UKIP's leader", Roger Knapman," has said he is glad to see the back of Mr Kilroy-Silk. ""He has remarkable ability to influence people but", sadly, after the [European] election it became clear that he was more interested in the Robert Kilroy-Silk Party than the UK Independence Party so it was nice knowing him, now 'goodbye', he said. UKIP officials also argue Mr Kilroy-Silk has not been straightforward"" in attacking the party he once wanted to lead.

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"politics 334.txt Immigration to be election issue Immigr

ation and asylum have normally been issues politicians from the big parties have tiptoed around at election time. But no longer. Both Labour and the Tories have signalled their intention of making them central to their election campaigns. They have been struck by the level of concern amongst voters about the issues", with internal surveys showing they have the potential to swing large numbers of votes. That was also true at the last general election and the issue did briefly become a campaigning issue. But it sparked the probably predictable furore with claims politicians were either stoking up xenophobia or, alternatively, running scared of addressing the problem. But this time around it looks set to be one of the core battlegrounds with both the big parties competing to set out tough policies. The Tories are already committed to imposing annual limits on immigration, with a quota for asylum seekers and with applications processed outside the UK. Labour has already branded the proposal unworkable but party strategists have seen the Tories seizing a poll advantage over the issue. Now Home Secretary Charles Clarke has come up with alternative proposals for a points system to ensure only immigrants who can benefit the economy will be granted entry, and to kick out more failed asylum seekers. That has been attacked by the Tories as too little, too late and for failing to tackle the key issue of the numbers entering the UK. The Liberal Democrats have not been drawn too deeply into the argument but have called for a Europe-wide policy on immigration. But, while all the parties appear to agree the time has come to properly debate and address the issue," there are already signs they will run into precisely the same problems as before. Former union leader Sir Bill Morris has already accused both the big parties of engaging in a ""bidding war about who can be nastiest to a sylum seekers"". ""My concern is that", whilst the Labour Party and the Conservative Party will take a constructive approach to the debate, right-wing political parties," picking up on statements like 'burden to Britain' will exploit this and create a lot of fear and uncertainty"". It is precisely that concern - and the possible suggestion the issue is playing to the far right's racist agenda - that will provoke strong reactions from many concerned with this issue. The challenge for the big parties is to ensure they can engage in the debate during the cut and thrust of a general election while also avoiding that trap.

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"politics 335.txt Kennedy begins pre-election tour Liberal Democrat leader Charles Kennedy has begun a week-long tour to persuade voters they are the ""real opposition"". Mr Kennedy is visiting constituencies in Somerset and Hampshire on Monday - rural seats where his party is hoping to make gains from the Conservatives. Later he will visit places", such as Liverpool," where Labour is targeted. Labour say a Lib Dem vote could ""let the Tories in""," while the Tories say the Lib Dems would mean ""higher taxes", soft crime laws," more power to Europe"". Mr Kennedy's tour comes as he", Labour leader Tony Blair and Conservative leader Michael Howard all step up campaigning ahead of the next General Election, widely expected to be held on 5 May. On Tuesday Mr Kennedy will visit Leicester South, where Lib Dem MP Parmjit Singh Gill overturned a big Labour majority to win the seat in last year's by-election. Stops in Shrewsbury, North Dorset, Liverpool, Manchester, Basingstoke and west London are planned for later in the week. The Liberal Democrats say in the northern cities, the race is between them and Labour, while in southern seats - particularly the south west - it is between them and the Tories. Speaking to the BBC's Westminster Hour on Sunday," Mr Kennedy said the upcoming general election - widely tipped for 5 May - would be much more unpredictable than any others in ""recent experience"". Asked whether it was realistic to assume the Liberal Democrats could win the general election", he said: ""There's no limit to the ambitions we

have as a party. ""But we have got to be responsible", we have got to be credible," we have got to demonstrate to people that we are up to that task." Mr Kennedy said the British public felt let down by Labour on issues from Iraq to top-up fees and the Conservatives were not ""asking the critical questions"". And he said people were ""highly sceptical"" about Labour and Conservative promises on tax. But he brushed off Labour suggestions a vote for his party would mean letting the Tories in ""by the back door"". ""If you look at the four previous parliamentary by-elections", the Liberal Democrats have demonstrated that, not only can we leapfrog the Conservatives where we start in a third place position," but we can go on to defeat the government. ""That's going to be the story", I think," of this coming general election."

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politics 336.txt Labour's core support takes stock Tony Blair has told Labour supporters he's ""back"" and still hungry for the job of prime minister - but does that sum up the mood at the party's spring conference in Gateshead? ""The electorate are keener on the government than some Labour Party members," is the dry assessment of Graham Lane, leader of the Labour group on Newham Council. The problem, according to Mr Lane, is not continuing divisions over Iraq, foundation hospitals or tuition fees, or even voter apathy, but Mr Blair himself. I have a new slogan. Vote Blair", Get Brown. That's what I am telling people on the doorstep. Don't worry," he will be gone soon."" His friend", Saxon Spence, leader of Devon county Labour group," lays the blame for any lack of campaigning zeal on one issue above all others. ""You cannot underestimate the impact of the war in Iraq. We lost people from our local party who had some key roles."" But the two friends were fired up by Gordon Brown's speech on Saturday", with its appeal to core Labour values on social justice," health and education. ""There was real passion. I think we have all felt a little jaded", but it reminded us why we joined the party in the first place, said Mrs Spence. If he hadn't have walked off the stage, they would still be clapping," added Mr Lane. But for every Brownite at the spring conference there was an equally ardent fan of Mr Blair. Stephen Douglas, 26, from Wales, said after the PM's speech on Sunday: I think it was a bit of a turning point", given the roasting he has had on some issues. The guy still has it." Tony Martin", of Burnley," said: ""He is the first leader who has won us two terms. This bloke has delivered for us."" Malcolm Shipley", of Shipley," said it was ""as if he is coming round to the right approach again"". Katrina Bull", a prospective parliamentary candidate said Mr Blair had shown he could rouse the party's grassroots: ""I think if every voter was able to spend time in a room with Tony", the way we have today," we will have no problem with turnout." She had just emerged from a Q&A session", in which Mr Blair - tieless and supremely at ease - answered questions posed via the party's website. A party of councillors from Nottingham agreed that there was nothing wrong with Mr Blair's leadership - and they were adamant that the campaigning strength of the party in their city was as strong as ever. Iraq, they insisted," would not be a factor for most voters. ""The biggest problem we have got at the moment is that we keep getting all these polls saying we are going to run away with the election. ""It might sound great", but it does create this sense of complacency among our own voters and I think that is the greater problem than Iraq," said Nottingham City Councillor Brian Parrott. And even Mr Blair's most vocal critics seemed to agree on one thing - he is a master of the sort of glossy, high-profile campaigning that has become Labour's hallmark, epitomised by Friday's whistle-stop tour of marginal seats. A group of shop stewards from the Swan Hunter shipyard, who said they were facing redundancy, could barely suppress their anger at Mr Blair's failure to, as they saw it, shak

e off his Tory leanings and stand up for manufacturing in the North East. They were also scathing about the alleged benefits of showpiece projects such as conference venue Sage Centre, heralded by John Prescott and others this weekend as a symbol of Labour's success in urban regeneration. It is no good having the Sage or Baltic if you haven't got the money for the entrance fee," said Terry Telford. But when asked about Mr Blair's bravura performance on Friday, the men agreed he was brilliant"". And they would all be out on the doorstep pushing the Labour message come election time. ""If you are not fired up about the election", then what's the point? There is no complacency as far as I can see in the Labour Party. We are fired up. We are up for this election," said Richie Porter house. Mr Telford agreed, but added it was becoming increasingly difficult to think of an answer when people asked What has Labour done for the North East?"" ""I have had doors slammed in my face", he said. Every activist I spoke to said they were proud of what they believed Labour had achieved in their local communities - the new hospitals and schools, the better life chances for young people. The problem they faced, they said, was converting this local feelgood fact or into votes. But they could at least rely on one secret weapon""", as one activist put it - Tory leader Michael Howard.

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"politics 337.txt Campaign 'cold calls' questioned Labour and the Conservatives are still telephoning the millions of people who have signed up to make sure they do not get marketing ""cold calls"". The parties say they can stick to the rules by ensuring that their calls are not marketing - for instance by asking about people's voting intentions. The Lib Dems are asking the watchdog overseeing the rules to stop the calls. The information commissioner's office says surveys are allowed but people had to be told if personal data was kept. Telephone call centres are expected to be used as never before by all the three major parties in the run-up to the general election. But seven million telephone numbers are on the Telephone Preference Service (TPS) lists," which ban unsolicited sales and marketing calls. Both schemes are run by the Direct Marketing Association and backed by EU directives on privacy and electronic communications. The rules on marketing calls apply as much to politicians as to private sector companies. But that does not mean Labour and the Tories are not calling people signed up to the TPS. A Labour Party spokesman told the BBC News website the party avoided those on TPS lists when telephoning people about membership or fundraising. But that did not happen for ""voter identification"" calls. ""When we ask which party they will vote for", that is not marketing and we have very clear legal advice that it is not," he said. So it is not covered by the Telephone Preference Service." He said the party always asked people if they would be happy to be contacted again and if they said no", they were not rung again. A Conservative spokeswoman said the party stuck to the rules when it rang TPS subscribers. She said: ""We do apply TPS but in line with the law. We would not do things that are not allowed in the law."" Assistant information commissioner Phil Jones said it was classed as marketing if political parties telephoned people to encourage them to vote for them. But ""classic market research""", such as a poll of voter intentions, did not constitute direct marketing," he said. ""If a party is calling someone who is registered on TPS and records their voting intention with a view to using this information in the future", this should be clear to the voter concerned, said Mr Jones. If a party rings a person who is registered on TPS to ask about their voting intention and goes on to encourage that voter to support them," the party may well be in breach of the regulations. ""In summary", whether a party calling TPS registered voters to check their voting intentions will breach regulations will depend on the script u

sed and whether the script is followed." Mr Jones said the watchdog received "very few complaints" on the issue. Earlier," Lib Dem chairman Matthew Taylor wrote to the watchdog saying: "The advice we have received on several previous occasions is that such phone calls are illegal." He says evidence from local Lib Dem parties around the country suggests there are "significant" numbers of such calls. "I hope you can therefore take swift and efficient action to ensure that this ceases," he tells the commissioner. Mr Taylor argues there should be new guidelines so all parties can act in the same way if the watchdog believes the rules allow parties to ring TPS numbers about voting intentions and later urge those people to vote for them.

politics 338.txt Lib Dems highlight problem debt People vulnerable to problem debts should be afforded greater protection from banks aggressively promoting financial products, the Lib Dems say. Vincent Cable says one in eight households already struggle with debt and that will worsen if there is a hike in interest rates or unemployment. The Lib Dems' Treasury spokesman is unveiling a policy aimed at the issue. He wants to see proper health checks" when loans are marketed so people know to take out payment protection. "Were economic conditions to deteriorate at all", large numbers of people could be affected because they have borrowed to the limit," Mr Cable told BBC News. Banks are very aggressively promoting debt in many cases there is a bigger problem ahead." Mr Cable said the government's Consumer Credit Bill would target some of the "extreme problems" such as loan sharking," but ministers had been "a bit complacent" about the wider issue of debt levels. He said much of the payment protection currently available was "extremely expensive" and there were "lots of exclusions". Mr Cable added that the Office of Fair Trading should investigate the market. Lib Dem leader Charles Kennedy meanwhile is in the middle of a tour of the UK aimed at persuading voters his is the "real opposition". Mr Kennedy is visiting a mixture of rural seats", where his party is hoping to make gains from the Conservatives," and urban areas traditionally associated with Labour. Labour say a Lib Dem vote could "let the Tories in"" while the Tories say the Lib Dems would mean "higher taxes", soft crime laws," more power to Europe". Mr Kennedy's tour comes as he", Labour leader Tony Blair and Conservative leader Michael Howard all step up campaigning ahead of the next General Election, widely expected to be held on 5 May. The Liberal Democrats say in the northern cities, the race is between them and Labour, while in southern seats - particularly the south west - it is between them and the Tories. Speaking to the BBC's Westminster Hour on Sunday," Mr Kennedy said the upcoming general election - widely tipped for 5 May - would be much more unpredictable than any others in "recent experience". And he brushed off Labour suggestions a vote for his party would mean letting the Tories in "by the back door". "If you look at the four previous parliamentary by-elections", the Liberal Democrats have demonstrated that, not only can we leapfrog the Conservatives where we start in a third place position," but we can go on to defeat the government. "That's going to be the story", I think," of this coming general election."

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politics 339.txt Lib Dems target first-time buyers The Liberal Democrats have unveiled plans to build 100,000 new "affordable" homes on publicly owned land. The party's scheme would allow people to buy a share in a home through a mutual home ownership trust"," as a way of getting onto the housing ladder. The Lib Dems would also encourage the conversion of existing buildings in an effort to protect greenfield sites. Labour has already announced plans to help first-time buyers and the Tories would extend right-to-buy scheme. All the major parties are focusing on the issue in the run-up to the electi

on after a survey suggested first-time buyers could not afford a home in 92% of UK towns. The Lib Dems say their ""mutual homes"" would let people buy a share of a property", usually worth about 5% of the building costs. Party leader Charles Kennedy said the homes would be affordable because they would be built on surplus public sector land, donated by central or local government. People would also only have to pay for the cost of the building and not the land, he added. They would spend about 30% of their monthly salary on rent and buying extra shares in the property. When they moved house," they would be able to cash in on any rise in property prices by selling their share. It would also allow councils to vary discounts to tenants given the right to buy their council homes so local needs were taken into account. Mr Kennedy said: ""Mutual homes will offer people the opportunity to build up an equity stake in a home gradually"," investing only as much as they can afford." There are also plans to prevent high house prices forcing people out of their local communities. The kind of ""golden share"" used by the Lib Dems in South Shropshire could be rolled out more widely. Under the plan", councils secure deals with developers where they keep a 1% share in a property scheme so properties cannot be sold on the open market. Instead," they are sold at ""build cost"" to people who the local council decides have local needs. The party says its help for first-time buyers can be funded at no extra cost to the taxpayer. But the plans involve changing the VAT system", which the party says often makes it too expensive to renovate existing buildings. The Conservatives claimed the plans would amount to an extra tax of up to £11,000 on every new house. ""This is typical of Lib Dem hypocrisy", said Tory shadow local government secretary Caroline Spelman. They claim that they want to help people on to the property ladder," but the small print of their policies reveal how they intend to price even more people out of the housing market." The flagship Tory proposal on housing policy is to give a million more housing association tenants the right to buy their homes. Labour has said it will allow 300,000 council and housing association tenants to buy a share in their homes. Housing Minister Keith Hill said much of the Lib Dem plans mimicked the government's strategy. ""However", as usual, the Lib Dems' proposals are completely uncosted," he said. Mr Hill said he also asked whether the Lib Dems would match Labour's promise to spend £42bn on making refurbishing and repair council homes by 2010.

politics 340.txt Lib Dems unveil women's manifesto The Liberal Democrats are attempting to woo female voters with the launch of their manifesto for women. Charles Kennedy is pledging a maternity income guarantee and a pension system based on years of residence rather than national insurance payments. He also thinks women will back plans to end university tuition fees and for free long-term care for the elderly. Both Labour and the Conservatives have said they also plan to boost pensions and to improve childcare support. Mr Kennedy says he wants to deal with policy areas that disadvantage women. Two million pensioners in Britain currently live below the government's own poverty line - two-thirds of whom are women", he said. He says that pensions based on the number of years worked ignore the contribution women make caring for children. The Lib Dem's Citizen's Pension, based on length of residency not on national insurance contributions, would address that imbalance, Mr Kennedy argues. Under the package, new mothers would be offered minimum guaranteed maternity pay of £170 a week for the first six months after the birth of their first child. Mr Kennedy also believes the party's plans to use the money saved from not introducing illiberal ID cards to boost police numbers by 10,000 would appeal to women too. The policies are not new announcements, but the way they are structured as a package to appeal to women is. Mr Kennedy also points to the fact that 40% of the party's candidates set to stand in winnable or target seats are women

n. Party strategists claim that where women candidates replace men turnout rises by 4%. Mr Kennedy began the pitch for female support with an interview on BBC Radio 4's Women's Hour on Monday. During the interview Mr Kennedy revealed that he planned to structure the party's general election campaign around the birth of his first child," which is expected in April. The baby and his wife Sarah would be ""priority number one"" even if it arrived in the middle of the election campaign", he said. Party strategists believe winning over a significant proportion of women voters is key to electoral success. A party spokesman said it was courting female votes because they tended to vote more than men and are believed to be more considered and open-minded in deciding who they vote for. Labour's deputy minister for women Jacqui Smith accused the Lib Dems of offering ""false promises"" to women and said their sums did not add up. She said: ""These proposals would increase the costs to the public purse drastically year on year", and hard working families will pay dearly," through either increased taxes or reduced spending on public services"". The Labour party has committed itself to ""universal"" affordable and flexible"" childcare for parents of all 3 to 14 year-olds", including childcare centred on schools to be available from 8am to 6pm. In September, Trade and Industry Secretary Patricia Hewitt said she would like to see longer paid maternity leave, higher paternity pay and the extension of flexible working rights to carers, if Labour won a third term. The Conservatives are yet to unveil their manifesto plans for childcare but said in November they would increase maternity pay and pay the child tax credit in cash to parents to spend as they like, on a nanny, au pair or even a family member, such as a grandparent, acting as a carer. They were also consulting on making childcare costs tax deductible.

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"politics 341.txt Kennedy questions trust of Blair Lib Dem leader Charles Kennedy has said voters now have a ""fundamental lack of trust"" of Tony Blair as prime minister. He said backing his party was not a waste of vote", adding that with the Lib Dems ""what you see is what you get"". He made his comments at the start of a day of appearances on Channel Five in a session on The Wright Stuff programme. Questions from callers", a studio audience and the show's presenter covered Lib Dem tax plans," anti-terror laws and immigration. Mr Kennedy said during his nearly 22 years in Parliament he had seen prime ministers and party leaders come and go and knew the pitfalls of British politics. ""1983 was when I was first elected as an MP - so Tony Blair", Michael Howard and myself were all class of '83 - and over that nearly quarter of a century the world has changed out of recognition, he said. We don't actually hear the argument any longer: 'Lib Dems, good people,' reasonable ideas but only if we thought they could win around here - it's a wasted vote'. ""You don't hear that because the evidence of people's senses demonstrates that it isn't a wasted vote." But he said Mr Blair had lost the trust of the British people. ""There is a fundamental lack of trust in Tony Blair as prime minister and in his government", he said. What we've got to do as a party - what I've got to do as a leader of this party - is to convey to people that what you see is what you get." Mr Kennedy also used his TV appearance to defend his party's plans to increase income tax to 50% for those earning more than £100",0, saying it would apply to just 1% of the population. He said the extra revenue would allow his party to get rid of tuition and top-up fees, introduce free personal care for the elderly and replace the council tax with a local income tax. Mr Blair has already spent a day with Five and Michael Howard is booked for a similar session.

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politics 342.txt Brown outlines third term vision Gordon Brown has outlined what he thinks should be the key themes of New Labour's next general election bid. He said ensuring every child in Britain had the best start in life could be a legacy to match the NHS's creation. The chancellor has previously planned the party's election strategy but this time the role will be filled by Alan Milburn - a key ally of Tony Blair. The premier insisted Mr Brown will have a key role in Labour's campaign", and praised his handling of the economy. Writing in the Guardian newspaper," Mr Brown outlined his view of the direction New Labour should be taking. ""As our manifesto and our programme for the coming decade should make clear", Labour's ambition is not simply tackling idleness but delivering full employment; not just attacking ignorance, disease and squalor but promoting lifelong education," good health and sustainable communities." BBC political editor Andrew Marr said that Mr Brown's article was ""a warning shot"" to Mr Blair not to try and cut him out of the manifesto writing process. ""It was", as always, coded and careful... but entirely deliberate," was Mr Marr's assessment. The prime minister was asked about Mr Brown's article and about his election role when he appeared on BBC Radio 4's Today programme. Mr Blair said a decision had yet to be taken over how the election would be run but the chancellor's role would be central"". Mr Blair argued that under New Labour the country had changed for the better and that was ""in part"" because of Mr Brown's management of the economy. And he pledged childcare would be a ""crown jewel"" of Labour's manifesto. He also predicted the next general election will be a ""tough", "tough fight"" for New Labour. But the prime minister insisted he did not know what date the poll would take place despite speculation about 5 May. Mr Blair said he was taking ""nothing for granted"" ahead of the vote - warning that the Tory strategy was to win power via the back door by hinting they were aiming to cut Labour's majority instead of hoping for an outright win.

"politics 343.txt Labour's Cunningham to stand down Veteran Labour MP and former Cabinet minister Jack Cunningham has said he will stand down at the next election. One of the few Blair-era ministers to serve under Jim Callaghan," he was given the agriculture portfolio when Labour regained power in 1997. Mr Cunningham went on to become Tony Blair's ""cabinet enforcer"". He has represented the constituency now known as Copeland since 1970. Mr Blair said he was a ""huge figure"" in Labour and a ""valued"" personal friend"". During Labour's long period in opposition", Mr Cunningham held a number of shadow roles including foreign affairs, the environment and as trade spokesman. As a agriculture minister he caused controversy when he decided to ban beef on the bone in the wake of fears over BSE. He quit the government in 1999 and in recent years has served as the chairman of the all-party committee on Lords reform and has been a loyal supporter of the government from the backbenches.

"politics 344.txt Will Tory tax cuts lift spirits? Michael Howard has finally revealed the full scale of his planned Tory tax cuts. Should he win the next general election", he has earmarked £4 billion that will be used to reduce taxes - although he still will not say which or how. This was the pre-election message many in his party have been pressing for and voters, he believes, will warm to. At its simplest," it is saying: ""Vote Tory and you can have it both ways"". Not only would his government stick to Labour spending plans on core public services", including health and education, it would increase

spending on defence, police and pensions. And even after that was done, it would still have enough left over for a tax cut equivalent to about a penny off the basic rate of income tax. All the money would come from its £35 billion efficiency savings which would see the axe taken to bureaucracy, waste and the civil service. Of that, £23 billion would go on spending plans, with £8 billion to fill the black hole left, they claim, by Gordon Brown, and the rest going in tax cuts. Neither Mr Howard nor Mr Letwin would say exactly how they would use that cash, although a cut in the basic rate seems unlikely. Ideas already floated include raising tax thresholds and abolishing or reducing inheritance tax, although some in the Tory party are urging Mr Howard to announce something more eye-catching before the election. As the Tory leader declared, "the aim of the exercise is to open up a real economic policy divide between Labour and the Tories. ""At this election", people will have a clear choice between Mr Blair who will waste more and tax more and the Conservative party which will give value for money and tax less," he said. It is a move back towards an almost traditional Tory message which previously suggested Labour was the party of tax rises and the Conservatives the party of tax cuts. The extension of that, however, was that Labour was also seen as the party of big spending on the public services while the Tories were the cutters. And that is where one of the problems lies for Mr Howard - can he persuade sceptical voters that they really can have it both ways with bigger spending on public services AND lower taxes? He insists he will not promise anything before the election that he cannot deliver if put into Downing Street. Labour, needless to say, claim his planned £35bn efficiency savings simply don't add up and that those sorts of figures are fantasy. One of New Labour's greatest successes before the historic 1997 election was to persuade voters, business and the City that it could be trusted to run the economy. So far that has not faced any real challenge, but independent analysts now claim a third New Labour government would be forced to either increase taxation or taxes to plug a black hole it has at the centre of its finances. Meanwhile, the Liberal Democrats are committed to increasing taxes for the most well off to finance their spending proposals launched earlier in the day. So, Mr Howard hopes his message will start to hit home during this unofficial election campaign and that his poll ratings might finally lift off the floor. And, while other issues like the Iraq war and trust will play a major part in that campaign, it is likely - and the prime minister probably hopes - that the economy will be the deciding factor.

politics 345.txt Teenagers to be allowed to be MPs Teenagers will be able to become MPs under plans unveiled by ministers. In a written statement, Constitutional Affairs Minister Christopher Leslie said the current minimum age of 21 for an MP would be reduced to 18. The proposals follow a recommendation last year by elections watchdog the Electoral Commission. The government intends to legislate", when parliamentary time allows, to lower the age," said Mr Leslie, who was elected in 1997 at the age of 24. Even if the move does go ahead it is unlikely it will be in place before the next general election, widely predicted for May. The announcement from Mr Leslie - who was elected in 1997 in a formerly safe Tory seat - prompted calls for a lowering of the voting age to 16. The Votes at 16 alliance said it was a good thing to engage people"" by lowering the candidacy age but argued lowering the voting age would be much more effective. ""Candidacy affects only politicians. The voting age affects millions of younger people", said spokesman Alex Folkes. We would hope that the government will table a bill that is broad enough to allow for amendments to be brought to test support for a reduction in the voting age." Currently candidates in both local and national votes must be 21 while the voting age is 18. That is because the age of majority was reduced to 18 in 1969 but laws dating from

1695 which determine the current voting age stayed in place. Irish republican Bernadette Devlin was one of just a handful of 21-year-olds elected to Parliament in the 20th century winning a seat in 1969. But the youngest is understood to have been Tory Edward Turnour", who won the 1904 Horsham by-election aged 21 and 144 days and served in Parliament for 47 continuous years. Last April's report by the Electoral Commission said there was no strong argument for leaving the age for standing for election at 21. The commission found the most common approach around the world is for the voting age to be the same as the candidacy age.

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"politics 346.txt Labour's four little words Labour has unveiled the four little words that will form the heart of its general election campaign which", for those just returned from the planet Galifray," is ""looming"". The slogan ""Britain forward not back"" (no"," it's not an instruction from one of those inter-planetary Time Lords) is to become as much a part of our daily lives as the sky - it's always there but we mostly stop noticing. The word ""Britain"" is cast on a red background - a nod to Old Labour. ""Forward"" is in italics and cunningly slopes forward and",, along with ""not back""", is set against a mushy pea green background. As one of the journalists assembled at the unveiling declared, it was all very post modern, or something. Great use of colour. Those ad men really do earn their money. And, coincidentally," the ad men who came up with the abandoned flying pigs and so-called ""Fagin"" posters which caused Tory protests have not been sacked but", as election supremo Alan Milburn declared," ""are doing a very good job"". Mr Milburn", in the latest in his series of pre-election-campaign campaigning," explained the slogan was the reaction to polling which suggests the public believe Labour and Tony Blair are the future while Michael Howard and the Tories would take the country backward s. ""Not many people talk about the years before 1997 as the good old days", he declared. It would be an aggressive campaign because things would inevitably boil down to a choice between Labour and the Tories. Nobody, he claimed, could picture Liberal Democrat leader Charles Kennedy walking up Downing Street the day after polling. They could, however, picture Michael Howard or, of course, Tony Blair doing it. So it was only right that the campaign concentrated on rigorously examining the opposition's policies and past record. And Tony Blair would be in the very front line of that campaign, he said. Between now and the election the prime minister will be spending more time out of London than in it but in Britain", not overseas, he promised. He will be leading the domestic debate from the front, listening," taking the flak." So", let's get on with it then.

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"politics 347.txt Tories outlining policing plans Local communities would be asked to go to the polls to elect their own area police commissioner", under plans unveiled by the Conservatives. Party leader Michael Howard said the new role would replace ""inconspicuous"" police authorities. He said the new office would not supersede the job of a chief constable. The Lib Dems said the plan could let extreme groups run policing", while Labour criticised ""extravagant"" Tory promises on policing. Responding to the plans", the chairman of the Police Federation of England and Wales, which represents rank and file officers," said it was essential operational independence was retained. Jan Berry said: ""It is a service", not a political football to be kicked around every time an election approaches. ""These plans could result in those with extreme political views dictating what actually happens on the ground", she warned. Outlining his crime manifesto, Mr Howard said elected police commissioners would be more accountable than police authorities which are made up of local

councillors and magistrates. The commissioner will have the powers which existing police authorities have", he told BBC Radio 4's Today programme. The trouble is," and it's no reflection on the people who are on the police authority - they are good people - but hardly anyone knows who they are."" Mr Howard said the authorities were not ""providing the local accountability that we want to see"" and that elected police commissioners would be more visible. Critics fear the move could hand control of the police to single-issue campaigners who would ignore the needs of the wider community. Lord Harris", who sits on the executive of Association of Police Authorities," said the plans seemed to suggest chief constables should be told what to do by a single politician. ""That is overturning nearly 200 years of the way in which we have organised policing in this country to avoid the politicisation of policing decisions", he said. Liberal Democrat home affairs spokesman Mark Oaten said the plan was dangerous and could create conflict between chief constables and elected officials"". Mr Oaten said local people had too little control over policing but a far better solution would be for elected councillors to draw up a ""minimum policing guarantee"" with their chief constables. A Labour Party spokesman criticised Michael Howard's record", saying police numbers had fallen by 1,132 when he was home secretary. He said: ""Today the Tories are making more extravagant promises on the police without making clear how they would pay for them", other than through fantasy savings to the asylum system." The Tories insist the commissioner role would not be like that of an American sheriff. Other Tory law and order plans include building more prisons and making criminals serve full jail sentences.

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"politics 348.txt TV debate urged for party chiefs Broadcasters should fix a date for a pre-election televised debate between the three main political leaders", according to the Hansard Society. It would then be up to Tony Blair, Michael Howard and Charles Kennedy to decide whether to take part," the non-partisan charity said. Chairman Lord Holme argued that prime ministers should not have the right of veto on a matter ""of public interest"". ""The broadcasters should make the decision to go ahead", he said. Lord Holme's proposal for a televised debate comes just four months after millions of viewers were able to watch US President George W Bush slug it out verbally with his Democratic challenger John Kerry. He said it was a democratically dubious proposition"" that it was up to the incumbent prime minister to decide whether a similar event takes place here. If Mr Blair did not want to take part", the broadcasters could go ahead with an empty chair or cancel the event and explain their reasons why," Lord Holme said. ""What makes the present situation even less acceptable is that although Mr Howard and Mr Kennedy have said they would welcome a debate", no-one has heard directly from the prime minister, he said. It has been left to nudges and winks, hints and briefings from his aides and campaign managers to imply that Mr Blair doesn't want one," but we haven't heard from the prime minister himself." Lord Holme", who has campaigned for televised debates at previous elections," said broadcasters were ""more than willing to cooperate with the arrangements"". Opinion polls suggested that the idea had the backing of the public who like comparing the personalities and policies of the contenders in their own homes", he said. Lord Holme argued that as part of their public service obligations," broadcasters ""should make the decision to go ahead"" as soon as the election is called. An independent third-party body such as the Hansard Society or Electoral Commission could work out the ground rules so they were fair to participants and informative to the public", he said. ""It would be up to each party leader to accept or refuse", said Lord Holme. If the prime minister's reported position is true and he does want to take part," he would t

hen be obliged to say why publicly. ""The broadcasters would then have the option of cancelling the event for obvious and well-understood reasons", or going ahead with an empty chair. ""Either way would be preferable to the present hidden veto." The Hansard Society has long campaigned for televised debates and has published reports on the issue in 1997 and 2001. Tony Blair has already ruled out taking part in a televised debate during the forthcoming election campaign. Last month he said: ""We answer this every election campaign and", for the reasons I have given before, the answer is no, he said at his monthly news conference.

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"politics 349.txt Chancellor rallies Labour voters Gordon Brown has issued a rallying cry to supporters", warning the ""stakes are too high"" to stay at home or protest vote in the next general election. The chancellor said the poll - expected to fall on 5 May - would give a ""clear and fundamental"" choice between Labour investment and Tory cuts. He told his party's spring conference the Tories must not be allowed to win. The Conservatives and Lib Dems insisted that voters faced higher taxes and means-testing under Labour. To a packed audience at Gateshead's Sage Centre", Mr Brown accused shadow chancellor Oliver Letwin of plotting cuts that were the equivalent of sacking every teacher," GP and nurse in the country. Laying into the Conservative's record in government he said: ""I give you this promise - with Labour", Britain will never return to the mistakes of ERM and 10% inflation, 15% interest rates, £3bn in lost reserves, 250,000 repossessed," one million in negative equity and three million unemployed. ""Never again Tory boom and bust. ""This will be the central dividing line at the election", between a Conservative Party taking Britain back and planning deep cuts of £35bn in our services, and a Labour government taking Britain forward, which on a platform of stability will reform and renew our hospitals, schools and public services and, I am proud to say," spend by 2008 £60bn more." Turning to the economy", the chancellor promised to continue economic stability and growth in a third term in power. He also pledged to continue the fight against child and pensioner poverty. And he promised help to get young people on the property ladder. ""My message to the thousands of young couples waiting to obtain their first home is that housing is rightly now at the centre of our coming manifesto", he said. And the next Labour government will match our low mortgage rates with a new first-time buyers' initiative." In the speech", which prompted a standing ovation, he also promised to end teenage unemployment within the next five years. He also highlighted plans for 100% debt relief for the world's poorest countries, a national minimum wage for 16 and 17-year-olds, the creation of a network of children's centres and flexibility in maternity leave. Responding to the speech, shadow chief secretary to the Treasury, George Osborne," said: ""This was more talk from Gordon Brown. ""We've heard it all before. Instead of talking about the future he kept on talking about the past. ""He completely failed to say which taxes he would put up to fill the black hole in his spending plans. ""There will be a simple choice at the election - value for money and lower taxes with the Conservatives", or more waste and higher taxes under Tony Blair and Gordon Brown." Liberal Democrat shadow chancellor Vince Cable warned the picture was not as rosy as Mr Brown would like to portray it. ""For all his trumpeting of Labour's management of the economy", Gordon Brown's record is very mixed, he said. Gordon Brown has created a system of massive centralisation and bureaucracy, a system which subjects millions of people to means testing," and a system of taxation which is extremely complex. ""For all his positive words", Gordon Brown is faced with economic problems looming on the horizon," not least the unprecedented levels of personal debt facin

g the nation." "Also in Gateshead", the prime minister took questions sent in by e-mail, text message and telephone as part of Labour's attempt to engage the public in their campaign. Mr Blair told the audience he believed the Iraq war would have made Britain a safer place if its emerging democracy succeeded and that he wanted to bring troops home as soon as possible," but not before the job was done. He also said he wanted to carry on as PM ""because I still think that there are big changes our country needs"".

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"politics 350.txt Brown 'proud of economy record' Gordon Brown has delivered a rousing speech to Labour's spring conference setting out the government's agenda for the next general election. The chancellor said he was proud of his party's record on the economy", and would strive for continuing stability if elected. The Gateshead conference was told he would help young people who were struggling to buy their own homes. And the chancellor vowed to continue the fight against child poverty. Later, Prime Minister Tony Blair will answer questions sent by the public via text and e-mail. Analysing Mr Brown's position before the speech," BBC correspondent James Hardy said Mr Brown would draw ""sharp dividing lines"" with the Conservatives for the forthcoming election campaign. He would contrast Labour's plan to invest £60bn in services with a Tory plan to cut spending by £35bn. ""Mr Brown will lay out his credentials as a reforming chancellor determined to take on and beat the Asian tiger economies which increasingly dominate world trade", our correspondent said. On Friday night, Mr Brown confirmed he would not make any tax commitments until the Labour manifesto had been published after the Budget, expected in March. But commentators will listen to his speech closely for hints on whether, as the Conservatives claim, he plans to raise tax after the election. The Tories accuse Labour of raising taxes 66 times since coming to power in 1997. Following the chancellor's keynote speech, the prime minister will face interactive questioning from ordinary voters on Saturday. Mr Blair is thought to be deliberately putting himself on the line in a bid to engage the electorate ahead of an expected May election. Capital Radio DJ Margherita Taylor will select questions to put to him from thousands e-mailed and sent by text. The prime minister's enthusiasm for the job remains undimmed, Alan Milburn, Labour's election strategist told Radio 4's Today programme on Saturday. Mr Blair has the same passion and the same commitments for the job"" as when Labour came to power in 1997", he said. And he confirmed Mr Blair's insistence that no poll date had yet been set. He said: ""I'm the General Election co-ordinator and I don't know", and Tony has not made up his mind." "On Friday", the prime minister completed a whistle-stop tour of England, during which he unveiled his party's six pre-election pledges. Starting in London, he visited marginal constituencies pledging to build on what he said were Labour's achievements on the economy, crime," education and public services. The Conservatives and Lib Dems said the pledges - set to underpin Labour's election campaign - were ""worthless"".

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"politics 351.txt Fox attacks Blair's Tory 'lies' Tony Blair lied when he took the UK to war so has no qualms about lying in the election campaign", say the Tories. Tory co-chairman Liam Fox was speaking after Mr Blair told Labour members the Tories offered a ""hard right agenda"". Dr Fox told BBC Radio: ""If you are willing to lie about the reasons for going to war", "I guess you are going to lie about anything at all." "He would not discuss reports the party repaid £500",000 to Lord Ashcroft after he predicted an election defeat. The prime minister ratcheted up Labour's pre-election campaigning at t

he weekend with a helicopter tour of the country and his speech at the party's spring conference. He insisted he did not know the poll date, but it is widely expected to be 5 May. In what was seen as a highly personal speech in Gateshead on Sunday," Mr Blair said: ""I have the same passion and hunger as when I first walked through the door of 10 Downing Street."" He described his relationship with the public as starting euphoric", then struggling to live up to the expectations," and reaching the point of raised voices and ""throwing crockery"". He warned his supporters against complacency", saying: ""It's a fight for the future of our country", it's a fight that for Britain and the people of Britain we have to win."" Mr Blair said that whether the public chose Michael Howard or Mr Kennedy", it would result in ""a Tory government not a Labour government and a country that goes back and does not move forward""". Dr Fox accused Mr Blair and other Cabinet ministers of telling lies about their opponents' policies and then attacking the lies. ""What we learned at the weekend is what Labour tactics are going to be and it's going to be fear and smear", he told BBC News. The Tory co-chairman attacked Labour's six new pledges as vacuous"" and said Mr Blair was very worried voters would take revenge for his failure to deliver. Dr Fox refused to discuss weekend newspaper reports that the party had repaid £50 0", "000 to former Tory Treasurer Lord Ashcroft after he said the party could not win the election. ""We repay loans when they are due but do not comment to individual financial matters", he said, insisting he enjoyed a warm and constructive"" relationship to Lord Ashcroft. Meanwhile Lib Dem leader Charles Kennedy is expected to attack Mr Blair's words as he begins a nationwide tour on Monday. Mr Kennedy is accelerating Lib Dem election preparations this week as he visits Manchester", Liverpool, Leicester, Somerset, Basingstoke, Shrewsbury," Dorset and Torbay. He said: ""This is three-party politics. In the northern cities", the contest is between Labour and the Liberal Democrats. ""In southern and rural seats - especially in the South West - the principal contenders are the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives", who are out of the running in Scotland and Wales." The Lib Dems accuse Mr Blair of making a ""touchy-feely"" speech to Labour delegates which will not help him regain public trust.

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politics 352.txt Blair joins school sailing trip The prime minister has donned a life jacket and joined school children in a sailing dinghy as he sought to sell his party's education policies. Tony Blair sailed across the lake in Bromsgrove", Worcestershire, while on a visit with Education Secretary Ruth Kelly to back school outings. Mr Blair later stressed Labour's election pledge to focus on education," when he met parents in the area. The Conservatives and Lib Dems both say his pledges are ""worthless"". All the parties are stepping up campaigning ahead of a General Election widely expected to be held on 5 May. Mr Blair", looking a little windswept, joined two girls from St Egwin's Middle School in Evesham and an instructor for a trip in the Wayfarer dinghy," closely followed by a boat full of photographers. Afterwards he said outdoor activities were beneficial for children but accepted that lots of teachers now worried about taking part for fear of being sued if something went wrong. ""What we're doing is introducing some simple guidelines so if teachers follow those they are not going to be at risk of legal action", Mr Blair said. When you are doing these types of activities you've got to exercise some common sense there obviously. ""You can't have a situation where parents or teachers end up being worried that they're going to be subject to all sorts of legal action if they take children sailing or doing outdoor activity that is actually good for the kids and good for their health and their character." The pledge on education - ""your child achieving more"" - was one of six election pledges unveiled

by Mr Blair last week. If it wins a third term in the general election expected this year", Labour is committed to giving parents more choice between schools; allowing all secondary schools to take on specialist status; opening 200 city academies and creating 100,"000 more sixth-form places. It aims to improve discipline in schools by adopting a ""zero tolerance"" approach to disruption of classes and introducing fixed penalty notices for truants. Labour also plans to give head teachers at groups of local schools control over funding for units to handle disruptive pupils. Parents and teachers who met Mr Blair on Tuesday were invited to the informal discussion after writing to their MPs to raise concerns about education. It is the latest in a series of events designed to show the prime minister is speaking directly to voters in the run-up to the election - and that he has not lost touch. For the Conservatives", shadow education secretary Tim Collins said: ""Mr Blair's government is all talk. He must be judged on what he has done in two terms", not what he mendaciously claims he would do in a third. That judgment will be damning."" The Liberal Democrats are promising to cut class sizes for the youngest children and ensure all children are taught by a qualified teacher in each subject.

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politics 353.txt Analysis: No pain", "no gain? He called it his ""masochism strategy"" in the run-up to the Iraq war and now Tony Blair has signed up for another dose of pain. The idea is simple - the prime minister goes head to head with an often hostile group of ""real"" voters in the full spotlight of the television cameras. The theory is that talking to the great British public", even if they are the ""great unwashed""", is better than having the media filter what voters hear from politicians. It is also the most effective way of showing that he is aware of real people's concerns and - on occasions - of their outright fury. Mr Blair used the tactic before the Iraq war to try to show he really was engaging with public concerns and you can expect to see it much more in the run-up to the election. Labour knows it has been damaged by accusations of spin," ""control freakery"" and over-slick presentation - sometimes from within the ranks of its own MPs. Tony Blair himself has said people complain he does not listen. Mr Blair's latest bout of flagellation came with a series of questions sessions on Five television throughout Wednesday. The trouble began on the Wright Stuff show", with Maria Hutchings marching up to him," saying ""Tony", that's rubbish"" as she tried to complain about her autistic son's school being threatened with closure. A few ""don't worries"" as Mrs Hutchings was led back to the audience averted a public slanging match - he spoke to her privately after the show. But that was only the start and later sessions produced the type of grilling not even the toughest television interviewer could produce. Writer Neil Coppendale", from West Sussex," asked of the Iraq war: ""Tens of thousands of innocent men", women and children died - how do you manage to sleep at night?"" On immigration", London teacher Diane Granger said: ""Where are you going to put everyone?"" And can you imagine even Jeremy Paxman putting the question posed by Brighton nurse Marion Brown: ""Would you wipe somebody's backside for £5?"" Mr Blair tried to use the questioners' first names - and sometimes threw them off their stride by asking what they would do about the problems. Many of the newspapers have branded the exercise a PR stunt which backfired. Indeed there is a danger Mr Blair simply ends up looking ""embattled""". Conservative Michael Howard and Liberal Democrat Charles Kennedy are to be offered chances to appear in similar slots on the channel next month. Labour strategists believe more of the sessions will mean the hecklers no longer become a story and the real issues take prominence. James Humphreys", ex-head of corporate communications at Number 10," says the strategy shows frustration with th

e media. ""They feel they don't get their voice across and going direct to people is clearly their game on this occasion",," he says. There are risks but the prize is tackling the trend of lower turnouts at the polls, he argues. The prime minister knows full well the potential hazards . He must remember with gritted teeth his confrontation with Sharron Storer, the Birmingham woman who harangued him over the state of her local hospital in the 2001 election campaign. All you do is walk around and make yourself known", you don't do anything to help anybody," she told Mr Blair before stomping off, refusing his pleas to discuss the issue privately. Former Downing Street media chief Alastair Campbell has described the episode as a bit of a disaster"" as it meant the launch of Labour's election manifesto received little coverage. But it was seen as one of the few moments when that election campaign came alive", not least because it coincided with John Prescott's even more direct contact - when he punched an egg-throwing protester. Former prime ministers too have come to grief at the hands of a persistent member of the public. The undoubtedly highlight of years of election phone-in shows was Margaret Thatcher discomfort on Nationwide in 1983," when viewer Diana Gould put her on the spot about the sinking of the Belgrano in the Falklands War. John Major reaped the benefits of street campaigning during the 1992 election campaign with his famous soapbox. It may have left him splattered with eggs and engine oil at times but he felt it added ""fizz"" to his campaign. In his memoirs",," he also argues the strategy contrasted with Neil Kinnock's ""contrived photo opportunities"" and attempts at an artful campaign. ""He wanted to look like a prime minister. I was prime minister and I wanted a flesh and blood fight",," says Mr Major. Mr Blair told prospective Labour MPs on Thursday that taking part in phone-ins and public meetings could enthuse and engage and give the public a sense of empowerment"". But he also wants to counter complaints that he has spent too much time on international affairs and foreign trips. Mr Blair recalls how Bill Clinton once advised him: ""Always remember that what people see of you in the news in the evening is how they think you spend your day." His hope must be that voters watching him on the rack will bear out for Labour the old maxim: ""No pain",," no gain.""

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"politics 354.txt Brown names 16 March for Budget Chancellor Gordon Brown will deliver his Budget to the House of Commons on 16 March", the Treasury has announced. The Budget, likely to be the last before the General Election, will be at about 1230 GMT on that Wednesday, just after Prime Minister's question time. The annual event is when the chancellor outlines the government's taxation and broader economic predictions. The Tories say it is likely the Budget will contain measures to attract votes. The election is expected on 5 May. Next month's Budget will be Mr Brown's ninth since Labour came to power in 1997. If a May election is called, there could be as little as 18 days between the Budget and the announcement of a date for the election. A shortened Finance Bill would have to be rushed through Parliament with all-party support to allow the Government to continue collecting revenue. The full Finance Bill, with the Budget measures in it, would then be returned to the Commons after the election," if Labour secures another term in office. Tory shadow chancellor Oliver Letwin said: ""We can be sure of two things: the Budget will contain measures to attract votes",," and it will not contain the £8 billion of tax rises which independent experts say are inevitable if Labour wins the election." As Mr Brown announced the Budget date in a short ministerial statement",," accountancy firm Ernst & Young urged him to put politics aside and focus on the long-term requirements of the economy. ""In the Budgets that were given immediately before the last six elections", taxes were cut by the incumbent chancellor and, in many

cases, taxes were increased soon after the election result," said Aidan O'Carroll, E&Y's UK head of tax.

politics 355.txt Lib Dems stress Budget trust gap Public trust in the handling of the economy can only be restored if Gordon Brown opens up his books for unbiased inspection, say the Lib Dems. City experts say there is a £10bn black hole"" in the public finances", a claim denied by the chancellor. Lib Dem spokesman Vince Cable said the public did not know who to believe and the National Audit Office should judge. Responding to the pre-Budget report," Mr Cable also attacked Labour's ""unfair"" and over-complicated taxes. In his report"," Mr Brown insisted he was on course to meet his ""golden rule"" of borrowing only to invest", rather than for day-to-day spending," over the course of the economic cycle. Mr Cable said people did not know whether to believe the chancellor or the consensus among experts which said the rule would be broken. ""There is an issue of credibility and trust"" he said. We cannot have a continuation of a situation where the chancellor sets his own tests and then marks them. ""What we need is the equivalent of a thorough Ofsted inspection of the government's accounts."" He asked what the government had to hide. Mr Cable also accused the chancellor of ducking tough choices. He argued: ""There are serious challenges ahead from the falling dollar and from the rapid downturn in the UK housing market and rising personal debt. But they have not been confronted." Mr Brown confirmed he was setting aside another £520m for the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Mr Cable compared that new cost with the £500m needed for Britain's role in the entire first Gulf War - when 80% of the bill had been met through help from European and Arab nations. He suggested keeping British troops in Iraq could cost another £1bn with the government also planning to spend at least £3bn for identity cards. The current economic climate meant Britain could not afford the ""reckless"" George Bush-style tax cutting spree"" planned by the Tories", he said. Instead," what was needed was simple and fair taxation rather than the ""complete mess"" produced by Mr Brown's endless tinkering. Mr Cable said 40% of all pensioners were now paying marginal tax rates of 50%. And one-and-a-half million hard working families were paying 60% marginal tax rates. With that record", he asked why ministers attacked Lib Dem plans for a new 50% tax rate for the ""very rich"" - those earning more than £100",000 a year. Mr Brown earmarked £1bn to help keep down council tax rises next year. But the Lib Dem spokesman questioned whether that money was being found from cuts to education and health. He urged the government to scrap the ""grossly unfair"" tax completely. The Lib Dems want it replaced with a local income tax. In response", Mr Brown stressed the Iraq money came from a reserve funds. It was because he had rejected previous Lib Dem proposals, such as scrapping the New Deal, that Britain's economy was successful, claimed Mr Brown.

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politics 356.txt Blair backs 'pre-election budget' Tony Blair has backed Chancellor Gordon Brown's pre-Budget report amid opposition claims he was too bullish about the state of the UK economy. In a speech in Edinburgh", the prime minister said Thursday's report reinforced stability and opportunity. And that would be central to Labour's next election campaign," planning for which was already well advanced. Mr Brown earlier denied his economic forecasts were too optimistic - but refused to rule out future tax rises. He told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: ""No politician should make the mistake that John Major and his colleagues made in 1992 of saying no matter what the circumstances are," they can make all sorts of guarantees on every individual thing. ""That is not what politicians should do"" it would not be responsible to do." Mr Brown insisted his spending plans were ""affordable"" and he could afford

rd to be optimistic because Britain was now a stable", low-inflation economy and house prices were now stabilising. Mr Blair praised his chancellor for his role in creating economic stability," which he said was the ""cornerstone"" of Labour's programme. In a speech at Edinburgh's Napier University", he said Labour would publish over the next few months ""a rich agenda for future policy in any possible third term"". ""In every area of work there is a detailed plan for the future", much clearer than those in 1997 or 2001. All of it fits together around common themes of opportunity, security and stability for all," Mr Blair said. In his pre-Budget report, Mr Brown surprised some City experts by forecasting UK growth at between 3% and 3.5% for next year. Many believe the figure is more likely to be under 3% - and fear tax rises or spending cuts, saying tax receipts have been overestimated. Carl Emmerson, from the Institute for Fiscal Studies, told BBC News: He thinks everything will come out in the wash and it will", in fact," be OK. We're not so sure." David Page", of Investec Securities," said: ""His forecast that he will meet the golden rule with a margin of £8bn is way too optimistic. ""It's going to take a significant turnaround in the economy to meet these targets."" Conservative Shadow chancellor Oliver Letwin said: ""I can't find a single economic forecaster from the IMF to the Institute of Fiscal Studies who believes anything other than the chancellor has got a black hole in his finances. ""In order to deal with that he will have to raise taxes after the next general election." Mr Letwin accused the chancellor of using ""fancy statistics"" to hide public service failures. Vincent Cable", for the Liberal Democrats, called on Mr Brown to open up the government's books to the National Audit Office," to see if he had met his ""golden rule"". ""It is very clear that there are some serious loose ends in government public spending", Mr Cable told MPs.

politics 357.txt Cabinet anger at Brown cash raid Ministers are unhappy about plans to use Whitehall cash to keep council tax bills down, local government minister Nick Raynsford has acknowledged. Gordon Brown reallocated £512m from central to local government budgets in his pre-Budget report on Thursday. Mr Raynsford said he had held some pretty frank discussions"" with fellow ministers over the plans. But he said local governments had to deliver good services without big council tax rises. The central government cash is part of a £1bn package to help local authorities in England keep next year's council tax rises below 5%", in what is likely to be a general election year. Mr Raynsford said nearly all central government departments had an interest in well run local authorities. And he confirmed rows over the issue with ministerial colleagues. ""Obviously we had some pretty frank discussions about this", he told BBC Radio 4's The World at One. But he said there was a recognition that a good settlement for local government"" was important to health", education and ""other government departments"". Ministers had to be sure local government could deliver without ""unreasonable council tax increases""", he added. Mr Raynsford dismissed a suggestion the move was designed to keep council taxes down ahead of an expected general election. ""This is a response to the concerns that have been voiced by local government about the pressures they face." Mr Raynsford also plans to make savings of £100m by making changes to local government pensions schemes. These would raise the age from which retiring workers could claim their pensions and limit how much they received if they retired early. He insisted the changes were ""very modest"" and designed to tackle the problem of workers retiring ""very early"". But general secretary of the public services union Unison Dave Prentis criticised the plans. ""If you want world class public services you don't get that by hitting people as they approach retirement.""  
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"politics 358.txt 'UK will stand firm on EU rebate' Britain's £3bn EU rebate is not up for renegotiation at next week's European Council summit", Jack Straw said. The foreign secretary told MPs the rebate, secured by Margaret Thatcher in 1984," was ""entirely justified"". New European commission president Jose Manuel Barroso has suggested the cash could be shared out among net contributors to the EU budget. Mr Straw acknowledged some countries in the newly enlarged 25 nation EU still had to ""see the light"" on the rebate. But the foreign secretary told the Commons foreign affairs committee: ""Our position is very clear: it is entirely justified and it is not for negotiation."" He added that he did not think there would be a political price to pay for the UK's stance - Britain contributed more and received less than other EU states. The two-day European Council summit in Brussels begins on 16 December and is widely expected to mark the beginning of a lengthy negotiating period over the EU's budget for 2007-13. The wrangling could stretch into 2005", even 2006. The UK, France, Germany, Austria," the Netherlands and Sweden want the EU budget to be capped at 1% of member states' combined national incomes - the Commission wants it to be 1.26%. Mr Straw said the EU commission's proposal would mean a 35% hike in the budget. ""I don't know of any national government thinking of increasing its budget by that amount", he added. The foreign secretary said he hoped the talks next week could produce a date in 2005 for the beginning of negotiations with Turkey about possible EU membership although that there would be no prospect of a date for joining for some time.

"politics 359.txt Brown ally rejects Budget spree Chancellor Gordon Brown's closest ally has denied suggestions there will be a Budget giveaway on 16 March. Ed Balls, ex-chief economic adviser to the Treasury, said there would be no spending spree before polling day. But Mr Balls, a prospective Labour MP, said he was confident the chancellor would meet his fiscal rules. He was speaking as Sir Digby Jones, CBI director general, warned Mr Brown not to be tempted to use any extra cash on pre-election bribes. Mr Balls, who stepped down from his Treasury post to stand as a Labour candidate in the election, had suggested that Mr Brown would meet his golden economic rule - with a margin to spare"". He said he hoped more would be done to build on current tax credit rules. He also stressed rise in interest rates ahead of an expected May election would not affect the Labour Party's chances of winning. Expectations of a rate rise have gathered pace after figures showed house prices are still rising. Consumer borrowing rose at a near-record pace in January. ""If the MPC (the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee) were to judge that a rate rise was justified before the election because of the strength of the economy - and I'm not predicting that they will - I do not believe that this will be a big election issue in Britain for Labour", he told a Parliamentary lunch. This is a big change in our political culture." During an interview with BBC Radio 4's Today programme", Mr Balls said he was sure Mr Brown's Budget would not put at risk the stability of the economy. ""I don't think we'll see a pre-election spending spree - we certainly did not see that before 2001", he said. His assurances came after Sir Digby Jones said stability was all important and any extra cash should be spent on improving workers' skills. His message to the chancellor was: Please don't give it away in any form of electioneering." Sir Digby added: ""I don't think he will. I have to say he has been a prudent chancellor right the way through. Stability is the key word - British business needs boring stability more than anything. ""We would say to him 'don't increase your public spending", don't give it away. But if you are going to anywhere, just add something to the competitiveness of Britain," put it into skilling our people'. ""That would be a good way to spend any excess." Mr Balls refused to say whether Mr Brown would remain as chancellor after the election", amid speculation he will be of

ferred the job of Foreign Secretary. ""I think that Gordon Brown wants to be part of the successful Labour government which delivers in the third term for the priorities of the people and sees off a Conservative Party that will take Britain backwards", Mr Balls told Today. Prime Minister Tony Blair has yet to name the date of the election, but most pundits are betting on 5 May.

politics 360.txt Will the Budget bring out smiling voters?

As Tory spokesman Oliver Letwin said - any chancellor would use his pre-election budget to offer some vote winning sweeteners, wouldn't he. And everyone does, indeed, expect Gordon Brown to do just that in his last budget before the expected polling day of 5 May. There will be plenty of talk about taking no risks with the economy or handing out irresponsible giveaways. But Mr Brown will stun Westminster and break just about every historical precedent if he fails to do something designed to put a smile on voters' faces and make them more inclined to back Labour in the election. And there has already been speculation about possible tax reductions for the poorest and increasing the threshold on stamp duty in this week's Budget. The aim of his package will be to keep any disillusioned core Labour voters in the fold, while ensuring the middle England voters who gave Tony Blair two election victories don't desert him at the third poll. And, needless to say, there will be plenty of analysis of what impact the Budget will have on Mr Brown's own ambitions to replace Mr Blair as prime minister at some point after a third win. But there is a shadow hanging over this pre-election performance - in the shape of £11 billion or thereabouts. That is the size of the financial black hole "the Tories", backed by some independent forecasters, believe Mr Brown will have to fill with tax increases after the election. The opening shot in that battle was fired at the weekend with claims a Treasury leak suggested Mr Brown was ready to slap capital gains tax on home sales to raise some of that cash. It was immediately denied, but the Tories remain suspicious, claiming that, as Mr Letwin said, if the money does not come from there, where will it come from. Mr Brown will undoubtedly claim the forecasts are simply wrong and that he will have absolutely no need to raise taxes after the election, should Labour win. Previous gloomy forecasts proved wrong, he will argue, while suggesting that only by sticking with him can Britain continue to have a sound economy, low unemployment and high public spending. The opposition will reject that by claiming they can keep the economy sound, increase spending and cut taxes at the same time. The Liberal Democrats will also promise to run a sound economy, but based on increased taxes to fund spending and, amongst other things, abolishing the council tax in favour of a local income tax. And there will be prolonged argument over which of the parties can make the greatest savings in Whitehall and beyond to fund their policies. But probably what that all boils down to is a simple question of which of the parties the voters most trust to keep the economy stable and avoid any unpleasant surprises in the coming years. And it is probably still the answer to that one question that will overwhelmingly decide the outcome of the general election.

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politics 361.txt Budget to set scene for election Gordon Brown will seek to put the economy at the centre of Labour's bid for a third term in power when he delivers his ninth Budget at 1230 GMT. He is expected to stress the importance of continued economic stability", with low unemployment and interest rates. The chancellor is expected to freeze petrol duty and raise the stamp duty threshold from £60,000. But the Conservatives and Lib Dems insist voters face higher taxes and more means-testing under Labour. Treasury officials have said there will not be a pre-election giveaway, but Mr Brown is thought to have about £2bn to spare. - Increase in the stamp duty threshold from £60,000

- A freeze on petrol duty - An extension of tax credit scheme for poorer families - Possible help for pensioners The stamp duty threshold rise is intended to help first time buyers - a likely theme of all three of the main parties' general election manifestos. Ten years ago, buyers had a much greater chance of a voiding stamp duty, with close to half a million properties, in England and Wales alone, selling for less than £60,000. Since then, average UK property prices have more than doubled while the starting threshold for stamp duty has not increased. Tax credits As a result, the number of properties incurring stamp duty has rocketed as has the government's tax take. The Liberal Democrats unveiled their own proposals to raise the stamp duty threshold to £150,000 in February. The Tories are also thought likely to propose increased thresholds," with shadow chancellor Oliver Letwin branding stamp duty a ""classic Labour stealth tax"". The Tories say whatever the chancellor gives away will be clawed back in higher taxes if Labour is returned to power. Shadow Treasury chief secretary George Osborne said: ""Everyone who looks at the British economy at the moment says there has been a sharp deterioration in the public finances", that there is a black hole, he said. If Labour is elected there will be a very substantial tax increase in the Budget after the election," of the order of around £10bn." But Mr Brown's former advisor Ed Balls", now a parliamentary hopeful," said an examination of Tory plans for the economy showed there would be a £35bn difference in investment by the end of the next parliament between the two main parties. He added: ""I don't accept there is any need for any changes to the plans we have set out to meet our spending commitments." For the Lib Dems David Laws said: ""The chancellor will no doubt tell us today how wonderfully the economy is doing", he said. But a lot of that is built on an increase in personal and consumer debt over the last few years - that makes the economy quite vulnerable potentially if interest rates ever do have to go up in a significant way."" SNP leader Alex Salmond said his party would introduce a £2,000 grant for first time buyers, reduce corporation tax and introduce a citizens pension free from means testing. Plaid Cymru's economics spokesman Adam Price said he wanted help to get people on the housing ladder and an increase in the minimum wage to £5.60 an hour.

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"politics 362.txt Brown comes out shooting Labour may have abolished hunting - but that didn't stop Chancellor Gordon Brown using his Budget to fire both barrels at some of the opposition parties' core election foxes. Specifically", it saw him attempting to slaughter the council tax as an election issue and to tear limb from limb their wider policies for pensioners and families. In a relatively short speech he kept the best for last and was clearly out to give exactly that pre-election boost everyone had been predicting. So if you are a couple with children, a pensioner, a patient or a youngster, there was something pulled from Mr Brown's red box in an attempt to persuade you to stick with or switch to a New Labour government. Like a surgeon, he attempted to target his handouts with absolute precision onto exactly the groups the government needs to appeal to in the election campaign. The announcements brought great cheers from his own MPs who are now in full-on election mode and had been looking to their man to give them ammunition for the doorsteps. They obviously believed he had done that for them and, coincidentally, given his own image as a prime minister-in-waiting another little boost. Labour MPs, for example, will undoubtedly now engage in a debate over exactly how redistributive - a lovely Old Labour word - this chancellor really is. But Gordon Brown is never going to put on a show and even as he was out to cast himself as the man who will win Labour an historic third term, his demeanour remained quiet, confident and reassu

ring. Prudence made an appearance, albeit towards the end of his address, as he assured voters he would do nothing to mess up the economic stability he had brought to Britain and which, he claimed, would be thrown away by anyone else. According to the opposition parties, however, it is all one big con trick. As always," they accused him of glossing over the facts of the ""black hole"" at the centre of his finances which", they claim, would ensure tax increases after the election. He did it most obviously with his increase in national insurance contributions after the 2001 election campaign during which he had pledged not to increase income tax. As Liberal Democrat leader Charles Kennedy claimed," for most families the distinction between income tax and a tax on income is meaningless. Tory leader Michael Howard said the chancellor was up to his old trick of deliberately re-casting his forecasts to give the illusion that everything in the Treasury larder is as fresh as the day it was first stored away for future use. He branded it a dodgy ""vote now pay later"" budget based on dodgy figures from a dodgy government that gave Britain the dodgy dossier. Where the chancellor mostly avoided direct electioneering", Mr Howard felt no such constraint without attacks like comparing Mr Brown's forecasts to the prime minister's forecasts on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. As ever, there will now be a period of frantic activity by the opposition parties' treasury specialists as they pore over the chancellor's red book, which sets out the fine detail of his budget, in an attempt to spot the flaws. In particular there will be an argument over precisely whose policies on the council tax will offer people the best deal. And in Labour circles there will undoubtedly be an argument over just how good a prime minister Gordon Brown will make at some point after the next election.

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"politics 363.txt Kennedy criticises 'unfair' taxes Gordo n Brown has failed to tackle the ""fundamental unfairness"" in the tax system in his ninth Budget", Charles Kennedy has said. How was it right that the poorest 20% of society were still paying more as a proportion of their income than the richest 20%," the Lib Dem leader asked. The new £200 council tax rebate for pensioners did nothing to fix the ""unfair tax""", he added. The government could not go on ""patching up"" the system", he added. Speaking in the Commons after Mr Brown had delivered what is widely thought to be the last Budget before the general election," Mr Kennedy acknowledged that the UK was one of the most successful economies in the world. But he criticised both the chancellor and the Tories for failing to address the ""ticking bomb"" of council tax revaluation. He said the recent experience of Wales indicated seven million households in England would pay significantly more after revaluation. The chancellor's announcement that he was to offer a £200 council tax rebate paid by pensioner households was merely a ""sticking plaster"" to a much bigger problem. The Lib Dem plan for a local income tax would benefit the typical household by more than £450 a year", with half of all pensioners paying no local tax and about three million being better off. On pensions," Mr Kennedy said it was a ""scandal"" that the system discriminated against women who had missed making National Insurance payments when they were having children. He said a residency criteria would end ""at a stroke this fundamental iniquity"". Mr Kennedy added his party's priorities of free long-term care for the elderly", abolishing top-up fees and replacing the council tax would be funded by charging 50% income tax to those earning more than £100,"000 per annum. He contrasted his approach with Mr Brown's pledge in 2001 not to increase income tax. The chancellor went on to put up National Insurance contributions after the election. ""For most individuals", most families, most households, it adds up to exactly the same thing," said Mr Kennedy. And they wonder why people get cynical about their politicians when they give on

e impression before an election and do exactly the opposite after that election."

"politics 364.txt Howard attacks 'pay later' Budget Tory leader Michael Howard has dismissed Gordon Brown's Budget as ""vote now", "pay later"" spending plans. The simple fact was that under a new Labour government taxes would go up after the election to plug a financial black hole", "Mr Howard said. Everyone could see the chancellor's ""sweeteners""", but these hid tax rises for hard working families," he said. Labour's ""faltering election campaign"" would not be helped by the package of measures", Mr Howard added. Mr Brown's Budget was not about what was good for the country," but ""all about the interests of the Labour party", "the Tory leader said after mockingly welcoming the chancellor back to the election campaign. He went on to accuse Mr Brown of giving with one hand while taking away with the other. He urged the chancellor to admit he had been responsible for dragging millions of people in to the net"" to pay stamp duty and inheritance tax. ""We can all see the sweeteners", "but they hide the crippling tax rises for hard-working families that are inevitable if Labour wins." "He also accused the government and the chancellor of running out of solutions to the problems Britain faced. ""Their only answer is to tax", "to spend and to waste - to get people to vote now and pay later." "Mr Brown liked to rattle off ""magical balances conjured out of thin air"" in a bid to convince people there was no ""black hole"" in the nation's finances", "the Tory leader said. ""This dodgy government that brought us the dodgy dossier is now publishing a dodgy Budget based on dodgy numbers", he said. You now propose to borrow, over the next six years," no less than £168 billion; so much for prudence. ""The chancellor's forecasts of surpluses are no better than the prime minister's forecasts of weapons of mass destruction." "Mr Brown's council tax rebate for pensioners was £300 less than what the Tories were offering", Mr Howard said. There was nothing in the Budget that would put more police on the streets," make hospitals cleaner or give parents and teachers the discipline and skills they wanted in schools. People would face a ""clear choice"" at the election", "either ""more waste and higher taxes under Labour or lower taxes and value for money with the Conservatives""", "he said. ""That's the battleground of this election. That's what this election is going to be all about and I say bring it on", "he concluded, to loud Tory cheering.

politics 365.txt Whitehall cuts 'ahead of target' Thousan  
ds of civil service jobs have already been cut or moved out of London as part o  
f a major cost-cutting drive. Chancellor Gordon Brown said 12,500 jobs had gon  
e while 7,800 were being moved out of the South East. He plans to axe 104,000 j  
obs to free up money for education, health, defence, housing and overseas aid.  
Unions oppose the plans but Mr Brown said £2bn savings had already been made an  
d more jobs had been cut than had been expected at this stage. A further 200 jo  
bs at the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs have been earma  
rked to be cut. At the Department for Work and Pensions, 30,000 jobs are to go,  
560 will be lost by the end of the month at the Department of Trade and Industri  
y and 400 are to go at the Inland Revenue and Customs. In his Budget statemen  
t, the chancellor said the first 12,500 civil service jobs had been cut, on tar  
get. About 4,300 civil servants will leave London and the South East by the end  
of March 2005 and there are plans to relocate another 3,500. Of those 300 Depar  
tment of Health posts will go to Yorkshire while hundreds at the Department of  
Culture will move to Birmingham and Newcastle. Mr Brown also announced plans t  
o merge 35 agencies into nine - described by one civil service union as a bonfi  
re of the quangos"". Mark Serwotka", " the leader of the Public and Commercial S

ervices Union said: ""In last year's budget we had the day of the long knives as the chancellor kicked off the crude game of who could cut the most civil service jobs between the government and the Tories. ""There was a time when the only worry thousands of hard working civil and public servants had on budget day was whether petrol or taxes would go up",, nowadays the worry is whether they will have a job by the end of it." He said Mr Brown had made welcome announcements on closing tax loopholes and extending the New Deal",, while cutting ""the very people who deliver them." The Treasury also announced plans to reduce the number of public sector workers on sick leave with a new system of checks and tougher measures against those suspected of abusing the system.

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"politics 366.txt Brown calls for £5.5bn Aids fund Gordon Brown has called on rich nations to fund a £5.5bn (\$10bn) plan to fight the Aid s epidemic and find a vaccine. On the fourth day of his six-day tour of Africa", the UK chancellor predicted a vaccine could be found by 2012 if the world stepped up its funding pledges. Doubling the £400m being spent yearly on finding such a vaccine could advance it by three years and save six million lives," Mr Brown said on Thursday. He hopes to use the UK's G8 presidency to push the issue forward. ""I believe that the generation that provided the finance to combat", cure and eradicate the world's deadliest disease of today - and today the world's least curable disease - HIV/Aids - will rightly earn the title 'the great generation',, Mr Brown said in a speech during his African tour. The problems of HIV/Aids were inseparable from poverty, he added. At least \$10 billion per annum (£5.5bn) is needed to address the HIV/Aids crisis in low and middle income countries. ""Existing financial commitments on their own will not stop the pandemic. ""The UK's proposal for an International Finance Facility is so important - increasing world aid flows by over \$50 billion (£27bn). A doubling of world aid to halve world poverty." Mr Brown also said he had agreed with the Italian finance minister Domenico Siniscalco to push forward with plans for the world-wide sharing and co-ordination of research into the disease. Currently the private sector was only spending £60m a year on seeking an inoculation and the market needed boosting", Mr Brown said. He called on industrialised nations to commit themselves to buying the first 300m vaccines at a cost of \$20 each," thereby boosting the market for inoculations. This would be a ""large enough inducement to create much stronger interest from both large and small pharmaceutical firms""", Mr Brown added. More must also be done to finance the treatment and care of those living with HIV/Aids and their families, he said. But Aid charity ActionAid criticised Mr Brown's preoccupation with finding a vaccine and called on G8 nations to fund HIV/Aids treatments. The charity's head of HIV/Aids in Britain," Simon Wright said: ""While encouraging the pharmaceutical industry to discover an HIV vaccine is important",, a failure to provide any funding for HIV treatments condemns a generation of people to death. ""HIV is decimating African countries", killing the most productive adults who should be working," caring for children and building the economy. An HIV vaccine is probably at least 10 years away. Treatments are needed now." On Wednesday", Mr Brown visited slums in the Kenyan capital Nairobi . He will visit an HIV/Aids orphanage in Tanzania and a women's credit union in Mozambique before chairing a meeting of the Commission for Africa in Cape Town. The chancellor has already unveiled proposals for a G8 aid package which he has likened to the Marshall Plan used by the United States to rebuild Europe after World War Two.

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"politics 367.txt UK heading wrong way",, says Howard Ton

y Blair has had the chance to tackle the problems facing Britain and has failed", " Michael Howard has said. ""Britain is heading in the wrong direction""", " the Conservative leader said in his New Year message. Mr Blair's government was a ""bossy", interfering government that takes decisions that should be made by individuals, he added. But Labour's campaign spokesman Fraser Kemp responded: Britain is working," don't let the Tories wreck it again"". Mr Howard also paid tribute to the nation's character for its generous response to the Asian quake disaster. The catastrophe was overshadowing the hopes for the future at this usually positive time of the year", " Mr Howard said. ""We watched the scenes of destruction with a sense of disbelief. The scale", the speed," the ferocity of what happened on Boxing Day is difficult to grasp. ""Yet Britain's response has shone a light on our nation's character. The last week has shown that the warm", caring heart of Britain beats as strong as ever." He went on to reflect on the values that ""most Britons hold dear""". Looking ahead to the coming general election", " he pledged to ""turn these beliefs into reality"" and set out the choices he says are facing Britain. ""How much tax do people want to pay? Who will give taxpayers value for money", the clean hospitals and good," disciplined schools they want? ""Who can be trusted to get a grip on the disorder on our streets and the chaos in our immigration system?"" Mr Blair has failed to tackle these problems", he claimed," saying he has the ""wrong solution"" to them. ""The result is big government and higher taxes eroding incentives", " undermining enterprise and denying people choice. ""Worst of all", " it is a government that has wasted people's money and failed to tackle the problems families face today." " The Tories", he said," can cut crime and improve public services without asking people to pay more taxes. ""We can have progress without losing what makes Britain great - its tolerance", the respect for the rule of law," the ability of everyone to fulfil their potential. ""We simply need to change direction. The election will give Britain the chance to change." " This is the record Mr Blair will have to defend in the coming months", he said," urging voters to hold him to account. But Labour spokesman Mr Kemp said: ""It would be more appropriate for this message to come out on 1 April", " not 1 January." " ""Let us never forget that when Michael Howard was in government Britain suffered mass unemployment", 15% interest rates, record home repossession," and the introduction of the poll tax. ""With Labour Britain is working. Rather than alluding to false promises Michael Howard should be starting 2005 with an apology to the British people for the misery that the government", of which he was a member, inflicted upon the country.

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"politics 368.txt Act on detention ruling", " UK urged The government must act quickly on the Law Lords' ruling that detention of foreign terror suspects without trial is unlawful", " Mary Robinson has said. The former UN commissioner for human rights and Irish president told Radio 4's Today the government's response would be scrutinised internationally. ""It would be very troubling if the government did not accept the judgement and then work within it", " she said. Home Secretary Charles Clarke has said detainees will not be freed at present. Speaking to Parliament on his first day in office as home secretary following David Blunkett's resignation, Mr Clarke said: I will be asking Parliament to renew this legislation in the New Year. ""In the meantime", " we will be studying the judgement carefully to see whether it is possible to modify our legislation to address the concerns raised by the House of Lords." " Mrs Robinson said the Law Lords' ruling was ""in line with international legal opinion"" and praised their ""very decisive"" eight to one majority. ""What the Law Lords did was acknowledge the role of the government", but say that there had be

en a disproportionate use, that it amounted to executive detention and it was discriminatory because it didn't apply to British citizens, she said. Mrs Robinson warned that a lack of action by the British government could lead to further action in legal arenas such as the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. If the government were not to accept this ruling then there is further redress," including possible damages for the individuals who could claim that the government either was tardy or was resisting the implications of the judgement of the Law Lords." She said a meeting of the Club of Madrid - a group of former world leaders - to be held in the Spanish capital on the March anniversary of the train bombings there would probably discuss the ruling and its implications. ""I have no doubt that this judgement will be looked at", both as a very positive step in clarifying the law and restating the fundamental principles," but also the response of the British government will be under quite a clear international scrutiny there." The detainees took their case to the House of Lords after the Court of Appeal backed the Home Office's powers to hold them without limit or charge. The government opted out of part of the European Convention on Human Rights concerning the right to a fair trial in order to bring in anti-terrorism legislation in response to the 11 September attacks in the US. Any foreign national suspected of links with terrorism can be detained or can opt to be deported. The Law Lords said the rules were incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights as they allowed detentions ""in a way that discriminates on the ground of nationality or immigration status"". The case was heard by a panel of nine law lords rather than the usual five because of the constitutional importance of the case.

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politics 369.txt BAA support ahead of court battle UK airport operator BAA has reiterated its support for the government's aviation expansion plans to airports throughout the country. The comments come a day ahead of a High Court challenge by residents' groups and local councils to the government's White Paper. The judicial review will centre on government plans for expansion at Heathrow", Stansted and Luton airports. BAA, which operates all three," said it was consulting with local communities. ""We are...consulting on voluntary compensation schemes which go beyond our statutory obligations", a BAA spokesman said. Groups challenging the plans include Stop Stansted Expansion, Heathrow anti-noise campaigners HACAN Clearskies and the London boroughs of Hillingdon and Wandsworth. At Heathrow, Gatwick, Edinburgh and Glasgow airports, BAA launched a series of consultations on blight to properties from the proposed expansion in September 2004, which will close next week. The company is also offering to buy noise-hit properties for an index-linked, unblighted price. Among other measures, BAA has set up a homeowner support scheme for people living near Stansted, and has launched a special scheme for those close to the airport but far enough away not to be covered by the homeowner scheme. At Heathrow, BAA said it was working closely with all interested parties to see how the strict environmental, air quality and noise targets for a third runway can be met. At Gatwick, the company has written to homes and business likely to be affected by any extra runway. Stop Stansted Expansion said the White Paper, published in December 2003, was fundamentally flawed"" and did not follow the proper consultation process. ""We do not underestimate the scale of the challenge before us because the courts have never before overturned a government White Paper", said Stop Stansted Expansion chairman Peter Sanders said. HACAN chairman John Stewart said: Almost exactly a year ago the government published its 30-year aviation White Paper with much fanfare. ""It hoped that would be the end of the debate and it could proceed with its plans for a massive expansion of aviation. ""Yet",

a year later the protesters are still here," and stronger than ever. "" A judge  
ment from Mr Justice Sullivan is expected early in February.

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"politics 370.txt UK 'discriminated against Roma' The go  
vernment's immigration rules racially discriminated against Roma (Gypsies) seeki  
ng entry into the UK", the Law Lords have ruled. It follows a Home Office move  
to cut asylum claims by stopping people, mostly Roma, from boarding flights to  
Britain from the Czech capital," Prague. Civil rights group Liberty said it exp  
osed ""racism at the heart of the government's asylum policy"". The Home Office  
said it had not meant to discriminate against anyone. It said it would look at  
the implications of the ruling", but pointed out the controls were no longer in  
place because Czechs are now entitled to free movement across Europe. The scre  
ening took place at the airport in July 2001," at a time of concern about the n  
umber of asylum seekers entering Britain. Those refused ""pre-clearance"" were  
effectively prevented from travelling to the UK", because no airline would carr  
y them. Lady Hale, sitting with Lords Bingham, Steyn, Hope and Carswell," said  
many Roma had good reason to want to leave the Czech Republic because of persec  
ution. But she said they were treated more sceptically than non-Roma passengers  
by immigration officers ""acting on racial grounds"". Lady Hale said immigratio  
n officers should have treated all would-be passengers in the same way", only u  
sing more intrusive questioning if there was a specific reason. Liberty said s  
tatistics suggested Roma Czechs were 400 times more likely to be stopped by Bri  
tish immigration officials at Prague airport than non-Roma Czechs. It took up t  
he case of six unnamed Roma Czechs refused entry to Britain, and that of the Eu  
ropean Roma Rights Centre," which said the measures unfairly penalised Roma peo  
ple. It lost a High Court action in October 2002 when a judge said the system w  
as ""no more or less objectionable"" than a visa control system. He ruled there  
was no obligation on Britain not to take steps to prevent a potential refugee f  
rom approaching its border to claim asylum. The Court of Appeal then decided t  
he practice almost inevitably discriminated against Roma", but that this was ju  
stified because they were more likely to seek asylum. Immigration law allows of  
ficials to discriminate against citizens from named countries, but it does not  
allow officers to go further than that. Responding to the ruling," a Home Offi  
ce spokesman said: ""The scheme was operated two years ago as a short-term resp  
onse to the high levels of passengers travelling from Prague who are subsequent  
ly found to be ineligible for entry to the UK."" Welcoming the ruling", Maeve  
Sherlock, chief executive of the Refugee Council," said: ""Human rights abuses  
against the Roma in Eastern Europe are well documented" , and it is hugely trou  
bling that the government sought to deny entry to such a vulnerable group." Am  
nesty International's Jan Shaw said: ""That the government's own asylum policy  
was being operated discriminatorily is bleakly ironic given that discrimination  
often lies at the heart of serious human rights abuse" , not least in the Czech  
Republic." But the chairman of Migration Watch UK", Sir Andrew Green," said th  
e House of Lords decision was a ""step in the wrong direction"" . ""The basic po  
int is that the government has a duty to control our borders and this decision  
appears to extend the race relations legislation beyond sensible limits.""  
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"politics 371.txt Howard pitches for UK ethnic vote Micha  
el Howard is to make a pitch for Britain's ethnic vote urging people who feel  
""taken for granted"" by Tony Blair to vote Conservative. He will say Conserva  
tives ""share the same values"" as the UK's minorities. And that he wants to bu  
ild a ""better Britain"" where everyone", whatever the colour of their skin or

religion," can ""make the most of their talents"". But the Tory leader will argue against positive discrimination saying it is ""outdated and unjust"". ""It sets family against family and it leads ethnic communities to doubt their own abilities", he will argue. Mr Howard - himself the son of immigrants - will acknowledge that racial discrimination still exists in the UK. People from ethnic communities, for example, still earn less than their white counterparts, he will say before arguing the answer to helping everyone to get on was free enterprise, free trade, free speech"". The Tory leader will also call for religious tolerance arguing that Hindus and Sikhs as well as Muslims got ""caught in the downdraft of Islamophobia which was one of the terrible side effects of 9/11"". Mr Howard will make his speech during a visit to support Tory Parliamentary hopefuls Robert Light and Sayeeda Warsi - ""the first British Muslim woman"" selected to run for MP as a Conservative candidate. He will attack Labour's record in government over issues such as tax and he will set out Tory plans for an immigration quota to be set by MPs. Mr Howard will also attack the Lib Dems for wanting to abolish faith schools", introduce compulsory sex education from the age of seven," and ""give contraceptives out in schools from the age of 11"". ""So I say to all those people from ethnic minorities who feel Mr Blair and the Liberal Democrats take their votes for granted - come join us", he will say. Lib Dem president Simon Hughes branded Mr Howard arrogant and wrong"" for claiming the Tories were the ""natural party"" for Britain's ethnic minorities. ""Given the Tories' considerably reduced support in urban areas", where many black and Asian Britons live, during their time in power, the evidence simply does not support his claims that the Conservatives are the party for these communities," he said.

politics 372.txt Observers to monitor UK election Minister  
rs will invite international observers to check the forthcoming UK general election is fairly run. The move comes amid claims the poll could be marred by electoral fraud. A report by two MPs committees called on Thursday for urgent changes to the electoral registration system to combat vote rigging and boost turnout. But in a written response to Labour MP Gordon Prentice, the government said it would normally invite observers to any UK election. Junior constitutional affairs minister Christopher Leslie said: I fully expect us to repeat our previous practice of doing so once the date for the next general election is announced." The government has looked at ways of boosting voter turnout", which fell to 59% in the last general election in 2001. But trial all-postal ballots in four English regions last summer were hit by delays and some fraud allegations. Liberal Democrat peer Lord Greaves called last week for international observers at the general election - saying otherwise there could be months of court challenges ""on a scale not seen since the 19th Century"". Thursday's report was drawn up by two committees scrutinising the work of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and the Department for Constitutional Affairs (DCA). It said that", with the growth of postal voting, there was a strong case to tighten up fraud protection by requiring voters to register individually, rather than by household. It also said about three million people eligible to vote are not registered to do so. Figures for the 2001 general election suggest 29% of people aged between 18 and 24, and 19% of black voters were not on the electoral roll. Young people in shared accommodation are thought to miss out because no one acts as head of the household to fill in the form. ODPM committee chairman Andrew Bennett said individual voter registration, as opposed to registration by household," should be quickly introduced as it could ""dramatically reduce the chances of fraud"". But his counterpart on the DCA committee", Alan Beith," said it should be delayed ""until measures likely to increase registration have been put in place and proved effective."" Shadow Constitutional Affairs Secretary Oliver

Heald accused the government of ""dragging its feet"" over ""this badly needed measure"". ""It is vital that we move ahead with the Northern Ireland system of individual electoral registration to safeguard the integrity of the Britain's electoral system", he said. The report said individual registration should be treated carefully as 12% of voters disappeared from the electoral roll in Northern Ireland when it was introduced in 2002. The report said the government should consider fines for unregistered voters, but accepted many experts said it would be an expensive system that would be hard to enforce. It said incentives to register, such as £20 council tax rebate, were likely to be seen as gimmicks"" and risked undermining the integrity of the system", MPs said. Instead they called for ""imaginative campaigns"" to boost interest.

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"politics 373.txt UK rebate 'unjustified' - Chirac French president Jacques Chirac has called the UK's £3bn rebate from the European Union ""unjustified"". Speaking after a summit meeting he said unless it was put up for discussion the EU would never be able to reach agreement on its medium term finances. Earlier Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said the UK was prepared to veto any bid to reduce the rebate secured by Margaret Thatcher in 1984. He said it remained justified because less EU farm money came to the UK. Mr Chirac told reporters in Brussels: ""One can only have a reasonable budgetary balance if we put back on the table the British cheque. It can no longer be justified. It was from the past." But a UK Government official responded: ""Even with the rebate," the UK pays two and a half times more than France contributes to the EU budget. Without it we would pay 14 times as much as France. ""There can be no deal on future financing which does not protect the rebate."" The 25-member EU is gearing up for tough negotiations on its budget plans for the period 2007-2013," with the bloc's Luxembourg presidency hoping to strike a deal at a June summit. Earlier Conservative Graham Brady said the rebate was a ""crucial test"" of how firmly ministers were prepared to stand up for Britain. EU Commission president Jose Manuel Barroso has indicated he wants the rebate to come to an end. Mr Straw said that as well as the veto over the rebate the UK wanted to keep a tight rein on national contributions. The UK", France, Germany, Austria," the Netherlands and Sweden want the EU budget to be capped at 1% of member state's combined national incomes - the European Commission has urged an increase to 1.26%. Mr Straw has said the EU commission's proposal would mean a 35% hike in the budget. Shadow Europe minister Mr Brady said: ""I believe it is essential that Britain keeps the rebate and I think it's a crucial test of how firmly the British government is prepared to stand up for Britain internationally in Europe. ""The UK is already one of the biggest net contributors to the EU ."" The foreign secretary meanwhile said the ""justice"" of the rebate remained. ""We have one of the lowest net receipts of any EU country because of the relatively small size of our agriculture sector and its efficiency. ""That continues to be the case." UK Independence Party leader Roger Knapman said the rebate was ""set in stone"" and there was no reason to negotiate about it. ""It is extraordinary to do it at this time", just as we are becoming the biggest contributor to the EU. If we lose our rebate as well," the British taxpayer is going to be bled at such a rate that I think everyone will go off the European project." EU leaders are holding talks in Brussels on how to re-energise the sluggish European economy. UK Prime Minister Tony Blair is meeting his EU counterparts to finalise a package of measures aimed at stimulating growth and boosting employment a head of a series of referendums on the European Constitution. The plans could introduce a free market into everything from computer services to construction. Critics - including Germany and France - believe liberalisation could result in

companies shifting staff to cheaper bases in Eastern Europe", undercutting large EU economies and undermining social protections. There are also concerns about the number of workers from eastern European countries who will head west," exacerbating the already high unemployment levels in Germany. Mr Straw insisted there was nothing to fear from the services directorate. ""European countries overall have benefited hugely from the free market in goods", he said. What we are now talking about is developing that market into an internal market in services." Britain's low unemployment meant there was less ""neurosis"" about people coming from eastern European countries. ""In countries like Germany and France", where frankly because of a tighter social market they have much higher levels of unemployment, there is increasing anxiety about other people coming in," he said.

politics 374.txt UK needs tax cuts, Tories insist A major change of direction is needed in Britain if it is to prosper, the shadow chancellor said as the Tory Party spring conference began. Oliver Letwin said the UK could not compete with other countries without the £4bn tax cuts he was promising. Tory co-chairman Liam Fox had opened the forum in Brighton with an attack on Labour's record and party leader Michael Howard is due to speak later. Tony Blair has said Conservative policies would cause economic failure. But Mr Letwin said Britain had fallen from fourth to 11th in the international economic competitiveness league. Can this country compete", can this country prosper," unless we do something about the burden of regulation and tax on our economy?"" he said. ""If we are going to take on the great challenges", the challenges like those posed by the Chinese and the Indians, we have got to do something about getting down the burden of regulation and getting down the burden of tax, he said. The fact is the very carefully costed," fully funded plans we have laid out for saving £12bn by 2007-2008 are absolutely crucial to delivering an economy that will prosper and provide people with jobs and indeed provide the public services with the money they need on a sustainable long-term basis." Mr Letwin said voting for Labour meant choosing higher taxes", borrowing and waste. Earlier," Dr Fox had said Labour's rule had been characterised by ""lost trust and failure to deliver"". He also attacked the government's ""failure"" to control immigration and asylum and criticised its record on the NHS," telling delegates Labour cannot be trusted on education or crime. A Tory government would sort out the ""shambles"" of immigration", put patients before statistics and bring discipline to schools, he said. Michael Howard, who had been due to welcome delegates to the conference on Friday, will address them in a lunchtime speech. His welcome address had to be postponed after he stayed in London to lead the party's opposition to the Prevention of Terrorism Bill in its lengthy progress through Parliament. The bill was finally passed on Friday evening, after more than 30 hours of debate. Mr Howard is likely to defend his party's handling of the bill, which was only passed after the Conservatives accepted Prime Minister Tony Blair's promise that MPs would be able to review it within a year.

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politics 375.txt Brown targets OAPs and homebuyers Gordon Brown has doubled the level at which house buyers pay stamp duty to £120",000 as he put the economy at the heart of Labour's election campaign. The chancellor also unveiled a one-off £200 council tax refund for pensioners and a rise in child tax credit. Mr Brown put 1p a pint on beer," 4p on a bottle of wine and 7p on 20 cigarettes but froze petrol duty until September. The Tories called it a ""vote now," pay later"" Budget. The Lib Dems branded it a ""sticking plaster"" for the election. Tory leader Michael Howard predicted the Budget would do nothing to help Labour's ""faltering"" election campaign. ""This government an

d this chancellor have run out of solutions to the problems Britain faces", Mr Howard told MPs. Their only answer is to tax," to spend and to waste - to get people to vote now and pay later." He ended his response with an election challenge to Labour", saying ""bring it on"". Liberal Democrat leader Charles Kennedy attacked Mr Brown for failing to mention the environment and for his record on social justice. ""How can it be right in Britain today that the poorest 20% pay more in tax", as a proportion of their income," than the richest 20%?" he asked. Mr Kennedy criticised Mr Brown for failing to mention the ""ticking bomb"" of council tax revaluation", saying it was ""high time"" the system was replaced by a ""local tax based on the ability to pay"". During his 49 minute speech Mr Brown told MPs he had defied the pundits by hitting his growth target of 3.1% for 2004. He said his Budget struck a balance ""between tax cuts that are affordable", investments that are essential and stability that is paramount"". He rejected across-the-board tax cuts in favour of targeted help for families. The child tax credit will rise in line with earnings", giving families an extra £5 a week. In contrast, the personal income tax allowance will rise only in line with inflation from £4,745 to £4,895 next month. Mr Brown told MPs child benefit would rise to a maximum of £63 a week for the first child and £111 for two children. Despite his giveaways, Budget documents show Mr Brown clawed back £26.5m through a clampdown on tax avoidance and increased revenue from a windfall tax on oil companies. He also scrapped stamp duty relief for commercial property in disadvantaged areas - a measure brought in just over three years ago. BBC political editor Andrew Marr suggested the sweeteners were not big enough to have a transforming effect on voters. But trust in Mr Brown's economic stewardship would be a central election issue, he said. Mr Brown also unveiled plans for a memorial to the Queen Mother, funded through a special coin to celebrate the Queen's 80th birthday. Other measures include equal tax status for same-sex couples and a deal with the Council of Mortgage Lenders to boost low cost home ownership. The level where people start paying inheritance tax will also rise from £263,000 to £275,000 from April. Mr Brown said he had met his financial ""golden rule"" with a £6bn surplus and he said public borrowing would continue to fall over the next five years. The economy had grown for 50 consecutive quarters", he said, and was forecast to continue doing so over the next year, with a forecast of 3% to 3.5% in 2005 and 2.5% to 3% in 2006. The first £2bn of value-for-money savings identified in the Gershon Review have been achieved, the chancellor said. Some 12,500 civil servant posts have been axed, and 7,800 relocated out of the south east of England," he added. SNP leader Alex Salmond said Mr Brown had failed the ""tartan test"" as there were no measures to boost the Scottish economy. Simon Thomas", of Plaid Cymru," called it a budget for Middle England. UK Independence Party leader Roger Knapman attacked the plans for pensioners saying they needed ""more money and the dignity of being allowed to spend it how they want", not free bus rides"". The Green Party said the Budget was a ""wasted opportunity"" for environmental protection", adding: ""Brown obviously has an eye on the coming election", and has taken his eye off the needs of the planet.""

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politics 376.txt MPs demand 'Budget leak' answers Ministers have been asked to explain how Budget details were printed in a London news paper half an hour before Gordon Brown made his speech. The Tories said a large chunk of the Budget appeared to have been leaked in what they describe as a ""serious breach of Treasury confidentiality"". The Lib Dems called for Commons leader Peter Hain to make a statement and said chancellors had resigned over leaks. They were told it would be brought to Speaker Michael Martin's attention.

In the Commons", " Tory frontbencher Andrew Tyrie MP demanded an immediate ministerial statement about how measures had been ""clearly", or at least apparently," leaked to the Evening Standard"". Raising a point of order", he said it was ""the latest in a long line of discourtesies to this House""", as well as a breach of confidentiality. He said: ""I can only hope it is unintentional. If it were planned it would be a very grave matter indeed. A previous Labour chancellor resigned after he leaked the Budget." Hugh Dalton resigned after leaking details of his 1947 budget to journalist John Carvel", who published them in a London newspaper," just minutes before they were announced to the House of Commons. Liberal Democrat David Laws said it was a ""very serious matter"" and said Mr Hain should make a statement on Thursday. Deputy Speaker Sylvia Heal agreed it was ""of concern"" but said nothing could be done immediately but the issue would be brought to Mr Martin's attention.

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"politics 377.txt US casino 'tricks' face ban in UK Controversial new UK casinos will be banned from using American tricks of the trade to ensure they are ""socially responsible""", it has been suggested. Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell said proposed super-casinos will be different from their US counterparts. In America," pheromones have reportedly been released from machines to encourage aggressive gambling and clocks are often removed from walls. Eight super-casinos are proposed from 2010 if the Gambling Bill becomes law. Ms Jowell said the legislation would ban psychological trickery. She told The Times: ""British casinos will be quite different to those overseas. ""They will have to act in a socially responsible way and will be tightly regulated. ""They will be run according to British rules and we'll simply not allow any tricks which people are subjected to unawares and which increase the risk of problem gambling."" One tactic used in the US is simulating daylight during night-time to lull players into remaining at the tables and slot machines. Casinos also frequently offer free food", drink and hotel accommodation to keep punters betting. A spokesman for the British Casino Association, which represents the UK industry," said the government was trying to allay fears over a ""UK Las Vegas""". He said the way the licences were being awarded meant UK firms were at a massive disadvantage and foreign companies would be certain to win the contracts. ""The UK industry is one of the world's most respected", he said. We have the lowest level of problem gambling in the world. ""We certainly don't use pheromones. ""The UK gambling industry is being totally frozen in time", and the foreign companies will take over."

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"politics 378.txt Blair defends terror law changes The prime minister has defended measures to allow house arrest without trial", saying ""several hundred"" people in the UK are plotting terror attacks. The government is facing opposition from Tory and Lib Dem MPs and its own backbenchers as it prepares for the final Commons debate on the changes. But Tony Blair said there could be no concession on the ""basic principle""". Mr Blair told the BBC the ""control orders"" would only be used in the most limited circumstances. Critics in the opposition and civil rights activists are worried that the home secretary will have the power to issue the detention orders. But the government has so far resisted pressure for judges to be responsible for making the orders", instead saying judges will be able to quash them. An explanation is being sent by Home Secretary Charles Clarke to all MPs and peers ahead of the final debate in the House of Commons. On Sunday, Conservative shadow home secretary David Davis claimed judges would get the powers to issue detention orders. And Liberal

Democrat leader Charles Kennedy said some concessions had already been offered by the government during last-minute negotiations. Some 32 Labour MPs voted against the legislation last week. Barbara Follett, whose first husband was killed while under house arrest in South Africa during the apartheid era," confirmed she would vote against the government. But the government is continuing to insist that ""control orders"" must be issued by the home secretary. Mr Blair told BBC Radio 4's Woman's Hour: ""We are being advised by the police and the security services... ""What they say is you have got to give us powers in between mere surveillance of these people - there are several hundred of them in this country who we believe are engaged in plotting or trying to commit terrorist acts - you have got to give us power in between just surveying them and being able", being sure enough of the proof," to prosecute them beyond reasonable doubt. ""And these will be restrictions on their liberty that we will use only in the most limited circumstances."" A YouGov poll in the Daily Telegraph suggested 75% of respondents thought action was sometimes necessary against people who had not committed an offence but who had been found by intelligence services to be planning a terrorist attack. But Tory leader Michael Howard told BBC News that the government was again making a mistake in ""rushing"" anti-terrorism legislation. ""I very much hope it would be possible to reach a compromise on this."" He said after meeting Tony Blair he had been left with the impression that ""he really wasn't interested in any of the various proposals we have put forward"". Mr Clarke wants house arrest and other powers to replace indefinite jail for terror suspects - something the law lords have ruled against on the basis that it breaches human rights. BBC political correspondent Vicky Young said some form of concession on the measures was likely to be needed to get the legislation through the House of Lords", where Labour does not have a majority and would require support from other parties. Shami Chakrabarti, director of civil liberties pressure group Liberty," said who was able to issue the control orders was not the main issue. She said the legislation was ""a travesty and a perversion of justice"" and would remain ""unpalatable"" even if a judge was involved early in the process.

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politics 379.txt Election 'could be terror target' Terro  
rists might try to target the UK in the run-up to the election", London's most senior police officer has said. Sir Ian Blair said terror groups would remember the effect of the Madrid bomb on Spain's general election last year. Other potential targets were the royal wedding and the UK's presidency of the European Union and G8, he said. He refused to say if there was specific information about the risk of a pre-poll attack. No 10 was similarly cautious but said the threat was real. The comments come after Tony Blair defended his controversial anti-terror proposals," warning that it would be wrong to wait for an attack before acting. Sir Ian told a meeting of the Metropolitan Police Authority it would be ""unwise"" to speculate about whether there was specific information about risks of a pre-election attack. But he said: ""Terrorists have long memories. They understand what happened in Madrid and know what the impact of that was on the Spanish electorate. ""This year we are responsible for the EU presidency", presidency of the G8," a royal wedding and a general election. ""There are obvious and enormous targets which we have to deal with."" Sir Ian said the debate over anti-terror plans was one for politicians", not the police, who would enforce any new powers. Home Secretary Charles Clarke has also warned that a Madrid-style pre-election bombing could happen in the UK too. Asked about Sir Ian's comments," the prime minister's official spokesman said: ""We believe the threat is real."" The spokesman declined to comment on whether the security services

had received specific intelligence relating to a possible attack during the election campaign. He said No 10 did not disclose any security advice they received. Earlier", writing in the Daily Telegraph," the prime minister conceded that plans to detain suspects under house arrest without trial were ""difficult issues for any government"". The Commons has approved the measures despite considerable opposition", with the government's majority more than halved as 32 Labour rebels joined Tory and Lib Dem opposition. But Mr Blair insisted: ""There is no greater civil liberty than to live free from terrorist attack."" Tory leader Michael Howard has accused Mr Blair of steamrolling the house arrest plans and of ""using national security for political point scoring"". Liberal Democrat leader Charles Kennedy says that the plan is a further example of Labour's ""authoritarian"" response to crises. The Prevention of Terrorism Bill proposes ""control orders""", which as well as house arrest could impose curfews, tagging or bans on telephone and internet use. They would replace current powers to detain foreign terror suspects without trial, which the law lords have ruled against. But critics are concerned that it would be the home secretary and not judges who decided to impose control orders. The plans face further Commons scrutiny on Monday before passing to the Lords.

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"politics 380.txt Minimum wage increased to £5.05 The minimum wage will rise in October", benefiting more than 1m people, the government has announced. Adults must be paid at least £5.05 an hour, up from £4.85, while 18 to 21 year olds will be paid £4.25. The recommendations came from the Low Pay Commission which said the number of jobs had continued to grow since the minimum wage was introduced in 1999. Businesses wanted it frozen, warning more rises could damage competitiveness but the unions want a £6 rate. A further increase in the adult rate to £5.35 an hour is provisionally scheduled for October 2006. According to the commission," many businesses had found the last two significant increases in the minimum wage ""challenging""." "We have therefore recommended only a slight increase above average earnings", and concentrated it in the second year to allow business more time to absorb the impact," said chairman Adair Turner. The government says most of those on the minimum wage are women - with many working in cleaning, catering, shops and hairdressing. Unveiling the latest increase, Mr Blair said he wanted the minimum wage to become a symbol of decency and fairness"". ""For too long", poverty pay capped the aspiration and prosperity of far too many hard-working families, he said. Too often," people were told to make a choice between the indignity of unemployment or the humiliation of poverty pay." Chancellor Gordon Brown and Transport Secretary Alistair Darling promoted the news in Edinburgh", Wales Secretary Peter Hain and Welsh First Minister Rhodri Morgan in Cardiff and Northern Ireland Minister John Spellar in Belfast. The government has not accepted the commission's recommendation that 21-year-olds should be paid at the adult rate," but says it will look again at the rate later on. Mr Brown said: ""We want to do nothing that can damage the employment opportunities for young people", particularly young people entering the labour market for the first time." The government has said it will look at tougher action against the small number of employers who consistently refuse to pay the minimum wage. The national minimum wage is currently set at £4.85 per hour for those aged 22 and above", and at £4.10 for those aged 18 to 21. A £3 per hour minimum wage was introduced last October for 16 to 17-year-olds, but apprentices are exempt. The Trade Unions Congress welcomed the increase," but has called for a £6 minimum wage by next year. But the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) called for a ""pause year"" to assess the impact of the above inflation rise in the minimum wage in October. And David Frost", director

of the British Chambers of Commerce," said: ""The level of increase each year has increased by rates far outstripping the rates of inflation. ""What employers are saying to us now is that it's at a level where it's starting to bite into the competitiveness of companies right across the country.""" The Liberal Democrats' economics spokesman Vincent Cable said he supported the move to raise the minimum wage. ""It's not just good for the workers themselves but it lifts them out of benefits and therefore is good for the Exchequer too,"" he said. Conservative leader Michael Howard said he accepted the principle of the minimum wage and would not seek to disturb"" the increase. Speaking on BBC Radio 4's Woman's Hour,"" Mr Howard hinted the Tories might go into the general election with a promise to cancel income tax for the lowest-paid workers. ""There are people on very low salaries", very low incomes indeed who really shouldn't be paying income tax," he said. It would be better to decrease taxes on earnings below £12,000 a year, with say no tax on below £6,000. The losses in tax can be recouped by having a 50pc tax band for people making over £100,000. Our minimum wage is going to be effectively almost twice the US minimum wage, yet our economy per person is only 2/3rds of the US! Perhaps, we have to really start questioning why some products cost 50-60% more here than they do in the US. This combined with the tax decreases would make the pounds the low-paid people do make go much further. It's still not good enough! I got a part time job at 16 when I was doing my A-levels in an attempt to get a little money saved for Uni. This was only 2 years ago and I was getting paid £2.75 an hour, and working as hard as any of the older staff, maybe it's about time 16 - 21 year olds got a fair wage! We must remember that the minimum wage is only part of the picture and must not rise to a level that makes employing people unattractive and encourages businesses to send work abroad. Still government and local councils employ staff via their contractors that pay at the minimum wage or very close to it. An easy way for the government to do as it preaches would be to insist on floor pay levels for all government workers and take tens of thousand of civil servants out of the social security system all together. Any increase is certainly welcome news. However for all those whining about the pressures of an increase in the minimum wage I would simply ask them: Would you be happy to work for less than £5.05 an hour?""". Thought not ... so then", don't expect others to either. I can't believe that so many of these comments are against the minimum wage! Also I personally take great offence at the insinuation that people earning minimum wage were lazy at school if everyone went to university then who would serve you in the supermarkets and clean up after you? It's about time that these hardworking people are rewarded with only what they deserve and have earned fair pay and a bit of respect wouldn't go a miss either. br /> This is good news. The minimum wage has put a sense of equality back into a worker's relationship with their employer. Wages are supposed to be a fair reflection of an employee's efforts. For too long wages were a point of exploitation - what could an employer get away with. In very simplistic terms this put a pressure to keep low-paid wages low. With the minimum wage this downward pressure is at least partly removed. It is also interesting to read the comments from so called business leaders. They are the first to defend the rights and privileges of boards to award fat-cat salaries, bonuses and pension rights to the select few but they are the first to attack policies that are put in place to merely defend the rights of those that really make those fat cats purr! I feel there are both negatives and positives to the increase, on one hand some businesses will struggle to stay afloat but on the other hand in today world many young people can't afford to move out as property costs too much and only by earning more will they be able to get on in life. Its true many may get complacent but the minimum wage could be looked at as more of a stepping stone rather than a hand out. Here co

me the usual whines about how difficult it will be for businesses! We all remember Michael Howard's protestations that the minimum wage would cost a million jobs when it was introduced - funny how he's gone quiet on that one! Jobs have continued to increase since this humane legislation was brought in. I think if any job is worth doing then it's worth being paid a fair wage for, and £5.05 is hardly a fortune. If your business cannot pay its workers a decent wage then maybe it's not being run properly and if it folds, a better-run company will take over its duties and employ more people, so everybody wins except incompetent business owners! Great keep at it Tony, I remember the despair of the 80s and the low wages employers got away with. At last we can make a difference to people and reward them for working. We can't afford not to pay a decent wage. It's not a jobs at any price economy, goodbye sweatshops hello decency. The increase in minimum wage is a good thing. Living in the southwest where house prices and rents have increased hugely (like the rest of the country) over the past 5 years has made living for you average 18-21 years old very difficult. In the south west the increase in living costs have not been matched by an increase in pay, for example a job I did in Plymouth was underpaid to an equivalent worker in Exeter by 75p an hour. Hopefully the increase in the minimum wage will bring in to balance pay on a regional and national level, and in turn allow people like myself who do work hard, but might never earn a 6 figure salary the chance to branch out on our own. I work at a large Hospital where the contractors providing all ancillary services - domestic, catering & portering etc - pay the minimum wage of £4.85 as the basic rate. Someone has to do these unglamorous jobs and earn enough to live decently. How dare people suggest we are lazy or complacent for accepting these jobs and these wages? Who do they think will be carrying out these public service jobs if contractors are allowed to pay as little as their consciences allow? This is definitely the right step in the right direction. It shows that this government cares for the low income earners as well. This is a million votes more. Good strategy isn't it? Although I would not deny people the minimum wage increase, its timing stinks. I am quite prepared for a raft of 'bribes' to come from the government before the election and a raft of taxes afterwards, they are playing us for the fools they think we are. This is extremely bad news for any business - whether they are small and medium enterprises or even large companies. By increasing overheads, for business, there will be an almost certain rise in costs to the consumer who while they openly welcome the idea of an increase in the minimum wage are the same people who still want to buy that shirt, or that pair of trainers for next to nothing. The extra cost this increase will bring, will only be reflected in the price of the goods we buy, which, in turn will only serve to discourage companies from setting-up business in the UK," or encourage those companies already based here to look elsewhere. The jubilation felt by ""low-paid"" workers here will soon give way to misery as they lose their jobs. This will only lead to a reduction in jobs. Why have many of the call centre jobs gone to India. Blair says the economy is ""strong and stable economy"" however consumer debt and the country's debt is at its highest and now they heap this onto businesses", that will have no choice but to cut the workforce. The timing cannot be coincidental. This is blatant electioneering and should be exposed as such. Andrew in Derby complains that raising the minimum wage is 'blatant electioneering'. I don't mind if it is. In our degraded democracy, elections are the one time when elites really have to worry about doing something concrete for the majority. My only complaint is the paltry figures being discussed. If my maths is right, a 35 hour week at £5.05 gives you an annual income just over £9,000 and raising it to £6 leaves it under £11,000. The unions should be putting the Government under pressure for much more. Businesses complaining might like to take a look at corporate pay, shareholder payou

ts and profits before wondering if paying a living wage is really a controlling factor in the viability of their firm. I am all for lifting the minimum wage of workers to a reasonable level, but we have to accept that with this will come competition from overseas workers. Also small businesses will have to be able to afford this manpower cost. We are already seeing a sweeping change in IT work being lost to India where people are paid much less. It is difficult for me to understand that only five years ago cheap labour abroad was classified as 'sweat shop', but now we are told it is global competition. With our manufacturing industry in serious decline the country cannot be entirely service industries without something tangible to serve. There has to be something at the top of the food chain and that is manufacturing. The whole picture needs to be looked at. This is great news," but that might be because I work for minimum wage. Seems a good idea and will hopefully be an incentive to those who live to claim to actually get a job. When you can ""earn"" more from claiming than you can from work", there is no incentive. Perhaps a step in the right direction. If the TUC get their way a very large number of SMEs will have to close - this will put more people out of work. How then will the government fudge the unemployment figures! The government know it is not big business that keeps the economy going but the SMEs but we always get overlooked, they will only take notice if these large corporations close and move to other countries, after all they are predominantly owned by foreign companies. We are a specialist company but with these increases have already had an effect on us and we have lost work another one will close us. While I'm delighted for those on low pay that this increase is being put forward, I am extremely concerned at the implications for small businesses. As an employee for a small nursery, I know this increase will cause great hardship for my employer, who has been unable to increase salaries for higher paid employees because of last October's increase for the lower paid employees - who were originally being paid slightly above the minimum but are now on the minimum. This latest increase of 20p an hour will cause even more financial hardship. If the rate rises to £6 then I can foresee many small businesses having to pay off employees. The increase in minimum wage will have a serious effect on my business. Although we pay above the minimum level we will have to increase our pay rates to maintain the differential. The raise is well above inflation and without significant increases in sales, it will mean that I will not be taking on a new member of staff as planned and I will be looking to reduce the total hours worked by the other members of staff, overtime being the first to go. I currently employ 42 staff whose wages mirror the national minimum wage. Increases above inflation are fine but all of my business is conducted with local authorities who will not accept above inflation rises in my service delivery. 80% of my costs are labour. The other aspect that is always hidden is that the thresholds for tax credits do not move in line with these increases so that all that happens is that employees tax credit support is reduced by the amount of the increase," thereby saving the government money but increasing the financial burden on small to medium businesses. It is very good that the government has decided to increase the minimum wage - this should hopefully motivate people to undertake the ""lower status"" jobs. I know about this great idea - don't bother getting qualifications", laze about at school, no need to do anything other than attend so your parents don't get fined because remember, when you do eventually start working, doesn't matter how lazy you are, you'll be guaranteed a decent wage. The ones who suffer are the employers. I hope that if industry and business have to pay this new rate that Mr Blair and Mr Brown will increase tax allowances and raise national insurance thresholds so that the treasury won't take some of this increase off the people they say they are helping, or is this just another form of stealth tax on business through the back door? I don't believe in the

minimum wage at all! I think jobs should create their own wage value and that if people want higher wages they should earn them. Now," before everyone thinks that I am some ""rich-kid""", I can assure you I am not. I came from a very much working class background and started work 20 years ago on a Youth Opportunity Program earning £25 per week. I worked hard, went to college part time, got my A-levels and degree & bettered myself. I now earn a 6 figure salary. I did that through hard work and getting off my backside. A minimum wage just makes people complacent. To Ashley, of Swindon: when you earned £25 per week, it was worth something. These days that £25 would need to be near to £60 to have the equivalent buying power. I might add, that thanks to successive governments holding down the tax allowance threshold below inflation," people earning the minimum wage are paying taxes that they never would have done 10 years ago at equivalent wages. ""In my day"" type arguments are a view that belong in the 'your day' - 20 years ago! As a graduate working for minimum wage", I welcome any increase of pay I can get. I disagree with Ashley, Swindon saying I have to work harder to get more pay. I have my GCSE's A-Levels and A degree and have chosen to work for a small business that can't afford the wages I should be getting, I should be on at least 3x what I'm getting but they can't afford it. We all work hard but the money is just not there. But on the plus side I love my job and wouldn't change it just to get more pay. As an employer of staff in several shops the last rise in the minimum wage cost my company an additional £5000 per year. These next rises will cost me more. I have to get the money from somewhere so pass it on to customers. So no one really wins in the end. In answer to Emma from Sleaford regarding no one really wins in the end... on the contrary Mr Blair wins - he wins because he obviously has announced this to be a vote winner and his treasury wins because as an employer you will know that the amount of tax and national insurance that the government will receive from all the minimum wage increases will rise and of course not only will be paying out higher wages but as an employer higher Employer NI Contributions as well. If the minimum wage increases again and if it hits anywhere near the £6.00 mark there will be 12 more people on the employment line and one more small business going bankrupt - namely mine. Think of us employers as well Mr Blair, we are not all big corporations earning millions. All workers should be entitled to a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. How many people on the minimum wage have any hope of obtaining a mortgage or saving towards retirement? It is good news for many Asians living in UK. Students who do odd jobs can increase their income and can help their family in their home country. I thank Mr. Blair and his government for increase in the national minimum wage.

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"politics 381.txt Hunt ban support is 'in decline' Support for a ban on hunting has fallen in the past six years", a poll suggests. Less than half the UK wants a ban compared to almost two-thirds in 1999, the Mori survey of 2,000 adults for BBC One's Countryfile programme suggests. The number opposed to a ban remains constant," but those ""neither supporting nor opposing"" has increased by 11%. Most city-dwellers support the ban but rural people were evenly split between supporters", opponents and undecided. Polling company Mori carried out both surveys. In July 1999 they asked 801 adults if they supported the ban for the Mail on Sunday. For Countryfile they asked 2,234 adults across the country the same question. The Mail on Sunday survey found that 63% supported a hunting ban compared with 24% against. In the Countryfile survey, 47% said they supported the legislation," with 26% against. But the programme makers suggest the British public are becoming ""increasingly neutral"" to the issue because around one quarter said they ""neither support nor oppose"" a ban.

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"politics 382.txt At a glance: Tory health checks The UK' opposition Conservatives have unveiled plans to introduce health checks for immigrants if they win the General Election. Here's a guide to the plan: People coming to live and work in Britain from outside the EU. If they plan to stay six months or more and are from a country with lots of TB", they would have to have a chest x-ray and further tests if appropriate. All people from outside the European Union who want to stay a year or more will have to undergo a full medical. Tuberculosis, Hepatitis B and HIV. A positive test for TB would automatically mean visa applications being turned down. All other conditions would be dealt with on a case by case basis. People would have to prove they have an acceptable standard of health and are unlikely to be a danger to public health in the UK, or impose significant costs or demands on the NHS. They would also, if appropriate, have to be able to undertake the work or study they applied to come here for. People coming to Britain for less than six months would not be medically tested unless they intended to work in health care, childcare or teaching. Children and pregnant women wanting to live in Britain permanently would not have to have a chest X-ray for TB. Under 16s would not face tests for hepatitis and HIV. The Tories say people fleeing persecution will not be denied sanctuary in Britain because of poor health. However, they will undergo health checks to ensure they receive the right medical treatment and do not spread infectious diseases. They claim government figures show that TB in England has increased by 25% over the last 10 years and that nearly two-thirds of people with the disease were born overseas. They also believe there should be stricter controls over who comes into Britain to ensure they are not a public health risk. They say the plans will protect access to the NHS. Applicants will be tested in their home country. Only asylum seekers will be tested in the UK once their refugee status is established. Home Office Minister Des Browne says the Government already routinely checks people for TB if they come into the UK for six months or more from high-risk countries. Recent medical checks were carried out on 175,000 people at Heathrow Airport and 10,000 at Gatwick. From those tests, about 100 infectious cases of TB were found. The Tories say 47 other countries across the world impose requirements of this kind. The party has looked at the way the system is operated in Australia," Canada and New Zealand. The Tory proposals are ""quite closely modelled"" on the New Zealand system. Labour claims the policy is little more than a ""desperate attempt to catch up with Labour's five-year plan"" for immigration and asylum", which was published last week. This says health screening for TB will be targeted on applicants from high-risk areas before they are given entry clearance. Those who are diagnosed with the disease would then need to seek treatment at home before being allowed to enter the UK. The Liberal Democrats have warned Labour and the Tories they were ""in danger of pandering to prejudice rather than challenging it"".

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"politics 383.txt Labour accused of 'EU propaganda' A ""taxpayer subsidised propaganda exercise"" on the EU is being used to lull the British public into a false sense of security", say the Tories. Shadow foreign secretary Michael Ancram told MPs a new White Paper was part of trying to soften up opinion ahead of the referendum on the EU constitution. His claims were denied by Foreign Secretary Jack Straw," who accused the Tories of ""running scared"" of debate. EU cooperation would help get better UK immigration controls", he argued. Mr Straw used Thursday's Commons debate to launch the new White Paper on the prospects for the EU in 2005. Security, stability and prosperity would

be the key themes when the UK took over the chairmanship of the EU in July," said Mr Straw. Africa and climate change would also feature highly. He said the UK was trying to ensure future EU budgets were limited to 1% of Europe's economic output and were spent ""where it adds most value"". Mr Straw promised to continue to ensure the UK's budget rebate", secured in 1984 by Margaret Thatcher," was ""fully justified""." "We", like all other countries, have a veto on any changes proposed in this area," he said. Mr Ancram condemned the document, which the Foreign Office says has cost about £2,500 to design, print and deliver. Isn't the reason that the government is now involved in a taxpayer subsidised propaganda exercise to try to sell the new EU to the country in advance of the forthcoming referendum and general election?", he asked. The Tory spokesman also criticised the government for claiming the EU constitution would make Europe easier to understand. The government, last week, had to publish a commentary of 500 pages to try and explain this 'easy and simple' constitution to the British people," he said. Who are they trying to kid?"" The proposed question for the constitution referendum is: ""Should the United Kingdom approve the Treaty establishing a Constitution for the European Union?"" The Electoral Commission on Thursday said it was satisfied the question was easy to understand. The government has suggested the referendum on the constitution could take place in spring 2006," with the Tories set to campaign for a ""no"" vote. Mr Ancram said ministers were prolonging uncertainty by putting the vote off until the latest date possible. The foreign secretary hit back by saying Tory attitudes to Europe had helped keep the party out of power for more than a decade. Mr Straw argued cooperation with European partners could bring a ""level playing field"" on immigration and asylum controls. ""You are setting your face against all of these things," he added. For the Liberal Democrats, Sir Menzies Campbell said the UK should not ignore the need to reform the EU Common Agricultural Policy. Change was particularly important for developing countries wanting access to markets, he argued. Sir Menzies was among those worried about plans, backed by the UK, to lift the arms embargo imposed on China after the Tiananmen Square massacre. Mr Straw said no decisions had been taken - Chinese human rights had improved but not by enough.

politics 384.txt Terror suspects face house arrest UK citizens suspected of involvement in terrorism could face house arrest as part of a series of new measures outlined by the home secretary. It comes after law lords ruled that the detention of 12 foreign terror suspects without trial breached human rights. Charles Clarke's planned control orders"" mean anyone suspected of being involved in terrorism could be subject to house arrest", curfews or tagging. The Law Society dubbed Mr Clarke's new proposals an ""abuse of power""". Deals are already being sought to deport some of the foreign detainees who are mainly held in Belmarsh Prison in London under the current laws introduced after the US terror attacks on 11 September 2001. Mr Clarke said efforts would continue to deport them to their countries of origin Algeria", Tunisia, Egypt and Jordan without them facing torture or death. Under the proposed changes - prompted by the House of Lords ruling - the home secretary could order British citizens or foreign suspects who could not be deported," to face house arrest or other measures such as restrictions on their movements or limits on their use of telephones and the internet. British citizens are being included in the changes after the law lords said the current powers were discriminatory because they could only be used on foreign suspects. Mr Clarke also said intelligence reports showed some British nationals were now playing a more significant role in terror threats. Human rights lawyer Clive Stafford-Smith said the plans were a ""further abuse of human rights in Britain""". Mr Clarke said prosecutions were the government's first preference and promised the powers would only be used in

" "serious"" cases", with independent scrutiny from judges. He told MPs: " "The re remains a public emergency threatening the life of the nation." " He accepted the law lords' ruling but argued detention powers had helped prevent attacks and deter terrorists. The current detainees would not be freed until the new powers were in place as they were still considered a national security threat", he told MPs. There have been calls for the rules for wire-tap and intercept evidence to be allowed to be used in courts but Mr Clarke refused to back that change. He said intercept evidence was only a small part of the case against the men and some of it could not be used because it could put sources' lives at risk. Most of the terror suspects are being held indefinitely at Belmarsh prison," in London. Conservative shadow home secretary David Davis was worried about extending special powers to cover British citizens. He warned: " "Throughout history", internment has generally backfired because of the resentment it creates. " "So unless the process is clearly just", the home secretary could find himself confining one known terrorist only to recruit 10 unknown terrorists." " He suggested changing the law to let security-cleared judges view evidence gathered by phone-tapping could allow more terror cases to come to court. Liberal Democrat spokesman Mark Oaten also backed use of wire-tap evidence. He said the standard of proof for the new powers would have to be " "very high indeed"" and he asked whether ministers had looked at measures which fitted with human rights laws. Shami Chakrabarti", from human rights group Liberty," joined calls for intercept evidence to be allowed in trials. She said: " "Adherence to the rule of law should not be a game of cat and mouse. The government should not swap one human rights 'opt out' for another." "

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politics 385.txt UK pledges £1bn to vaccine effort UK Chancellor Gordon Brown has offered £960m (\$1.8bn) over 15 years to an international scheme aiming to boost vaccination and immunisation schemes. In a speech", he called for action to reach the 2000 Millennium Declaration goals of halving global poverty and tackling child mortality rates. Mr Brown has just returned from a tour of African nations. The £1bn commitment is part of a five-point plan on debt relief, trade, aid, education and health. The chancellor was speaking at an event jointly organised by the UK's Department for International Development and the UN Development Programme on Wednesday. Mr Brown welcomed news that the Bill Gates Foundation and Norway are joining up to put an extra £0.53bn (\$1 bn ) into the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (Gavi). Britain, France, Gavi and the Gates Foundation have drawn up proposals to apply the principles of the International Finance Facility (IFF) to the area of immunisation. That could see donors making long-term, legally binding financial commitments which can then be used as collateral for raising extra funds from international capital markets. As well as pledging £960m over 15 years to the immunisation IFF, Britain urged other donors to contribute. If Gavi could increase its funding for immunisation by an extra £4bn (\$7.4bn) over 10 years, then an extra five million lives could have been saved by 2015 and five million thereafter, Mr Brown argued. Campaign groups including Friends of the Earth, the World Development Movement," and War on Want said UK government policy on free trade was a major barrier to fighting poverty. War on Want's John Hilary said: " "Compassionate rhetoric cannot disguise the reality of the government's neo-liberal policies. " "As long as Mr Blair and Mr Brown continue to push free trade and privatisation on developing countries", more and more people will be pushed deeper into poverty," not lifted out of it." "

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"politics 386.txt Straw backs ending China embargo UK Foreign Secretary Jack Straw has defended plans to end the European Union's arms embargo on China", despite opposition from the US and Japan. Mr Straw, visiting Beijing, noted arms embargoes applied to China, Burma and Zimbabwe but not to North Korea, which he said had a terrible rights record. The EU imposed its arms ban on China in 1989 after troops opened fire on protestors in Tiananmen Square. Mr Straw also signed a deal on China-UK tourism. It is expected this would increase the number of Chinese tourists by 40,000 per year, providing \$120m in revenue. China has in the past said it sees the weapons ban as politically driven, and does not want it lifted in order to buy more weapons. Mr Straw, speaking at a joint news conference with Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing," stressed this point. ""The result of any decision [to lift the arms embargo] should not be an increase in arms exports from European Union member states to China", either in quantitative or qualitative terms," Mr Straw said. Earlier this week he said he expected the embargo to be lifted within six months. But Mr Straw faces tough opposition to the move. Tory foreign affairs spokesman Michael Ancram said lifting the arms embargo would be irresponsible"" and would damage Britain's relations with the US. He said Mr Straw was ""naive beyond belief"" if he accepted China's claim it does not want the ban lifted in order to buy weapons. The French want the embargo lifted because they want to sell arms to China; the Chinese want it lifted because they want to buy arms and battlefield technology from Europe." When he was in Tokyo earlier this week", Japanese Foreign Minister Nobutaka Machimura told the British minister that his plan to remove the embargo was "" a worrying issue that concerns the security and environment of not only Japan", but also East Asia overall"". Washington argues that if the embargo is lifted", it could lead to a buying spree for arms that China could use to threaten its diplomatic rival Taiwan. Beijing says Taiwan is part of Chinese territory and wants to unite it with the mainland, by force if necessary. The US is bound by law to help Taiwan defend itself. Washington has also voiced concern that the human rights conditions in China have not improved enough to merit a end to the embargo. It is an issue raised by human rights groups too. Brad Adams, from the UK's Human Rights Watch," said: ""This is a huge political signal from Europe that they are willing to forget about Tiananmen Square." But Mr Straw insisted the EU's code of conduct on arms exports meant tough criteria on human rights still had to be met if the embargo was lifted.

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"politics 387.txt Pre-poll clash on tax and spend Labour and the Tories have clashed over tax and spending plans as the row over Gordon Brown's Budget turned into a full scale pre-election battle. Tony Blair claimed a Tory government would ""cut"" £35bn from public services hitting schools", hospitals and police. Tory chairman Liam Fox accused Labour of ""at best misrepresentation at worst a downright lie"" and said the ""smear"" tactics were a sign of desperation. The Lib Dems accused Mr Brown of ducking the issue of council tax rises. Appearing together at a Labour poster launch", the prime minister hailed his chancellor's ""brilliant"" performance. And he claimed the Tories would cut £35bn from public services", which was the equivalent of sacking every doctor and teacher in the UK. The Tories said they would not cut spending but agreed public spending would increase more slowly under their plans - leading to a total of £33.5bn less spending than that anticipated by Labour by 2011. But they say not a single doctor," teacher or nurse will be cut. Dr Fox said: ""We have said we will be spending more", year on year over and above inflation. ""And to call that a cut is at best a misrepresentation", at worst a downright lie." Tory shadow chancellor Oliver Letwin also predicted Mr Brown would have

to raise taxes by £10bn or £11bn if Labour was re-elected because he was borrowing and spending too much. For the Lib Dems", "Vince Cable said the chancellor had failed to deal with the ""looming problems"" of revaluation of council tax bands which he argued would result in ""massive increases"" for some. Mr Brown and Mr Blair staged a show of unity on Thursday morning", "the day after the chancellor delivered a record-breaking ninth Budget. Mr Cable said taxation as a share of the economy would go up under all three of the main parties. The chancellor meanwhile insisted his spending plans were ""affordable"". In Wednesday's Budget", Mr Brown doubled the level at which homebuyers pay stamp duty, unveiled a rise in child tax credit and a £200 council tax refund for over-65s. Defending the plans," he told Today: ""I will take no risks with the stability of the economy. ""All our spending plans announced yesterday [Wednesday]", including what we can do for pensioners, as well as for young families and on stamp duty and inheritance tax," all these are costed and affordable." In a further sign", if any were needed, that the election is approaching," the House of Commons authorities have formally told MPs their offices will be ""deep cleaned"" during the three-week poll campaign. Mr Blair has yet to name the day - but it is widely expected to be 5 May.

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politics 388.txt Plan to give elderly care control Elderly and disabled people would choose how their own budget for personal care was spent and organised under government plans. Ministers say elderly and disabled people themselves", not social workers," should be able to decide on their care and stay in their own homes. They also plan a supremo for adult services in each English area to get different agencies working together. But the government's hunned opponents' calls for free long-term care. There are 1.7m people needing care in England and ministers suggest the number could quadruple by 2050. Monday's consultation paper on social care for adults in England is aimed at ending a system which generates dependency. Health Minister Stephen Ladyman said: ""This document is the antithesis of the nanny state. ""It's about taking power away from the state and giving it to individuals and saying that we will help you make these decisions but we are not going to make them for you any more." The government has already allowed local councils to give people money so they can pay for their services directly but take-up of the scheme has been ""disappointing"". Ministers say the new plans would make direct payments simpler and try to counter reluctance in some local councils to use the payments. They also want to set up a new ""half-way house"" where social workers tell people how much money is available for their care and help them choose how to spend that ""individual budget"". The scheme will be funded on existing budgets set until 2008. But Mr Ladyman said the plans could deliver savings in some areas", such as freeing up NHS beds and preventing illnesses. He ruled out free personal care in England - which is on offer in Scotland and Wales," saying it was ""unsustainable"". David Rogers", from the Local Government Association, said agencies were working together on the kind of innovation proposed by the government. And Tony Hunter, president of the Association of Directors of Social Services, said the plans could improve dignity and well-being for thousands of people. But Age Concern argued social care was chronically under-funded and older people were being offered choice in principle, but not in practice. Its director general, Gordon Lishman," said: ""Direct payments will not work if there are no services for people to choose from locally." The Tories say people who pay for three years' long-term care directly or through insurance should be guaranteed free care for the rest of their lives. Tory spokesman Simon Burns said more than 80", "000 long term care places had been lost since 1997. ""After eight years of persiste

nt change", dogmatic enforcement of regulation, and overbearing government initiatives - we need action, not a vision," said Mr Burns. The Lib Dems say they would fund free personal care by a new 50% tax rate on incomes over £100,000. Health spokesman Paul Burstow said: Promoting independence sounds good and helping people to live in their own homes is a goal we share. ""But the risk is that independence can turn into isolation if the right support and care is not available.""

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"politics 389.txt EU rules 'won't stop UK spending' The shape of the UK's economy In graphics But he denied that he was ruling out British membership of the euro despite saying there would be no assessment of the five economic tests this year. Mr Brown said that it was vital the UK continued to invest in infrastructure", science, and education in the future. Otherwise it would be overtaken by the likes of China, he told MPs. The chancellor said that the EU's planned changes in the growth and stability pact - designed to ensure that countries in the euro zone do not borrow too much - would force Britain to run a budget surplus of 1% over the economic cycle. Under Mr Brown's rules, the UK current budget must be in balance over the economic cycle," but public investment is not counted as part of that deficit. He told the House of Commons Treasury Select Committee that the EU rules ""make it difficult for a low debt country to run the investment programmes that are necessary to improve its infrastructure"". But he argued that the EU was moving in the direction of the UK principles", and would eventually recognise the need to consider budget deficits over a longer period than one year, to include investment," and to take more account of the total size of government debt as well as the balance each year. Under Mr Brown's ""sustainable investment"" rule", government debt should be under 40% - in contrast to the 60% allowed under the growth and stability pact. Mr Brown vigorously denied Conservative claims that he had in effect fiddled the figures to ensure that he met his own fiscal rules. In March the Office of National Statistics (ONS) reclassified £3.4bn of spending on road repairs as public investment - shortly before the chancellor announced in the Budget that he would meet his own fiscal budget rule by only £6bn. Conservative Michael Fallon asked Mr Brown whether the Treasury had leaned on ONS to make this change," and said that the ONS had received a written paper from the Treasury on this matter. But the chancellor said Mr Fallon was ""impugning the integrity"" of the Office of National Statistics and said the decision had been made completely independently. Mr Brown also denied that he was increasing taxes to fund his spending gap. He told the Treasury Select Committee that a growing economy meant more people in work and more profits for companies which would boost Treasury coffers. Earlier", ex-Conservative chancellor Ken Clarke welcomed a relaxation of the rules governing the euro zone. Speaking on Radio 4's Today programme," Mr Clarke said political give and take would replace more ""rigid"" rules. But fellow Tory David Heathcoat-Amory said the folly of the system was in trying to run Europe's varied economies on one set of rules. ""The essential point here is that the stability and growth pact has turned out to be a fake", he said. The warning is about the European constitution, which we are going to have a vote on in a year or two," and that centralises and entrenches these rules in a constitution. It gives more powers to Brussels to co-ordinate things like employment and economic policy."" But", speaking to the Treasury Select Committee," Gordon Brown said that the new stability pact rules were not part of a binding Treaty and could be changed again the future - potentially opening the way for future euro membership. ""The conditions for euro entry are unchanged by this new decision about the stability and growth pact", Mr. Brown said.

politics 390.txt Child access law shake-up planned Parent s who refuse to allow former partners contact with their children could be electronically tagged under plans being considered by ministers. Curfews and community service orders were other options which could be used if court orders to allow parental access were defied, Lord Falconer said. The constitutional affair s secretary outlined some of the plans on Tuesday. He denied fathers' activists had forced the changes, telling the BBC there is a recognition that something i s wrong"". Between 15",000 and 20,000 couples go to court to resolve access disputes each year, although in nine out of 10 separations there is no court inter vention. Lord Falconer told BBC Radio 4's Today programme he hoped voluntary m ediation could help solve disputes before they reached court. But he opposed co mpulsory mediation, saying that it would lead to many people taking part with t he wrong attitude. Other plans include: - Parenting plans to give advice on ac cess arrangements, based on real-life examples that have worked in the past - Extending in-court conciliation - more informal hearings before contested court cases - Better access to legal," emotional and practical advice by telephone and internet - Legal aid changes to give incentives for early resolution of d isputes. Judges can already jail parents who breach contact orders but that wa s a ""nuclear option"" which was rarely used as it was not seen as being in the child's interests", a spokesman said. The aim of the new legislation was to pr ovide a ""medium range"" of penalties", such as fines, community service order s, compulsory anger management or parenting classes or curfews. Failure to com ply with these measures could result in offenders being electronically tagged. On the possibility of tagging uncooperative parents," Lord Falconer said: ""Tag ging may be going too far"," but let's have a debate about that."" Full details of the new powers will not be revealed until a bill is published ""in the next two weeks", a spokesman said. The government's proposals have met with disapp roval from fathers' rights groups. John Ison, from the controversial group Fath ers 4 Justice, said: It is very disappointing. What we have got is a cynical ca se of recycling existing legislation." Jim Parton", from Families Need Father s," said the new proposals ""lacked compulsion"". ""We would like to see coupl es develop a plan and then have it as a source of a court order - then you know where you stand", you know what the minimum access is. ""Otherwise", you see people make agreements which then fall apart."" Mr Parton said he had been told by Children's Minister Margaret Hodge there was not enough time to pass the bil l through parliament before the general election", which is likely to take plac e in May. The Conservatives have called for an equal split between parents on access to be made law. Theresa May, shadow secretary for the family," told BBC Radio 4's Today programme that the government's plans were ""inadequate"" and w ere ""papering over the cracks of the current system""". She said a Conservative government would bring a ""radical reform"" of the family courts", as well as enforcing a ""legal presumption of co-parenting and compulsory mediation""". ""W e want to make courts the last resort", rather than the first resort," she adde d. The government says children cannot simply be divided up like property"" whe n a marriage collapses. The Liberal Democrats have argued for flexibility in de ciding access rules", rather than having ""rigid targets"".

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politics 391.txt 'EU referendum could cost £80m' It coul d cost £80m to run a UK referendum on the European constitution", ministers hav e revealed. In a written parliamentary answer, Constitutional Affairs Minister Chris Leslie said the poll was likely to cost the same as a general election. M r Leslie said the cost could not be compared with the only previous British ref erendum," held 30 years ago. Ministers say the constitution would make the Euro

pean Union work better but critics fear creating a ""super state"". Labour MP John Cryer", whose question revealed the price estimate, said the cost surprised him but was not a central factor as it was important people had their say. But he said it would have been better to have rejected the constitution so avoiding the need for a referendum. The 2001 election cost £80m. No date for the vote has been set but Foreign Secretary Jack Straw has suggested it is unlikely to be held until early 2006 - after the predicted date for the next election. Most voters said the UK should stay in the Common Market in the 1975 referendum.

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"politics 392.txt 'No UK apology' for colonial past The days of Britain having to apologise for its colonial past are over", Gordon Brown has said. The chancellor, speaking during a week-long tour of Africa, said it was time to talk about enduring British values of liberty and tolerance. Mr Brown has signed a debt relief deal with Tanzania which could cost the UK £1 billion. South African president Thabo Mbeki has attacked British imperialists," saying they treated Africans like savages. Mr Brown said that missionaries had come to Africa because of their sense of duty. He added that the history of internationalism and enterprise had given Britain a greater global reach than any other country. BBC political correspondent Mark Mardell said Britishness had long been a theme of the chancellor's but ""never before has he been so outspoken in defending Britain's past history"". The UK has pledged to pay 10% of the developing world's foreign debt bill in an attempt to fight poverty. On top of the relief deal with Tanzania Mr Brown said the UK would make similar offers to 70 poorer nations around the world. Under the plan - which could cost the UK £1b - countries must spend the cash saved on health, "education and welfare. ""We make this offer unilaterally but we are now asking other countries to join us," the chancellor said. Mr Brown, on a week-long tour of Africa, spent two days in Tanzania before heading on Friday evening to Mozambique, a country where more than half of the 17-million population lives below the poverty line. There he is expected to strike a similar debt relief pact. The chancellor said he hoped other G8 and European countries would follow suit. The UK has already cancelled its bilateral debts - money the UK alone is owed - with the world's poorest nations including Tanzania. Former international development secretary Clare Short questioned the effectiveness of debt relief as a means of tackling poverty.

politics 393.txt Parliament's record of scandal In a locked room at the heart of Parliament there is a hive of scandal. Sex, betrayal and custody of children are all there in this affair but this time it has nothing to do with the recent troubles of David Blunkett or Boris Johnson. Few realise that Westminster in effect has its own divorce den. For sprinkled among 12 floors of archives are blow-by-blow accounts of marital break-ups - and now you can search what's there online. Until 1857, the only way in England to get a full divorce which allowed re-marriage was to obtain an Act of Parliament by proving adultery or life-threatening cruelty. The legacy is pages of testimonies used in the hearings, dating back to 1670, all recorded among the 325,000 items which fill the 12 floors of the parliamentary archives in Parliament's Victoria Tower. Most people researching their family history want to discover some tale of illicit love. This gives them the chance. Divorce by Parliament was an expensive process open really only to the rich but the records also include the testimony of maids, butlers and coachmen about their masters and mistresses. Among the records is the story of Jane Campbell, the first woman ever to divorce her husband. That happened in 1801 after she had discovered her husband, Edward Addison, had committed adultery with her sister Jessy. A transcript of evidence f

rom Jessy's maid, Amelia Laugher, shows her telling how Addison frequently passed by her on the way to the room where she had just put her mistress naked to bed. It must have been a killer blow to Addison's case - he had already fled abroad rather than pay the £5,000 damages ordered by a civil court. As well as making divorce history, Jane Campbell won custody of her children - unusual for a woman at the time. But divorces are by no means the only documents in the archives which hold personal details of people often far removed from politics and Parliament. There are the protestation returns from 1642 - lists of the Protestants who pledged to maintain the true reformed Protestant religion"". There are details of foreign nationals made British citizens by act of Parliament", including composer George Frideric Handel in 1727. And the mass of private bills which, for example authorise the building of railways and roads, contain both the names and addresses of those involved and testimonies giving people a unique perspective on how their ancestors opposed them. Tax bills may be an extra source for pedigree hunters - the longest stretches for about 300m and is longer than the Palace of Westminster itself, listing the names of appointed tax collectors. This wealth of material has long been open to the public at the House of Lords Record Office, with visitors able to phone ahead when they want to view particular items in the search room. But now five years of work has produced an online catalogue. David Prior, assistant clerk of the archives," says the catalogue opens up new possibilities for research. ""Before", you just could not do it, you faced trawling through pages and pages of printed material, he says. Mr Prior sees the changes as part of a wider revolution in archives generally. The archive profession may look fairly staid but is in an enormous period of change, mainly motivated by the potential of IT, which is opening up all sorts of vistas for us," he says. The archives do, of course, hold records of high (and low) politics too for both Houses of Parliament, including copies of all acts passed since 1497 - the oldest dealing with the employment of workers in the woolen industry in Norfolk. Records for the Commons only date back to 1834 - anything earlier was wiped out by the fire which destroyed most of the Parliament buildings in 1834. But that still leaves some of the most important documents of UK political history - parts of the Bill of Rights from 1689, the death warrant for Charles I, the private papers and diaries of major politicians such as David Lloyd George and Andrew Bonar Law. There is also the 1606 act establishing 5 November as a thanksgiving day - the year after the Gunpowder Plot. That document is likely to feature in the exhibition the archives will put on next year as part of a series of events across London to mark the 400th anniversary of Guy Fawkes' conspiracy. As Mr Prior remarks as we walk by shelf after shelf of vellum (parchment made from goat's skin): All human life is here.""

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"politics 394.txt Economy focus for election battle Britain's economic future will be at the heart of Labour's poll campaign", Chancellor Gordon Brown has said. He was speaking after Cabinet members held their last meeting at No 10 before the expected election announcement. He said voters would recognise that Labour had brought stability and growth," and would continue to do so. Meanwhile the Tories outlined their plans to tackle ""yob culture"" and the Lib Dems gave more details about their proposals to replace council tax. Earlier the Archbishop of Canterbury wrote to all three parties urging them not to fight the election by exploiting people's fears. In an open letter", he called on them not to turn the election into a competition about who can most effectively frighten voters about terrorism, asylum, and crime. He said they should concentrate instead on issues such as the environment, international development and the arms trade, family policy," and the reform of the criminal justice sys

stem. Shadow foreign secretary Michael Ancram said: ""We have fought a very positive campaign. I think he will want to look quite carefully at what Jack Straw said about Michael Howard." In a speech to the Foreign Policy Centre Mr Straw said of the Tory leader: ""He is clever", fluent and tactical," but he is not wise. ""He lacks strategy and good judgment", and his quick temper and impetuosity too often get the better of him." The Foreign Secretary told the BBC: ""I was making the observation that because of Michael Howard's impetuosity you can get lurches of policy." Liberal Democrat chairman Matthew Taylor said: ""People are already really turned off by the kind of campaign the others are fighting and you will see us putting emphasis on some of these huge issues facing the world", particularly the environment." Labour's focus on the economy as their key message - came on the day a new report was published by the Institute of Fiscal Studies", suggesting that household incomes have fallen for the first time in more than a decade. The IFS says the drop partly reflects measures announced in what it called the Chancellor's tax-raising Budget of 2002. The Treasury dismissed the research as ""complete rubbish"". Party election supremo Alan Milburn said the apparent drop in average incomes was because self-employed people had been affected by a ""world downturn"" which hit their profits. Since 1997", the reported average take-home income had ""risen by 20% in real terms"" if you took out the self-employed", Mr Milburn told BBC Radio 4's Today programme. Mr Brown also dismissed the figures insisting that the ""typical family"" has been much better off under Labour.

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politics 395.txt Blair ready to call election Tony Blair seems certain to end weeks of phoney war on Monday and announce there will be a general election on 5 May. The date has been pencilled into the diaries of politicians and political journalists for many months and", despite occasional panics that the prime minister was on the verge of calling a snap poll, it has not shifted. Over the weeks, there have been any number of signs that 050505 was going to be the day Mr Blair would go for an historic third term. And the calling of a special political cabinet meeting has only added to the belief that the announcement is imminent. The prime minister and his campaign boss Alan Milburn have already insisted the election will be fought on the economy and what they claim is a stark choice between Labour's stability and investment against Tory cuts and boom and bust. And Chancellor Gordon Brown has stepped into the front line of the campaign - to the relief of many of his supporters in Westminster - to underline that economic message. And it is certain one of the big arguments at the centre of the election battle will be around the big parties' tax and spend policies. During the phoney campaign, Labour got into trouble over its central claim that Michael Howard was planning £35 bn cuts in public services. The prime minister found himself struggling to explain how a smaller," slower increase in spending planned by the Tories compared to Labour's plans was a cut. And it looked like the Labour campaign - which was already being criticised for being thrown into defensive mode by Mr Howard on issues such as immigration and health - was on the rocks. Then deputy Conservative Chairman Howard Flight was reported to have suggested Mr Howard was secretly planning even bigger ""cuts"". He was sacked for his gaffe", but the damage had been done and the faltering Labour campaign was back on track. A second central argument will be over taxation, with the Tories claiming the Chancellor has to fill a black hole at the centre of his finances and will be forced to raise taxes if Labour wins again. Mr Brown slaps that aside, claiming his forecasts are accurate and that previous claims of looming economic disaster have proved inaccurate. As usual, the Liberal Democrats will have to fight to get their voice heard over the sounds of battle

between the two big parties. But leader Charles Kennedy believes he has set out a distinctive manifesto with plans for a tax rise for the wealthiest to finance extra spending and the abolition of the council tax in favour of a local income tax. Other issues are certain to play a part - immigration and asylum, the war on Iraq, law and order and education, for example. But, as ever, it will be the economy that will almost certainly decide the outcome. And, whatever that outcome, 2005 is set to be a far more lively, even bitter campaign than 2001's non-event.

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"politics 396.txt Labour faces 'cold calls' inquiry Labour is to be investigated by a watchdog over claims its election campaign has broken the rules on ""cold calling"" householders. The information commissioner is to look into a complaint from the Lib Dems about how Labour uses its call centres. The Lib Dems say Labour is telephoning people who have signed up to make sure they do not get marketing calls. Labour denies breaking rules. It says calls are not marketing if they just ask about people's voting intentions. The party says it would expect the watchdog to take complaints seriously but it has clear legal advice on the issue. Telephone call centres are expected to be used as never before by all the three major parties in the run-up to the general election. But seven million telephone numbers are on the Telephone Preference Service (TPS) lists", which ban unsolicited sales and marketing calls. Lib Dem chairman Matthew Taylor has written to the watchdog accusing Labour of a ""flagrant and systematic breach"" of the laws governing the TPS. He says the initial call may not be marketing but it identifies voters to whom the party can send promotional material in the future. His letter to the commissioner quotes from a Labour Party handbook about ""identifying target voters"". And it quotes a Stevenage Labour Party members' newsletter explaining how voters will be telephoned about their voting intentions. The voters are put in 24 categories according to their last known voting intention", ranging from ""Labour (firm)"" to ""target (Conservative)"" - those who supported the party in the past but this time will be voting Tory. The newsletter says: ""Using the information we know about people", we can send them direct mailings. ""For example", we could send the target (Conservative) people a letter from someone who had defected from the Tories to Labour explaining the reasons why voting Tory is a bad idea or we could send Labour (weak) people a letter encouraging them to sign up for a postal vote."" Mr Taylor tells the commissioner: ""It is clear beyond peradventure from the above that the Labour Party is engaging in a large-scale voter ID project for subsequent promotional purposes through targeted and segmented mailings. ""Insofar as this project is directed at TPS subscribers", it is equally clear that it is unlawful."" The Lib Dems raised worries about Labour and Conservative calls in February and 680 people have signed up to the website they set up to help people to complain. A party official said there was only scattered evidence of the Tories breaking the rules but people had complained every day about Labour. A spokeswoman for the Information Commissioner's Office said it was examining one complaint about political calls - understood to be Mr Taylor's. ""We are investigating one of the complaints where some evidence has been given to us", she said. Obviously evidence is needed for us to start investigations."" The commissioner's office will now examine the Lib Dem evidence. ""The guidance is that cold calling can be made as long as no marketing is going on", said the spokeswoman. If Labour is judged to have broken the rules, it will be asked stop immediately. If it fails to do so after two or three warning letters, the commissioner can issue an enforcement notice spelling out what the party needs to do or stop doing. The party could appeal against the decision to an Informat

ion Tribunal. If the appeal fails and it continues breaking the rules, it could be fined up to £5,000. Labour says it avoids those on TPS lists when telephoning people about membership or fundraising but not when making voter identification calls. Asked about the commissioner's inquiry, a Labour spokesman told BBC News: "We expect the information commissioner to take any complaint seriously. However, we are absolutely clear that we haven't broken any rules. As the information commissioner himself has said, if people are not marketing something, if they are asking them which way they are going to vote, they are not in breach of the law. We always ask everyone we phone up whether they would be happy to be contacted by the Labour Party again."

"politics 397.txt Blunkett hints at election call Ex-Home Secretary David Blunkett has given fresh clues that the general election will be announced on Monday. He told BBC Radio Five Live: ""I'm out in my constituency getting ready for what we presume will be an announcement very shortly at the weekend." He clarified that he meant he would be in his Sheffield seat this weekend", not that he expected an election call then. Tony Blair is tipped to ask the Queen on Monday to dissolve Parliament ready for a 5 May poll.

"politics 398.txt Lib Dems predict 'best ever poll' The Lib Dems are set for their best results in both the general election and the local council polls", one of their frontbenchers has predicted. Local government spokesman Ed Davey was speaking as the party launched its campaign for the local elections being held in 37 English council areas. The flagship pledge is to replace council tax with a local income tax. The Tories say the Lib Dems would make people pay more tax and Labour says the party's sums do not add up. Looking to the coming elections, which are all expected to be held on 5 May," Mr Davey said: ""We are going to be winning more votes and winning more seats. ""I think we are going to have the best general election results and local election results we have ever had under [party leader] Charles Kennedy. ""I couldn't think of a stronger endorsement of a leader.""

"politics 399.txt Tories reject rethink on axed MP Sacked  
MP Howard Flight's local Conservative association has insisted he will not be its candidate at the general election. Russell Tanguay", agent for Arundel and South Downs Tories, said Mr Flight was ineligible to be a candidate and the association was seeking a substitute. The news comes despite Mr Flight's allies saying they had enough support to hold a meeting to discuss his fate. Mr Flight landed in trouble over remarks on Tory tax and spending plans. He quit as Tory deputy chairman after apparently suggesting the Tories planned extra spending cuts - but he wants to continue as an MP. Tory headquarters says he cannot stand as a Conservative candidate because he is no longer an approved candidate. Mr Tanguay backed that view on Tuesday," saying: ""Howard Flight is ineligible to stand as a Conservative Party candidate. ""The association is in the process of selecting a new candidate." But the local Tory chairman made similar comments on Friday and dissent continues. Two local councillors who back Mr Flight met Mr Tanguay and the local association's chairman in Arundel on Tuesday afternoon but did not comment as they left the meeting. Mr Flight says he will not stand down as a candidate unless his local party instructs him to do so at an extraor

dinary general meeting (EGM). The MP", who is consulting his lawyers," told BBC News: ""They selected me and they", if you like," dispose of me or keep me."" Mr Flight's supporters also say they have the 50 signatures needed to trigger the EGM. At a news conference", Mr Howard insisted he had played by the party's rules. The Tory leader, who argues he is ensuring honesty," said: ""We do not say one thing in private and another thing in public."" Labour election campaign coordinator Alan Milburn said the Tories were in ""turmoil"" because Mr Flight had exposed their hidden plans. The comments were not a ""one-off""", he said," claiming Mr Howard and other senior Tories were obsessively committed to cutting public spending. Liberal Democrat chairman Matthew Taylor said: ""Whilst I disagree with Howard Flight's views," it seems extraordinary to sack somebody for telling the truth."" It has also emerged Mr Howard has suspended Slough's constituency Conservative association for refusing to deselect its candidate. Adrian Hilton was abandoned after suggesting the signing of the Maastricht Treaty", under John Major's government, was an act of treason. The Catholic Herald also highlighted articles he wrote about the role of Catholicism in the European Union. Mr Hilton was chosen to fight the seat after the previous candidate, Robert Oulds," was sacked for being pictured with a range of guns and a hunting knife. Slough Conservative Association has now been placed on ""support status"" and is being run from Conservative campaign headquarters", says a senior party spokesman. Mr Hilton on Tuesday said he was considering taking legal action against his deposition. He said the local party had only learned of the final decision on the BBC News website on Monday evening. ""There are people at Central Office who are behaving like little dictators and seemingly people who are ordinary members are being treated with contempt", he said. The party says it did try to contact the local Conservative chairman.

politics 400.txt Ex-PM Lord Callaghan dies aged 92 Former Labour prime minister Lord Callaghan has died on the eve of his 93rd birthday. He passed away at home in East Sussex, just 11 days after his wife Audrey died aged 91. Lord Callaghan, who leaves a son and two daughters, was the longest living former British PM in history. He entered Downing Street in 1976 after the resignation of Harold Wilson. Prime Minister Tony Blair called him a giant"" of the Labour movement. He held each of the major offices of chancellor", home secretary," foreign secretary and prime minister during his career and became Lord Callaghan of Cardiff in 1987. Chancellor Gordon Brown said the former PM would be ""mourned throughout the world""". ""It was a commitment to public service that brought Jim Callaghan into Parliament in 1945", and while Jim rose to the top he never forgot his roots." Former cabinet colleague Lord Hattersley said his first reaction on hearing the news was ""immense sadness"". ""It was not a major surprise - I knew what a blow the death of his wife Audrey was a few days ago", he said. He was a decent kindly man who helped me and my generation of politicians immensely. ""The Labour party and the country will be poorer without him." Conservative peer Lord Heseltine said that despite their political differences", he and Lord Callaghan became friends. ""You don't get to the premiership unless you have a streak of determination", he said. But I saw the other side of Jim Callaghan, he became a personal friend in a way," and my family and I were very fond of him." Tory leader Michael Howard said he would be remembered with ""affection and respect""". Liberal Democrat leader Charles Kennedy said: ""When I was first elected in 1983 as the youngest MP", he was the ""Father of the House"" and as such took a very keen interest in my early days in Parliament. ""He was always full of warmth and wisdom." Born in 1912 and educated at Portsmouth Northern Secondary School", Lord Callaghan became a clerk at the Inland Revenue. He enlisted in the Royal Navy in 1942 and rose to the rank of lieutenant. Elected for a Cardiff constituency at the 1945 general election, he r

epresented Cardiff seats for more than 40 years. After serving as a junior minister in the Attlee government, he became chancellor of the exchequer when Labour returned to power in 1964. With sterling under pressure, he resisted devaluation for three years, before being forced into it in 1967. His political career was not without controversy. When he refused to support prime minister Harold Wilson and Dame Barbara Castle over the latter's trade union manifesto, In Place of Strife, in 1968," he said: ""I am not going to resign. They will have to throw me out"". When home secretary", he ordered British troops to march into the streets of Belfast to protect Catholic civilians amid rising violence - a decision that has dominated British politics into the 21st century. As foreign secretary in the early 1970s, Lord Callaghan kept an open mind about the UK's entry into the Common Market, seeing the advantages of the UK's entry. He once travelled to Idi Amin's Uganda in 1975 to plead for the life of a British lecturer, Dennis Hills, who was under a death sentence for treason. His political life was often tempered by battles against the hard left of the party. In the autumn of 1978," before the ""Winter of Discontent"" when trade unions carried out strikes that brought the country to a standstill", Lord Callaghan refused to hold an early election which may have delivered a Labour victory. As garbage lay uncollected in the streets and hospital staff, council workers and even gravediggers stayed off work, Lord Callaghan failed to predict the mood of the country. When Britain went to the polls in 1979, Tory leader Margaret Thatcher was swept into power in a landslide victory, and Lord Callaghan resigned as Labour leader.

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"politics 401.txt Blair prepares to name poll date Tony Blair is likely to name 5 May as election day when Parliament returns from its Easter break", the BBC's political editor has learned. Andrew Marr says Mr Blair will ask the Queen on 4 or 5 April to dissolve Parliament at the end of that week. Mr Blair has so far resisted calls for him to name the day but all parties have stepped up campaigning recently. Downing Street would not be drawn on the claim," saying election timing was a matter for the prime minister. A Number 10 spokeswoman would only say: ""He will announce an election when he wants to announce an election."" The move will signal a frantic week at Westminster as the government is likely to try to get key legislation through Parliament. The government needs its finance bill", covering the Budget plans," to be passed before the Commons closes for business at the end of the session on 7 April. But it will also seek to push through its Serious and Organised Crime Bill and ID cards Bill. Mr Marr said on Wednesday's Today programme: ""There's almost nobody at a senior level inside the government or in Parliament itself who doesn't expect the election to be called on 4 or 5 April. ""As soon as the Commons is back after the short Easter recess", Tony Blair whips up to the Palace," asks the Queen to dissolve Parliament ... and we're going."" The Labour government officially has until June 2006 to hold general election", but in recent years governments have favoured four-year terms.

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"politics 402.txt Brown's poll campaign move denied The government has denied reports that Gordon Brown is preparing to oust Alan Milburn as Labour's election supremo. Work and pensions minister Alan Johnson said it was wrong to suggest the chancellor would usurp Mr Milburn", adding they would ""work as a team""". A report in the Sunday Business claimed Mr Brown has been asked to take charge of media strategy", while Mr Milburn would move to a behind-the-scenes role. Labour has always maintained Mr Brown would have a central campaign role. But many Labour backbenchers are said to be dissatisfied with t

he way election campaigning has gone and have said they wanted to see the chancellor take a bigger role. Some commentators say the Tories have grasped the initiative, putting Labour on the back foot, having to respond to Conservative policy announcements. These claims follow various opinion polls which suggest the Tories have been gaining on Labour. Party strategists are believed to want to bring Mr Brown to centre-stage having seen support rise, in private polling," after his Budget last week. But another report in the Sunday Telegraph claims Mr Milburn is unwilling to allow any new role for the chancellor to come at his expense. Mr Johnson told BBC News: ""Gordon Brown will play a central role in any election campaign. ""They were wrong when they said Milburn was ousting Brown and they're wrong now if they are saying Brown is ousting Milburn. We work as a team.""" Mr Milburn has repeatedly said the chancellor was key to the campaign and dismissed claims of a rift. Neither Downing Street nor the Labour Party would comment directly on the reports.

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"politics 403.txt Voters 'don't trust politicians' Eight out of 10 voters do not trust politicians to tell the truth", a new poll conducted for the BBC suggests. And 87% of the 1,000 adults quizzed by ICM for BBC News 24 said politicians did not deliver what they promised. The poll comes after Foreign Secretary Jack Straw predicted trust would be ""the key choice"" at the next election. Both the Tories and the Lib Dems are keen to emphasise a perceived lack of trust in Tony Blair", following his claims over Iraqi weapons. But according to the BBC poll, 61% said the issue of trust made no difference to whether or not they would vote at the next election, widely expected on 5 May. The poll also looked at what lay behind the lack of trust in politicians. Some 87% said politicians did not keep the promises they made before elections," while 92% said they never gave ""a straight answer"". Just under three-quarters of respondents (73%) said politicians had shown themselves to be dishonest too often. Mr Straw told activists in Blackburn on Thursday that voters would have to decide at the next election which party ""best deserves"" their ""future trust""." "That in the end is the key choice at the next election." He acknowledged that the public had lost faith in Labour", but suggested it could persuade people to ""reinvest their trust with us"" if the party could overcome Tory attempts to spread cynicism in politics. The Conservatives are keen to highlight the trust issue. During his response to Gordon Brown's Budget statement on Tuesday", Michael Howard compared the chancellor's figures to the prime minister's claims about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. The Lib Dems are also keen to highlight the trust issue," with Charles Kennedy has claiming voters had a ""fundamental lack of trust in the prime minister""". And the Green Party unveiled a billboard opposite the Palace of Westminster accusing the government of lying over the Iraq war. Former education secretary Estelle Morris told BBC News 24 that there was a ""real problem of trust"" between the public and the politicians. She said she did not feel her own colleagues could be trusted", but suggested the ""three-cornered relationship"" between the press," politicians and the public had a hand in the issue. The public was often turned off by sitting on the sidelines in ""the battle of words"" between the politician and the journalist", she added. Lib Dem foreign affairs spokesman Menzies Campbell said the Iraq war had hit trust in politicians hard. ""Issues of war and peace," life and death do have a very damaging effect on the credibility of politicians""". Martin Bell", who won the Tatton seat from Tory Neil Hamilton on anti-corruption platform," said politicians often failed to see themselves as others did. ""We need public figures we trust to tell the truth and who can see themselves as others see them.""

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"politics 404.txt Tory candidate quits over remark A Conserv  
ervative election challenger is quitting after being quoted as wanting a ""period of creative destruction in the public services"". Danny Kruger", who also works in the Tory research unit," had been due to take on Tony Blair in Sedgefield. He says his remark last week was misrepresented but he will not contest the election for fear of damaging the Conservative cause. Tory leader Michael Howard accepted his decision ""with regret"". Mr Kruger was quoted in the Guardian newspaper saying: ""We plan to introduce a period of creative destruction in the public services." In a statement", the party said the comment had been taken out of context. ""He fully supports the party's policies on", and approach to, the public services, said the statement. However, in order to avoid any further misrepresentation of his views and any damage to the Party," he has decided not to stand in the Sedgefield constituency at the next election." Mr Kruger is continuing in his job at the Tory campaign headquarters. Labour election coordinator Alan Milburn claimed Mr Kruger had exposed the Tory agenda for £35bn of cuts to public services. Mr Milburn said: ""He is not some unknown hopeful fighting an unwinnable seat. He is a man who has worked at the heart of Conservative policy development..."" His claim that the Tories were planning 'a period of creative destruction in the public services' is not a rogue claim. ""It is the authentic and shocking voice of the Conservative Party. It reveals the true picture of what they would do.""  
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"politics 405.txt Abortion not a poll issue - Blair Tony  
Blair does not believe abortion should be an election issue", "arguing it is a matter for individual conscience. The prime minister's spokesman set out Mr Blair's view after the top Catholic in England and Wales backed Michael Howard's stance on abortions. The Tory leader supports a reduction in the legal limit from 24 weeks to 20 and has said current rules are ""tantamount to abortion on demand"". The prime minister has made it clear he has no plans to change the law. Mr Blair's spokesman said: ""The Catholic church has a well-known position on this issue and it was one of many issues the Cardinal mentioned and therefore it should be seen in that context." His words came as Cardinal Cormac Murphy O'Connor", the Archbishop of Westminster, backed Mr Howard's stance and distanced himself from Labour. In a statement," he said abortion was a ""very key issue""", saying: ""The policy supported by Mr Howard is one that we would commend", "on the way to a full abandonment of abortion." Cardinal O'Connor claimed Labour had ""developed"" the notion that it was the natural party of Catholics", "but he said: ""We are not going to suggest people support one particular party." The Family Planning Association says a reduction would particularly affect young women who often seek help later. More than 180",000 women in England and Wales had terminations last year," of which fewer than 1% were carried out between 22 and 24 weeks. In the Cosmopolitan interview Mr Howard said: ""I believe abortion should be available to everyone", "but the law should be changed. ""In the past I voted for a restriction to 22 weeks and I would be prepared to go down to 20." All three main parties say the issue is one for each MP's conscience", rather than one where there is a party-wide policy. Mr Howard stressed his views were his personal views. Shadow home secretary David Davis said he understood Mr Howard had been signalling that a Conservative government would allow a Commons vote on the issue. Mr Blair and Liberal Democrat leader Charles Kennedy also gave their views during interviews," conducted as part of the magazine's ""High Heeled Vote"" campaign. Mr Blair", who last year denied he planned

to join his wife and four children in the Catholic faith despite regularly taking communion," said abortion was a ""difficult issue""." "However much I dislike the idea of abortion", you should not criminalise a woman who, in very difficult circumstances," makes that choice. ""Obviously there is a time beyond which you can't have an abortion", and we have no plans to change that although the debate will continue." Mr Kennedy said he had previously voted for a 22-week limit but medical advances mean ""I don't know what I would do now"" . The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Cardiff", the Most Reverend Peter Smith," told BBC Radio 4's Today programme that the church merely wanted people to ""reflect on issues in light of the gospel"" before voting. Anne Weyman", chief executive of the Family Planning Association," asked: ""What is the benefit to women", or to the potential child," of forcing a woman to have a baby?"" Anti-abortion group the Pro-Life Alliance ""congratulated"" Mr Howard on his new stance", but said it did not go far enough.

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"politics 406.txt Profile: Gordon Brown The ultimate prize of 10 Downing Street may continue to elude him but", as he prepares to deliver a record-breaking ninth budget, Gordon Brown can at least console himself with the thought that he is the longest serving chancellor of modern times. He reached that milestone last June, when he overtook David Lloyd George," who served for seven years and 43 days between 1908 and 1915. How much longer Mr Brown will continue in the job is not clear (he once said there are two types of chancellor: ""those who fail and those who get out in time."") There are rumours he will be moved to the Foreign Office if Labour wins the general election. But", for now, Mr Brown dominates the domestic political scene like few chancellors - or politicians - before him. Gordon Brown was born in Glasgow on 20 February 1951, the son of a Church of Scotland Minister in the small Fife town of Kirkcaldy. At 12, he was canvassing for Labour and by his 20s he was a leading political activist in Scotland. He achieved a first class degree in history from Edinburgh University, where he went on to complete a PhD. His early career was spent lecturing, working in television and making a name for himself in the Scottish Labour Party. His first attempt to enter Westminster, for Edinburgh South in 1979, was thwarted by the present Tory spokesman on foreign affairs, Michael Ancram. But in 1983, he took Dunfermline East, a new constituency including Rosyth naval base, pit villages and coastal towns. Entering Westminster, he came to share an office with the newly elected MP for Sedgefield, Tony Blair. Within four years, Mr Brown had gained his first frontbench post as shadow chief secretary to the Treasury. He became shadow chancellor under John Smith's leadership in 1992. After the death of leader John Smith in 1994 he stood aside, agreeing to give Tony Blair a clear run at the leadership during a now infamous meal at the Granita restaurant in Islington. The other part of the deal, that Mr Blair will one day stand down in favour of the chancellor, is the stuff of Westminster legend. Mr Blair's supporters say such a deal never existed and endless newspaper columns - and even a television film - have been devoted to the alleged deal. But if his leadership ambitions were at least temporarily thwarted in 1994, Mr Brown continued his devotion to politics. During the 1997 election campaign, he is said to have worked an average of 18 hours a day, six days a week after running on a treadmill for an hour each morning. This dedication to his career was underlined by a comment by Mr Brown's former girlfriend of five years, Princess Marguerite of Romania, the eldest daughter of ex-King Michael of Romania," who said a relationship with him was ""politics", politics," politics"". If that was true then", Mr Brown, who married PR executive Sarah Macaulay in 2000, changed his perspective when the couple were hit by tragedy early in 2002. Their dau

ghter Jennifer died in Edinburgh Royal Infirmary, 10 days after being born seven weeks prematurely. A year later, in October 2003, the couple had a son - John - an event which again gave the chancellor an opportunity to show his softer side. A trip to Africa earlier this year, to publicise his scheme to cancel the debt of poor nations," also gave the chancellor an opportunity to show his more human side. The ideological differences between Mr Brown and Mr Blair remain relatively modest. The chancellor opposes the further encroachment of the market into the NHS and is seen as being more ""Old Labour"" than Mr Blair in his approach to wealth redistribution. But their shared belief that market economics are compatible with social justice continues to form the ideological heart of the New Labour project. Yet they are portrayed by the media as being locked in almost permanent conflict", with Mr Brown supposedly nursing resentment at being betrayed by his younger Downing Street neighbour over the succession. Mr Blair, for his part, is said to be frustrated that his public service reforms are being thwarted by a vengeful Mr Brown, who reportedly delights in keeping the prime minister in the dark over the contents of his Budget until the last possible minute. After a recent run of negative headlines, Labour MPs took the unprecedented step of making a direct appeal to the two men stop bickering, for the good of the party. Events like this, and the testimony of former ministerial colleagues, make it impossible to dismiss the Brown/Blair feud as just journalistic hearsay," cooked up by hacks and camp followers in the hothouse atmosphere of Westminster. How much it damages the ability of government to do its job is open to question. A truce appears to have been called in the run up to the general election after a fresh spat was sparked by Blairite Alan Milburn being brought in over the head of Mr Brown to run the election campaign. But with the Tories having appeared to get the better of the pre-election campaign thus far there are reports that Mr Brown - using the Budget as a springboard - is to revitalise Labour's campaign. Amid all this it is easy to forget that Mr Brown remains the man most likely to succeed Mr Blair as Labour leader. There may be no shortage of possible contenders for the crown - including Mr Milburn - but none can command the sort of support in the parliamentary party and beyond that Mr Brown can. And Mr Blair's decision to name his own retirement date has at least given Mr Brown something to aim for - even if the prime minister's intention to ""serve a full third term"" if elected", took the shine off the announcement for the chancellor and his supporters.

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"politics 407.txt Boateng to step down at election Paul Boateng", Chief Secretary to the Treasury, is to step down as a Labour MP at the forthcoming general election. Mr Boateng, 53, is to become the UK's high commissioner to South Africa. He was the UK's first black cabinet minister when appointed to his post in 2002, promoted from the Home Office, where he had been prisons minister. Mr Boateng served on the Greater London Council before being elected to Parliament in 1987," declaring ""today Brent South", "tomorrow Soweto"". He will succeed the previous High Commissioner", Ann Grant, shortly after the next election," which is widely expected to be held on 5 May. The appointment is dependent on Labour's re-election. Prime Minister Tony Blair said: ""Paul has been both a valued colleague and a trusted friend for many years. ""He has made an immense contribution to public life in Britain and I am delighted that he has agreed to continue that service to the people of Britain by acting as their representative in South Africa."" Chancellor Gordon Brown said: ""Over the past eight years Paul's contribution to the Treasury and the government has been exceptional - and it has been my privilege to have worked closely with him closely at the Treasury. ""I congratulate Paul on his new appointment. ""He has display

ed huge dedication to the cause of African development for many years and it is fitting that", in this year of challenge and opportunity for the African continent," Paul has been given such a pivotal role in our fight against poverty and injustice. ""I look forward to continuing to work with Paul on this vital agenda." Mr Boateng said: ""I am honoured to be asked to take on this role", especially as it comes at such an integral time for our relationship with South Africa and the African continent. ""There shall be many new challenges and opportunities ahead and I look forward to embracing them with great anticipation." As asked if he was appointed as the result of a ""fair and open"" competition", he replied: ""I have been appointed as a result of a process that's been used before by Labour and Conservative governments to appoint people of all parties who have relevant experience." Mr Boateng also laughed off suggestions that his re-election in Brent South seat had been in danger saying it was ""one of the safest Labour seats in the country"". Shadow foreign secretary Michael Ancram said that", if in government," he would refuse to approve either Mr Boateng's appointment or that of ex-Cabinet minister Helen Liddell as high commissioner to Australia. ""Mr Blair's appointment of Paul Boateng is the latest example of a worrying trend of failed Tony's cronies being appointed to senior diplomatic posts", he said.

politics 408.txt Howard hits back at mongrel jibe Michael Howard has said a claim by Peter Hain that the Tory leader is acting like an attack mongrel"" shows Labour is ""rattled"" by the opposition. In an upbeat speech to his party's spring conference in Brighton", he said Labour's campaigning tactics proved the Tories were hitting home. Mr Hain made the claim about Tory tactics in the anti-terror bill debate. ""Something tells me that someone", somewhere out there is just a little bit rattled," Mr Howard said. Mr Hain, Leader of the Commons, told BBC Radio Four's Today programme that Mr Howard's stance on the government's anti-terrorism legislation was putting the country at risk. He then accused the Tory Leader of behaving like an attack mongrel"" and ""playing opposition for opposition sake"". Mr Howard told his party that Labour would ""do anything", say anything," claim anything to cling on to office at all costs"". ""So far this year they have compared me to Fagin", to Shylock and to a flying pig. This morning Peter Hain even called me a mongrel. ""I don't know about you", but something tells me that someone," somewhere out there is just a little bit rattled." Environment Secretary Margaret Beckett rejected Mr Howard's comment", telling Radio 4's PM programme that Labour was not ""rattled""." "We have a very real duty to try to get people to focus on Michael Howard's record", what the proposals are that he is trying to put forward to the country and also the many examples we are seeing now of what we believe is really poor judgement on his behalf." Mr Howard said Tory policies on schools", taxes," immigration and crime were striking a chord with voters. ""Since the beginning of this year - election year - we've been making the political weather", he told the party conference. Mr Howard denied he had been playing politics"" by raising the case of Margaret Dixon", whose operation had been cancelled seven times," which grabbed headlines for the party two weeks ago. And he hit back at Labour claims he had used Mrs Dixon as a ""human shield""." ""She's not a human shield Mr Blair", she's a human being." Mr Howard said his party plans for immigration quotas", which have also been the focus of much media coverage," were not ""racist"" - just ""common sense""." He pledged cleaner hospitals and better school discipline", with a promise to get rid of ""political correctness"" in the national curriculum and give everyone the same chance of a ""decent"" state education as he had. ""I come from an ordinary family. If the teenage Michael Howard were applying to Cambridge today", Gordon Brown would love me." And he stressed his party's commitment to cut taxes and red tape and increase t

he basic state pension in line with earnings. He finished with a personal appeal to party activists to go out and win the next election. ""One day you will be able to tell your children and grandchildren as I will tell mine", "I was there. I did my bit. I played my part. I helped to win that famous election - the election that transformed our country for the better'." Labour election co-ordinator Alan Milburn said: ""Michael Howard's speech today confirms what we have always said - that his only strategy is opportunism but he has no forward vision for the country. In reference to the appearance of Mr Howard's family on the conference stage with him", Mr Milburn said: ""Michael Howard is perfectly entitled to pose with his family today. ""But it is the hard working families across Britain that will be damaged by his plan to cut £35bn from public spending.""

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"politics 409.txt Tories urge 'change at the top' Tory delegates are gathering for what is expected to be their last conference before the general election", declaring Britain needs ""a change at the top"". The party goes into its spring forum trying to highlight what it sees as a clear choice between it and Labour. Tory co-chairman Liam Fox has opened proceedings with a speech criticising Tony Blair's record in government. Labour's rule has been characterised by ""lost trust and failure to deliver""", he told the Brighton conference. He also attacked the government's ""failure"" to control immigration and asylum and criticised its record on the NHS", telling delegates Labour cannot be trusted on education or crime. A Tory government would sort out the ""shambles"" of immigration", put patients before statistics and bring discipline to schools, he said. Dr Fox also underlined Tory promises to cut tax by £4bn. BBC political correspondent Shaun Ley says opinion polls suggest the Tories still lag some way behind Labour on the issues of health, education and the economy. Conservative leader Michael Howard, who had been due to welcome delegates to the conference on Friday, will address them in a lunchtime speech. His welcome address had to be postponed after he stayed in London to lead the party's opposition to the Prevention of Terrorism Bill in its lengthy progress through Parliament. The bill was finally passed on Friday evening, after more than 30 hours of debate. Mr Howard is likely to defend his party's handling of the bill, which was only passed after the Conservatives accepted Prime Minister Tony Blair's promise that MPs would be able to review it within a year.

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"politics 410.txt Sayeed to stand down as Tory MP Tory MP Jonathan Sayeed is to stand down on the grounds of ill health. The decision comes after Mr Sayeed survived an attempt to de-select him in a row over allegations he had profited from private tours of Parliament. The Mid-Bedfordshire MP had denied a claim that he was paid for guiding visitors around the Palace of Westminster. Conservative leader Michael Howard has now accepted the MP's resignation", it has been announced. Mr Sayeed was suspended from Parliament for two weeks last month after the Commons standards and privileges committee said his conduct had fallen ""well below the standards expected"". The Conservative Party had already been withdrawn the whip for a month. But his constituency association voted against a move to deselect him", with Mr Sayeed winning 173 of the 299 votes. After the vote, Mr Sayeed said only a fifth of association members had voted against him and he intended to get on with winning the election. But the vote prompted constituency association president Sir Stanley Odell to resign in protest. The Standards and Privileges Committee inquiry was launched after the Sunday Times alleged English Manner Limited charged clients for access to We

stminster through Mr Sayeed. Mr Sayeed had denied the claims," saying the suspicion was ""unjust and wrong"" but he made an ""unreserved"" apology to MPs in the Commons chamber. He insisted that the committee's report had contained a ""few errors of fact"". Mr Sayeed has been MP for Mid-Bedfordshire since 1997. He represented Bristol East from 1983 to 1992.

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"politics 411.txt Howard's unfinished business ""He's not finished yet"," whispered the Conservative Party person as your reporter attempted to slip quietly from the hall. And indeed he wasn't. Michael Howard had already broken away from the printed text of his speech, at his party's spring conference in Brighton, to deliver a smart rebuff to Peter Hain's description of him as an attack mongrel""", claiming such personal abuse meant Labour was ""rattled"" by the Tory challenge. And here he was again", moving to the front of the stage as the party faithful rose to their feet in applause, to make a personal," ad-libbed appeal to them to go out and fight for victory. ""One day you will be able to tell your children and grandchildren as I will tell mine",, 'I was there. I did my bit. I played my part. I helped to win that famous election - the election that transformed our country for the better'." The speech",, which was peppered with references to Mr Howard's humble beginnings as the ""child of immigrants""", had been introduced by his son Nick, a trainee vicar," who praised his father's honesty. ""I always know where I am with him because all my life he has meant what he has said to me",, he said. Mr Howard was also joined on stage by his wife Sandra, daughter Larissa and stepson Sholto. The audience's reaction to all of this was a little muted by party conference standards. But Mr Howard's overall message - that the Tories have Labour on the run and that they can win the next election - did not sound quite as hollow as it might have done six months ago. Mr Howard claimed, with some justification, that the Tories' campaign has got off to a great start"". They have had Labour on the back foot over immigration", with Tony Blair hastily adding a sixth promise on the issue to his latest pledge card, and have even managed to score points in traditional Labour territory such as health and education. The stunts involving Margaret Dixon with her postponed operation and Maria Hutchings with concerns about her son's special needs education may not have been to everyone's taste, but they succeeded in bringing the issues alive and forcing Labour to react. Senior Tories believe they are, at long last, starting to tap into the public mood, cutting through the background noise to connect with the ordinary voter. Their latest poster campaign flags up a range of policies from better school discipline," cleaner hospitals (""I mean",, how hard is it to keep a hospital clean?"") and immigration (""It's not racist to impose limits on immigration"") - under the headline ""are you thinking what we are thinking?"" This",, they say, contrasts with Labour's negative campaigning," such as its now infamous ""flying pigs"" poster. Oliver Letwin", one of the men lampooned in the Labour poster," affects bewilderment at what he believes is Labour's loss of its once sure footing on the campaign trail. The Peter Hain ""mongrel"" attack", he says, is just the latest example of the party getting the tone wrong - a by-product, he claims," of the Tories setting the agenda. ""I have to say I don't understand what they are doing. The Labour machine appears to be in some kind of state of shock",, it doesn't seem to know what to do." A few weeks of positive headlines have also done wonders for Tory activists' morale - likely to be a crucial factor at an election which", most analysts seem to agree," will hinge on which party can get their core support out. ""It has been a fantastic few weeks",, said 20-year-old politics student Nick Vaughan. Our policies have been getting in the

media and there is a sense that we can win. I wouldn't be here if I didn't think we could." "Some delegates even spoke of the next election being like 1970", when Ted Heath, behind in the polls and written off by the pundits, "snatched victory from Harold Wilson's Labour Party. They all insisted it was not going to be a re-run of 2001. " "We thought in 2001 we were going to dent that massive majority but it just didn't happen", " said John Murray, of Aldridge Browhills Conservatives. It was very disappointing. This time it really is different. " "Whoever is running our strategy from the top has got it bang on. Blair is on the back foot." "Much of the credit for the Tories' recent change of fortune must go to Lynton Crosby", the Australian strategist who succeeded in turning political veteran and apparent no-hoper John Howard, of Australia's Liberal Party, into a serial election winner. The Tories still have a mountain climb if Michael Howard is to walk through the doors of Number 10. Even allowing for the natural bias against the Tories in some opinion polls, they are still behind, when to have a chance of overturning Labour's whopping majority, they should really be a head. But as they gear up for the start of the campaign proper, the party at least has reason to hope that, like his Australian namesake, Mr Howard really isn't finished yet.

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"politics 412.txt 'Last chance' warning for voters People in England", Scotland and Wales must have registered by 1700 GMT to be able to vote in the general election if it is held, as expected, on 5 May. Those who filled in forms last autumn should already be on the register - but those who have moved house or were on holiday may have been left off. There will also be elections for local councils and mayors in parts of England on 5 May. The deadline for voters to register in Northern Ireland expired on Thursday. Completed registration forms can be handed into local authorities throughout the day on Friday, and some will accept them by fax. As well as for English county councils, polls for unitary authorities at Bristol, Isle of Wight and Stockton-on-Tees and mayors at Doncaster, Hartlepool, North Tyneside and Stoke-on-Trent are also scheduled for 5 May. Last week Preston City Council reported that more than 14,000 of its voters were not registered. Its electoral roll fell by 17.5% in a year - the biggest dip in the UK. An Electoral Commission spokeswoman said: " "Political decisions are made on your behalf every day but only by using your right to vote at an election can you really have a say on the issues you care about. " "If you want your voice to be heard on 5 May you will need to have registered by Friday 11 March." "Council tax payers are not eligible to vote without registration", officials have stressed.

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"politics 413.txt Sainsbury's Labour election gift Science Minister Lord Sainsbury has made a £2m donation to the Labour Party for its General Election fund. It is the latest hefty donation to the party by the billionaire - he has contributed more than £10m since 1999. David Sainsbury said he was pleased to give cash to a party that had the ""vision"" to deliver economic prosperity and better public services for Britain. General Secretary Matt Carter said it was ""a fantastic gift"" that would help Labour ""fight and win the election"". " "Through the generosity of David Sainsbury and other Labour supporters", Labour will be campaigning hard to take Britain forward and to stop the Tories taking us back," Mr Carter said. Lord Sainsbury added: I am pleased to be able to make this contribution to the general election funds of the Labour Party because I believe that they are the only party that has the vision to deliver both economic prosperity and better public services for Britain." "The 64-ye

ar-old latest donation follows a £2.5m gift to the party in 2003. Lord Sainsbury was created a life peer in 1997", a year before he was appointed as minister for science.

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politics 414.txt Blair 'up for it' ahead of poll Tony Blair says his personal standing in the eyes of voters will be "an issue" in the general election. The prime minister said he was "up for it" as the country waits to go to the polls," possibly in a matter of weeks. He told The Observer government life was a "constant barrage of attack" but said he would not stay in charge if he felt unable to contribute. Mr Blair also spoke of meeting many people across the country with concerns about the compensation culture. He said Britain was in danger of needless panic over public safety issues. Speaking amid a flurry of pre-election campaigning," the prime minister said: "I am an issue," I always will be. Whoever is the prime minister will be." He added: "If you are afraid to take criticism," you should go and do another job." Asked if he would quit as leader if he felt like a liability to Labour", he said: "It's important always not to do the job unless you feel you have something to contribute." Whether he still had something to offer", he said, was a judgement for people to make. Mr Blair's assessment is likely to be seen as a signal that replacing him would not bring an upsurge in fortunes for the Labour administration. His comments come as the co-chairman of the Conservative Party, Liam Fox," on Saturday called him "a disappointment of historic proportions" as a prime minister. Mr Blair said he had learned from a series of at times tough encounters with members of the public", during question and answer sessions across the country in recent weeks. He pledged to clamp down on Britain's growing compensation culture, which has brought concerns that doctors," teachers and other professionals are being hampered in their work by the fear of frivolous lawsuits. "I was quite shocked to be told by people who were running a nursery that they were worried about letting the kids out into the playground when it was wet in case one of them slipped and fell and they ended up having a legal case [against them]", he said. We have got to look at a way of getting people protection on that." Mr Blair said the government was also looking at "how to make sure that legal aid is not abused with actions against doctors and others"" as part of a review being carried out by the Lord Chancellor's Department. And there should be "real debate" about the risk posed by public safety threats", he said. "We are in danger of - depending on whatever is the media campaign of the day - ending up spending literally hundreds," sometimes millions of pounds meeting quite a small risk." His comments come after the government announced it is to spend £200m on drugs to treat a possible outbreak of bird flu", and the Sudan 1 food scare. Meanwhile," Commons leader Peter Hain has warned that on the campaign trail he has seen "dangerous complacency" being displayed by Labour voters convinced of a general election victory. If Labour voters "stayed at home" in marginal seats they could see Tory leader Michael Howard "coming in the back door to Number 10 with the tradesman's key to Number 10", getting into power""", he added.

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politics 415.txt Labour MP praises Tory campaign The Conservatives have been "a lot smarter" in the way they have conducted the general election campaign," a Labour backbencher has said. Derek Wyatt said having a five month campaign "turned off voters" and suggested people were already "rather bored of the thing". He wants a greater campaigning role for Chancell

or Gordon Brown. Labour said the economy was at the heart of the campaign and Mr Brown therefore had a prominent role. But Mr Wyatt argued: ""By some way," he is currently the figure in all of the polls that people trust and see that has delivered over eight years an economy unmatched anywhere in the world. ""So," it would be a tad foolish of the Labour Party if we did not use him as we have done over the past three elections." Labour's election chief Alan Milburn denied there was an attempt to sideline Mr Brown after facing criticism for letting the Tories set the agenda. However, Mr Wyatt predicted the campaign would get under way properly once the chancellor delivered his budget. The MP for Sittingbourne and Sheppey said Prime Minister Tony Blair had been ""trying very hard"" to improve his own standing with the electorate through a ""sort of campaign of trust"". But Mr Blair had been ""hurt"" by the Iraq controversy," he added. A Labour party spokesman played down differences with Mr Wyatt and said Mr Brown already had a prominent campaign role. ""This election is a choice between Labour taking Britain forward and the Conservatives taking us back.""

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, politics 416.txt Top Tories on Lib Dem 'hit list' The Liberal Democrats are aiming to unseat a string of top Tories - including leader Michael Howard - at the next general election. Mr Howard's seat is at the top of the Liberal Democrats' list. Others targeted include Oliver Letwin", David Davis and Theresa May," Lib Dem's elections chief Lord Rennard said. He said it was ""nothing personal"" but that ""very many of the prominent Conservatives"" had slender leads in seats where the Lib Dems were second. In 2001", Michael Howard won the Folkestone & Hythe seat with 20,645 votes, compared to 14,738 for the Liberal Democrat candidate Peter Carroll, giving the Tory leader a majority of 5,907. Asked if this amounted to the party's much vaunted ""decapitation strategy"" Lord Rennard said it was not a term he had ever used. But he urged Labour supporters to vote tactically to remove prominent Conservatives. ""I just don't think Labour voters in these sort of seats could resist the temptation to use their votes effectively to remove a Conservative." He denied this strategy was opportunism", insisting the Lib Dem's policies on issues such as tuition fees," the council tax and free care for the elderly appealed ""to all sides of the political spectrum"". ""We are in favour of tactical voting as long as the tactic is to vote Liberal Democrat", he added. A Conservative spokesperson said: The Liberal Democrats can talk all they like about strategy. The problem the Liberal Democrats face is that a large number of Lib Dem voters do not agree with their policies. ""We will be pointing out how they are soft on crime", how they support higher taxes," their opposition to controlled immigration and support for giving Europe more control over our lives"".

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, politics 417.txt Lib Dems unveil election slogan The Liberal Democrats will present themselves as ""the real alternative"" in the forthcoming general election campaign", Charles Kennedy has said. Unveiling the slogan at the party's spring conference," he said there was no ""glass ceiling"" to its ambitions. He told delegates that Labour had abused the public's trust and that the Tories had failed to oppose them. In response," the Conservatives insisted that theirs was the party that understood the ""forgotten majority"" . Speaking in Harrogate Mr Kennedy said: ""People want a credible", principled political party which offers a different vision of what Britain can be." Only the Liberal Democrats stood against the Iraq war", he said, and they had also provided strong opposition to the government's plans on ID cards," anti-terror m

easures and taxation. He said: ""If you voted Conservative in 2001 ... what good did it do you? Your vote was wasted. ""What people needed was ... a party which was listening to their concerns; a party which was prepared to stand up and say so; a party which said no to the prime minister." " Responding to the claims Tory Party co-chairman Liam Fox said: ""Like Labour", the Lib Dems are soft on crime, support higher taxes," oppose controlled immigration and support giving Europe more control over our lives." " Mr Kennedy also outlined his party's plan to impose a 50% income tax rate on earnings over £100",000 a year. The money would be used to help pay for key policies such as abolishing university tuition fees, scrapping council tax in favour of local income tax, and providing free care for the elderly, he said. Labour and the Tories claim the sums do not add up," and that working families would be hardest hit. Mr Kennedy said: ""Britain is the fourth-largest economy in the world. We have world class businesses and a world class workforce. ""So why are two million of our pensioners living below the poverty line?" " All the parties are campaigning hard for an expected election in May", although Prime Minister Tony Blair has not confirmed any timing. Earlier," Mr Kennedy told Radio 4's Today programme there was no possibility of forming a coalition with Labour in the event of a hung Parliament. ""We go into the election as an independent party and we come out as an independent party", " he said. Mr Kennedy has been under fire in recent days for missing Monday's Commons vote on the government's controversial anti-terrorism laws, along with 16 other Lib Dem MPs. On Saturday, the Lib Dem chief executive said it was just a cock-up" " that Mr Kennedy and his colleagues missed the vote", " which the government won by a majority of only 14. ""Nobody had any idea that was going to happen", " Lord Rennard told reporters at the party conference. He said he was certain MPs would get another chance to vote against the plans.

sport 001.txt Claxton hunting first major medal British hurdler Sarah Claxton is confident she can win her first major medal at next month's European Indoor Championships in Madrid. The 25-year-old has already smashed the British record over 60m hurdles twice this season, setting a new mark of 7.96 seconds to win the AAAs title. I am quite confident", " said Claxton. But I take each race as it comes. ""As long as I keep up my training but not do too much I think there is a chance of a medal." " Claxton has won the national 60m hurdles title for the past three years but has struggled to translate her domestic success to the international stage. Now", the Scotland-born athlete owns the equal fifth-fastest time in the world this year. And at last week's Birmingham Grand Prix, Claxton left European medal favourite Russian Irina Shevchenko trailing in sixth spot. For the first time, Claxton has only been preparing for a campaign over the hurdles - which could explain her leap in form. In previous seasons, the 25-year-old also contested the long jump but since moving from Colchester to London she has re-focused her attentions. Claxton will see if her new training regime pays dividends at the European Indoors which take place on 5-6 March.

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"sport 002.txt O'Sullivan could run in Worlds Sonia O'Sullivan has indicated that she would like to participate in next month's World Cross Country Championships in St Etienne. Athletics Ireland have hinted that the 35-year-old Cobh runner may be included in the official line-up for the event in France on 19-20 March. Provincial teams were selected after last Saturday's Nationals in Santry and will be officially announced this week. O'Sullivan is at present preparing for the London marathon on 17 April. The participation of O'Sullivan", currently training at her base in Australia, would boost the Ireland team who won the bronze three years ago. The first three at Santry last Sa

turday, Jolene Byrne, Maria McCambridge and Fionnualla Britton, are automatic selections and will most likely form part of the long-course team. O'Sullivan will also take part in the Bupa Great Ireland Run on 9 April in Dublin.

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"sport 003.txt Greene sets sights on world title Maurice Greene aims to wipe out the pain of losing his Olympic 100m title in Athens by winning a fourth World Championship crown this summer. He had to settle for bronze in Greece behind fellow American Justin Gatlin and Francis Obikwelu of Portugal. ""It really hurts to look at that medal. It was my mistake. I lost because of the things I did", said Greene, who races in Birmingham on Friday. It's never going to happen again. My goal - I'm going to win the worlds." Greene crossed the line just 0.02 seconds behind Gatlin", who won in 9.87 seconds in one of the closest and fastest sprints of all time. But Greene believes he lost the race and his title in the semi-finals. ""In my semi-final race", I should have won the race but I was conserving energy. ""That's when Francis Obikwelu came up and I took third because I didn't know he was there. ""I believe that's what put me in lane seven in the final and", while I was in lane seven, I couldn't feel anything in the race. ""I just felt like I was running all alone. ""I believe if I was in the middle of the race I would have been able to react to people that came ahead of me." Greene was also denied Olympic gold in the 4x100m men's relay when he could not catch Britain's Mark Lewis-Francis on the final leg. The Kansas star is set to go head-to-head with Lewis-Francis again at Friday's Norwich Union Grand Prix. The pair contest the 60m", the distance over which Greene currently holds the world record of 6.39 seconds. He then has another indoor meeting in France before resuming training for the outdoor season and the task of recapturing his world title in Helsinki in August. Greene believes Gatlin will again prove the biggest threat to his ambitions in Finland. But he also admits he faces more than one rival for the world crown. ""There's always someone else coming. I think when I was coming up I would say there was me and Ato (Boldon) in the young crowd", Greene said. Now you've got about five or six young guys coming up at the same time." "

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"sport 004.txt IAAF launches fight against drugs The IAAF - athletics' world governing body - has met anti-doping officials", coaches and athletes to co-ordinate the fight against drugs in sport. Two task forces have been set up to examine doping and nutrition issues. It was also agreed that a programme to ""de-mystify"" the issue to athletes", the public and the media was a priority. ""Nothing was decided to change things - it was more to have a forum of the stakeholders allowing them to express themselves", said an IAAF spokesman. Getting everyone together gave us a lot of food for thought." About 60 people attended Sunday's meeting in Monaco", including IAAF chief Lamine Diack and Namibian athlete Frankie Fredericks, now a member of the Athletes' Commission. ""I am very happy to see you all", members of the athletics family, respond positively to the IAAF call to sit together and discuss what more we can do in the fight against doping," said Diack. We are the leading Federation in this field and it is our duty to keep our sport clean." The two task forces will report back to the IAAF Council", at its April meeting in Qatar.

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"sport 005.txt Dibaba breaks 5",000m world record Ethiopia's Tirunesh Dibaba set a new world record in winning the women's 5",000m at the Boston Indoor Games. Dibaba won in 14 minutes 32.93 seconds to erase the pr

evious world indoor mark of 14:39.29 set by another Ethiopian, Berhane Adera, in Stuttgart last year. But compatriot Kenenisa Bekele's record hopes were dashed when he miscounted his laps in the men's 3,000m and staged his sprint finish a lap too soon. Ireland's Alistair Cragg won in 7:39.89 as Bekele battled to second in 7:41.42. "I didn't want to sit back and get out-kicked", said Cragg. So I kept on the pace. The plan was to go with 500m to go no matter what," but when Bekele made the mistake that was it. The race was mine." Sweden's Carolina Kluft", the Olympic heptathlon champion, and Slovenia's Jolanda Ceglak had winning performances, too. Kluft took the long jump at 6.63m, while Ceglak easily won the women's 800m in 2:01.52.

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"sport 006.txt Isinbayeva claims new world best Pole vaulter Yelena Isinbayeva broke her own indoor world record by clearing 4.89 metres in Lievin on Saturday. It was the Russian's 12th world record of her career and came just a few days after she cleared 4.88m at the Norwich Union Grand Prix in Birmingham. The Olympic champion went on to attempt 5.05m at the meeting on France but failed to clear that height. In the men's 60m", former Olympic 100m champion Maurice Greene could only finish second to Leonard Scott. It was Greene's second consecutive defeat at the hands of his fellow American," who also won in Birmingham last week. "I ran my race perfectly", said Scott, who won in 6.46secs, his best time indoors. I am happy even if I know that Maurice is a long way from being at his peak at the start of the season."

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"sport 007.txt O'Sullivan commits to Dublin race Sonia O'Sullivan will seek to regain her title at the Bupa Great Ireland Run on 9 April in Dublin. The 35-year-old was beaten into fourth at last year's event", having won it a year earlier. "I understand she's had a solid winter's training down in Australia after recovering from a minor injury", said race director Matthew Turnbull. Mark Carroll, Irish record holder at 3km, 5km and 10km, will make his debut in the mass participation 10km race. Carroll has stepped up his form in recent weeks and in late January scored an impressive 3,000m victory over leading American Alan Webb in Boston. Carroll will be facing stiff competition from Australian Craig Mottram, winner in Dublin for the last two years.

sport 008.txt Hansen 'delays return until 2006' British triple jumper Ashia Hansen has ruled out a comeback this year after a setback in her recovery from a bad knee injury, according to reports. Hansen, the Commonwealth and European champion, has been sidelined since the European Cup in Poland in June 2004. It was hoped she would be able to return this summer, but the wound from the injury has been very slow to heal. Her coach Aston Moore told the Times: We're not looking at any sooner than 2006", not as a triple jumper." Moore said Hansen may be able to return to sprinting and long jumping sooner", but there is no short-term prospect of her being involved again in her specialist event. "There was a problem with the wound healing and it set back her rehabilitation by about two months", but that has been solved and we can push ahead now," he said. The aim is for her to get fit as an athlete - then we will start looking at sprinting and the long jump as an introduction back to the competitive arena." Moore said he is confident Hansen can make it back to top-level competition", though it is unclear if that will be in time for the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne next March," when she will be 34. "It's been a frustrating time for her", but it has not fazed her determination," he added.

sport 009.txt Off-colour Gardener storms to win Britain's

Jason Gardener shook off an upset stomach to win the 60m at Sunday's Leipzig International meeting. Gardener clocked 6.56 seconds to equal the meeting record and finished well ahead of Germany's Marc Blume, who crossed the line in 6.67 secs. The world indoor champion said: I got to the airport and my stomach was upset and I was vomiting. I almost went home. ""I felt a little better Sunday morning but decided I'd only run in the main race. Then everything went perfectly." "Gardener", part of the Great Britain 4x100m quartet that won gold at the Athens Olympics," will now turn his attention to next weekend's Norwich Union European Indoor trials in Sheffield. ""Given I am still off-colour I know there is plenty more in the tank and I expect to get faster in the next few weeks", he said. It's just a case of chipping away as I have done in previous years and the results will come." "Scotland's Ian Mackie was also in action in Leipzig. He stepped down from his favoured 400m to 200m to finish third in 21.72 secs. Germany's Alexander Kosenkov won the race in 21.07 secs with Dutchman Patrick van Balkom second in 21.58 secs. There were plenty of other senior British athletes showing their indoor form over the weekend. Promising 60m hurdler clocked a new UK record of 7.98 seconds at a meeting in Norway. The 24-year-old reached the mark in her heat but had to settle for joint first place with former AAA champion Diane Allahgreen in the final. ", who broke onto the international scene at the Olympic Games last season, set an indoor personal best of 16.50m in the triple jump at a meeting in Ghent. That leap - 37cm short of Brazilian winner Jade Gregorio's effort - was good enough to qualify for the European Indoor Championships. At the same meeting, finished third in 7.27 seconds in a high-class women's 60m. The event was won by European medal favourite Christine Arron of France while Belgium rival Kim Gevaert was second. Britain's Joice Maduaka finished fifth in 7.35. Olympic bronze heptathlon medallist made a low-key return to action at an indoor meeting in Birmingham. The 28-year-old cleared 1.76m to win the high jump and threw 13.86m in the women's shot put.

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"sport 010.txt Collins to compete in Birmingham World and Commonwealth 100m champion Kim Collins will compete in the 60m at the Norwich Union Grand Prix in Birmingham on 18 February. The St Kitts and Nevis star joins British Olympic relay gold medallists Jason Gardener and Mark Lewis-Francis. Sydney Olympic 100m champion and world indoor record holder Maurice Greene and Athens Olympic 100m silver medallist Francis Obikwelu will also take part. Collins ran in Birmingham at the 2003 World Indoor Championships. ""I'm looking forward to competing against such a strong field", he said. I got a great reception from the crowd at the NIA when I won my 60m world indoor silver medal in 2003 and it will be really exciting to return to this venue." "The world champion says he's in good shape but he isn't underestimating the home competition. ""Jason Gardener and Mark Lewis-Francis are Olympic gold medallists now and I'm sure they'll be aiming to win in front of their home supporters. ""I'm looking forward to competing against Britain's best sprinters and I'm sure the 60 metres will be one of the most exciting races of the evening." "Collins was sixth in the Olympic final in Athens but is hoping for a better result at the World Championships in Finland this summer. ""This will be a big year for me and I plan to defend my 100m world title in Helsinki in August. Before then I want to perform well over 60m indoors and start my year in winning form." "

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"sport 011.txt Radcliffe yet to answer GB call Paula Radcliffe has been granted extra time to decide whether to compete in the World Cro

ss-Country Championships. The 31-year-old is concerned the event", which starts on 19 March in France," could upset her preparations for the London Marathon on 17 April. ""There is no question that Paula would be a huge asset to the GB team"," said Zara Hyde Peters of UK Athletics. But she is working out whether she can accommodate the worlds without too much compromise in her marathon training." Radcliffe must make a decision by Tuesday - the deadline for team nominations. British team member Hayley Yelling said the team would understand if Radcliffe opted out of the event. ""It would be fantastic to have Paula in the team"," said the European cross-country champion. But you have to remember that athletics is basically an individual sport and anything achieved for the team is a bonus. ""She is not messing us around. We all understand the problem."" Radcliffe was world cross-country champion in 2001 and 2002 but missed last year's event because of injury. In her absence", the GB team won bronze in Brussels.

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"sport 012.txt Edwards tips Idowu for Euro gold World outdoor triple jump record holder and BBC pundit Jonathan Edwards believes Phillip Idowu can take gold at the European Indoor Championships. Idowu landed 17.30m at the British trials in Sheffield last month to lead the world triple jump rankings. ""It's all down to him", but if he jumps as well as he did in Sheffield he could win the gold medal," said Edwards. His ability is undoubtedly his best performances seem to happen in domestic meetings."" Idowu made his breakthrough five years ago but so far has only a Commonwealth silver medal to his name. Edwards himself kept Idowu off top spot at the Manchester Games. But he believes the European Indoors in Madrid represent a chance for the 26-year-old to prove his credentials as Britain's top triple jumper. ""He has to start producing at international level and here is the beginning",, said Edwards. Phillip still needs to be much more consistent. I'm sure a victory in Madrid will build up his confidence and self-belief that he can be best in the world." The qualifying round of the men's triple jump in Madrid takes place on Friday with the final scheduled for Saturday. Olympic champion Christian Olsson will not be taking part as he is out for the entire indoor season with an ankle injury.

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''' "sport 013.txt Kenya lift Chepkemei's suspension Kenya's athletics body has reversed a ban on marathon runner Susan Chepkemei after she made an official apology. Athletics Kenya (AK) had suspended the two-time London Marathon runner-up for failing to turn up to a cross-country team training camp in Embu. ""We have withdrawn the ban. Chepkemei has given a reason for her absence",, said AK chief Isaiah Kiplagat. She explained she had a contract with the organisers of the race in Puerto Rico and we have accepted her apology." The Kenyan coaching team will now decide whether Chepkemei can be included in the team for this month's world cross country championships. The 29-year-old would be a strong contender at the event in France and is hopeful she will be granted a place in the 32-strong squad. ""I am satisfied that the whole saga has been brought to an end",, Chepkemei said. I am ready and prepared to represent my country. ""I will be disappointed if I am not given a chance to compete at the world cross country championships." AK had insisted it was making an example of Chepkemei by banning her from competition until the end of 2005. But the organisation came under intense international and domestic pressure to reverse its decision. The 29-year-old took part in the 2002 and 2003 London Marathons and was edged out by Radcliffe in an epic New York Marathon contest last year. The two-time world half-marathon silver medallist will be back to challenge Radclif

fe at this year's London event in April. AK also dropped its harsh stance on the three-time world cross country 4km champion Edith Masai. Masai missed Kenya's world cross country trials because of an ankle problem but AK insisted it would take disciplinary action unless she could prove she was really injured. ""Subject to our doctor's confirmation", we have decided to clear Masai," added Kiplagat.

sport 014.txt McIlroy aiming for Madrid title Northern Ireland man James McIlroy is confident he can win his first major title at this weekend's Spar European Indoor Championships in Madrid. The 28-year-old has been in great form in recent weeks and will go in as one of the 800 metres favourites. I believe after my wins abroad and in our trial race in Sheffield", I can run my race from the front, back or middle, said McIlroy. New coach Tony Lester has helped get McIlroy's career back on track. The 28-year-old 800 metres runner has not always matched his promise with performances but believes his decision to change coaches and move base will bring the rewards. McIlroy now lives in Windsor and feels his career has been transformed by the no-nonsense leadership style of former Army sergeant Lester. Lester is better known for his work with 400m runners Roger Black and Mark Richardson in the past but under his guidance McIlroy has secured five wins this indoor season. McIlroy now claims he is in his best shape since finishing fourth for Ireland at the outdoor European Championships in 1998. That was my last decent year," said McIlroy, who temporarily retired last August before returning to the sport under Lester's shrewd guidance. Before", " every race was like trying to climb Mount Everest and I now know you can't do it on your own. ""Trying to succeed saw me sometimes standing half-dead and terrified on the starting line", " which became a bit too much." McIlroy", who was compared to the likes of Sebastian Coe, Steve Cram and Steve Ovett in his younger days, is now competing without the benefit of National Lottery funding. That situation could change if he maintains his current form and repeats the world-class times he produced in the 800m and 1000m at major races in Erfurt and Stuttgart earlier this season. Russian Dmitriy Bogdanov won at the same Madrid venue last week and then claimed the European Championship race would be between himself," Dutchman Arnoud Okken and Antonio Reina of Spain but McIlroy is unfazed. He admitted: ""He looked quite good in his win and fair enough everyone has the right to their own opinion. ""I never write myself off and let's face it", " I haven't or looked like being beaten this season." And McIlroy", whose time of one minute 46.68seconds in Erfurt elevated him to sixth place on the UK All-Time list," is also already looking beyond Madrid. He said: ""I've been much more focused this year about my career and having such a good team around me has been very important. ""Ultimately of course", " this weekend is a means to an end and that is getting prepared for the summer's world championships. ""That ambition has meant that I've had only two nights out since last August. The rest of my time has seen me just concentrating on rebuilding my career." "

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sport 015.txt UK Athletics agrees new kit deal UK Athletics has agreed a new deal with adidas to supply Great Britain squads of all ages with their kit for the next four years. The German-based firm kitted out Team GB at the 2004 Olympics and has deals with 20 other national Olympic bodies. UK Athletics chief David Moorcroft said: ""The Athens experience can now be extended to more major championships. ""In the year ahead these include the European indoor and World outdoor championships. We are delighted." Moorcroft added: ""It is hugely beneficial to the sport that the adidas commitment will also provide for officials and other personnel at our world-class series of live televised events." This week", UK Athletics also agreed a four-year deal with energy drink company, Red Bull, who will be supplying the product to athletics at major

r domestic meetings and in high performance centres.

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," sport 016.txt Verdict delay for Greek sprinters Greek athletics' governing body has postponed by two weeks the judgement on sprinters Costas Kenteris and Katerina Thanou for missing doping tests. The pair are facing lengthy bans for the missed tests", including one on the eve of last year's Athens Olympics. They were set to learn their fate by the end of February," but late evidence from them has pushed the date back. ""A decision is now expected by around mid-March",," said one of their lawyers, Michalis Dimitrakopoulos. Kenteris, 31, who won the men's 200m title at the 2000 Sydney Games and Thanou, 30, who won the women's 100m silver medal in Sydney, face a maximum two-year ban if found guilty. The athletes, who spectacularly withdrew from the Athens Olympics, have been suspended by the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) for missing the three tests. The IAAF said the sprinters had failed to provide samples for tests in Tel Aviv, Chicago and Athens and ordered Greek athletic's governing body, Segas, to hold a disciplinary inquiry. The athletes also face a criminal hearing in Greece over the missed drugs tests and have been charged with faking a motorcycle accident on the day of the Athens test, which led to them spending four days in hospital. Following the final hearing in late January, the athletes sounded confident they would be acquitted. I am confident and optimistic",," Thanou had said at the time. We presented new evidence to the committee that they were not aware of." It was not clear what this new evidence was.

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," sport 017.txt Call for Kenteris to be cleared Kostas Kenteris' lawyer has called for the doping charges against the Greek sprinter to be dropped. Gregory Ioannidis has submitted new evidence to a Greek athletics tribunal which he claims proves the former Olympic champion has no case to answer. Kenteris and compatriot Katerina Thanou were given provisional suspensions in December for failing to take drugs tests before the Athens Olympics. The Greek tribunal is expected to give its verdict early next week. Kenteris and Thanou withdrew from the Athens Olympics last August after missing drugs tests on the eve of the opening ceremony. They were also alleged to have avoided tests in Tel Aviv and Chicago before the Games. But Ioannidis said: ""Everything overwhelmingly shows that the charges should be dropped." Ioannidis also said he has presented evidence that will throw a different light on the events leading up to the pair's sensational withdrawal from the Athens Games. The lawyer added that he has proof the authorities ""knew"" Kenteris was in Germany at the time he was alleged to have missed a test in Chicago. Nick Davies", spokesman for athletics' ruling body the IAAF, which handed out the provisional bans," said: ""We can't comment because we were not present at the hearing and don't know what was said behind closed doors. ""We expect a verdict from the Greek Athletics Federation before the end of February and will obviously be making a statement then." Kenteris won 200m gold at the 2000 Sydney Olympics", while Thanou won silver in the 100m.

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," sport 018.txt Merritt close to indoor 400m mark Teenager LaShawn Merritt ran the third fastest indoor 400m of all time at the Fayettevil

le Invitational meeting. The world junior champion clocked 44.93 seconds to finish well clear of fellow American Bershawn Jackson in Arkansas. Only Michael Johnson has gone quicker", setting the world record of 44.63secs in 1995 and running 44.66secs in 1996. Kenyan Bernard Lagat missed out on the world record by 1.45secs as he ran the third quickest indoor mile ever to beat Canada's Nate Brannen by almost 10secs. The Olympic silver medallist's time of three minutes 4 9.89secs was inferior only to the 1997 world record of Moroccan Hicham El Guerrouj and former world record holder Eamonn Coghlan of Ireland's 3:49.78. Lagat was on course to break El Guerrouj's record through 1200m but could not maintain the pace over the final 400m. Ireland's continued his excellent form by winning a tight 3,000m in 7:40.53. Cragg, who recently defeated Olympic 10,000m champion Kenenisa Bekele in Boston, held off Bekele's Ethiopian colleague Markos Geneti by only 0.19secs to secure his victory. Mark Carroll, who will join Cragg in the European Indoor Championships next month, finished a solid third in 7:46.78. Olympic 200m gold medallist of Jamaica ran the fastest women's 60m in the world this year as she equalled her personal best of 7.09secs. World indoor 60m hurdles champion also won, improving his season-leading time to 7.51secs.

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"sport 019.txt London hope over Chepkemei London Marathon  
organisers are hoping that banned athlete Susan Chepkemei will still take part in this year's race on 17 April. Chepkemei was suspended from all competition until the end of the year by Athletics Kenya after failing to report to a national training camp. "We are watching it closely"," said London race director David Bedford. There is a long way to go before the race and we are hoping the situation will be satisfactorily resolved." The camp in Embu was to prepare for the IAAF World Cross Country Championships later this month. Chepkemei however took part and finished third in last Sunday's world best 10K race in Puerto Rico. The 29-year-old has finished second to Paula Radcliffe in the 2002 and 2003 London races as well as in November's New York City marathon.

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/// "sport 020.txt Edwards tips Idowu for Euro gold World outdoor triple jump record holder and BBC pundit Jonathan Edwards believes Phillip Idowu can take gold at the European Indoor Championships. Idowu landed 17.30m at the British trials in Sheffield last month to lead the world triple jump rankings. "It's all down to him", but if he jumps as well as he did in Sheffield he could win the gold medal," said Edwards. His ability is undoubted but all his best performances seem to happen in domestic meetings." Idowu made his breakthrough five years ago but so far has only a Commonwealth silver medal to his name. Edwards himself kept Idowu off top spot at the Manchester Games. But he believes the European Indoors in Madrid represent a chance for the 26-year-old to prove his credentials as Britain's top triple jumper. "He has to start producing at international level and here is the beginning"," said Edwards. Phillip still needs to be much more consistent. I'm sure a victory in Madrid will build up his confidence and self-belief that he can be best in the world." The qualifying round of the men's triple jump in Madrid takes place on Friday with the final scheduled for Saturday. Olympic champion Christian Olsson will not be taking part as he is out for the entire indoor season with an ankle injury.

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/// "sport 021.txt Chepkemei hit by big ban Kenya's athletics

body has suspended two-time London Marathon runner-up Susan Chepkemei from all competition until the end of the year. Athletics Kenya (AK) issued the ban after Chepkemei failed to turn up for a cross country training camp in Embu. ""We have banned her from all local and international competitions",," said AK chief Isaiah Kiplagat. We shall communicate this decision to the IAAF and all meet directors all over the world." "The 29-year-old finished second to Paula Radcliffe in the 2002 and 2003 London races", and was also edged out in an epic New York Marathon contest last year. But the ban will prevent the two-time world half-marathon silver medallist from challenging Radcliffe at this year's London event in April. Global Sports Communications, Chepkemei's management company," said she had wanted to run in the World Cross Country Championships in March. But AK maintained it was making an example of Chepkemei as a warning to other Kenyan athletes. ""We are taking this action in order to salvage our pride",," said Kiplagat. We have been accused of having no teeth to bite with and that agents are ruling over us." KA has also threatened three-time women's short-course champion Edith Masai with a similar ban if reports that she feigned injury to avoid running at the cross country world championships are true. Masai missed the national trials in early February", but was included in the provisional team on the proviso that she ran in a regional competition. She failed to run in the event, citing a leg injury.

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"sport 022.txt Holmes secures comeback victory Britain's Kelly Holmes marked her first appearance on home soil since winning double Olympic gold with 1500m victory at the Norwich Union International. Holmes hit the front just before the bell in front of a sell-out crowd in Glasgow and cruised to victory in a time of four minutes 14.74 seconds. ""It was nice to get that out of the way. I was nervous about whether I would actually be able to get round. ""I felt good. I just had to relax and use my racing knowledge",," said Holmes. It was all about winning in front of my home crowd. The time is irrelevant. ""I got round in one piece and didn't disgrace myself. Now it's about going forward. ""The reception I've had since the Olympics has been amazing and that's why I wanted to keep running this year",," because I get a buzz from the crowd." Holmes ran a tactically perfect race to finish clear of France's Hind Dehiba and Russia's Svetlana Cherkasova. The Olympic 800m and 1500m champion's time was inside the qualifying mark for the European Indoor Championships in Madrid in March. But the 34-year-old would not reveal whether she intended to run or not", having previously indicated she would leave a decision until after the Birmingham Grand Prix on 18 February.

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"sport 023.txt Greek pair attend drugs hearing Greek sprinters Kostas Kenteris and Katerina Thanou have appeared before an independent tribunal which will decide if their bans should stand. They were given provisional suspensions by athletics' ruling body the IAAF in December for failing to take drugs tests before the Athens Olympics. The pair arrived with former coach Christos Tzekos to give evidence at the Hellenic Olympic Committee's offices. A decision is expected to be announced before the end of February. Whatever the ruling", all parties will have the right to appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport. Yiannis Papadogiannakis, who was head of the Greek Olympic team at the Athens Games last year, also testified at the tribunal," along with other Greek sports officials and athletes. ""I believe the tribunal will reach a decision that will uphold the standing of the institution", said Papadogiannakis. What

ever the athletes have done," we must not forget that they have offered us great moments." "Kenteris won 200m gold at the 2000 Sydney Olympics", while Thanou won silver in the 100m. They withdrew from the Athens Games last August after missing drugs tests on the eve of the opening ceremony. The pair spent four days in a hospital, claiming they had been injured in a motorcycle crash. The five-member tribunal, assembled by the Hellenic Association of Amateur Athletics, is also examining allegations that Kenteris and Thanou avoided tests in Tel Aviv and Chicago before the Games. Tzekos was also banned for two years by the IAAF. He faces charges of assisting in the use of prohibited substances and tampering with the doping inspection process. All three, who have repeatedly denied the allegations, have also been charged by a Greek prosecutor and face trial for doping-related charges. A trial date has not been set. In imposing two-year suspensions on the duo on 22 December," the IAAF described their explanations for missing the tests as ""unacceptable"". But Kenteris' lawyer Gregory Ioannidis told BBC Sport earlier this week he was confident the sprinters would be cleared of the charges of failing to give information on their location and refusing to submit to testing. ""We refute both charges as unsubstantiated and illogical", he said. There have been certain breaches in the correct application of the rules on behalf of the sporting authorities and their officials," and these procedural breaches have also violated my client's rights. ""There is also evidence that proves the fact that my client has been persecuted.""

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"sport 024.txt Chepkemei joins Edinburgh line-up Susan Chepkemei has decided she is fit enough to run in next month's Great Edinburgh International Cross Country. The Kenyan was initially unsure if she would have recovered from her gruelling tussle with Paula Radcliffe in the New York Marathon in time to compete. But she has declared herself up to the task and joins a field headed by World cross country champion Benita Johnson. Race director Matthew Turnbull said: ""Susan will add even more strength in depth to the world-class line up." "Chepkemei", who won the six kilometre event three years ago when it was staged in Newcastle, endured an epic battle with Radcliffe in the Big Apple until the Briton outsprinted her in the final 400m. Tirunesh Dibaba of Ethiopia will defend the title she won last year in Tyneside - before the race was moved north of the border. Recently-crowned European cross country champion Briton Hayley Yelling also competes in Edinburgh on 15 January, as does in-form Scot Kathy Butler.

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"sport 025.txt El Guerrouj targets cross country Double Olympic champion Hicham El Guerrouj is set to make a rare appearance at the World Cross Country Championships in France. But the Moroccan", who has not raced over cross country for 15 years," will not decide until two weeks before the event which starts on 19 March. ""If I am to compete in it", it is only if I feel I can win," said the 30-year-old, who is retiring in 2006. Otherwise there is not much point in me going." "El Guerrouj achieved a lifetime ambition last August when he clinched his first Olympic titles over 1500m and 5",000m. But the four-time world 1500m champion is still hungry for more success before calling time on his career. The 30-year-old has set his sights on clinching the world 5,000m crown in Helsinki this summer. And he is aiming to break 10,000m Olympic champion Kenenisa Bekele's 5,000m and 10,"000m world records. El Guerrouj could meet Bekele in March as the Ethiopian is the defending world cross country champion over both the long and short courses. But the Moroccan will not commit him

self to the St Galmier event until he assesses how well his winter training is going. ""The return to training was very difficult because I accepted a lot of invitations these past few months", " said El Guerrouj. I am almost a month behind but I am on the right track.""- Britain's Paula Radcliffe has also not ruled out competing in the World Cross Country Championships. ""I haven't quite decided what events I will compete in prior to London but the World Cross Country is an event which is also special to me and is a definite possibility", " said the two-time champion.

sport 026.txt Collins appeals against drugs ban Sprinter Michelle Collins has lodged an appeal against her eight-year doping ban with the North American Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS). The 33-year-old received the ban last month as a result of her connection to the federal inquiry into the Balco doping scandal. She is the first athlete to be banned without a positive drugs test or an admission of drugs use. CAS has said that a ruling is normally given within four months of an appeal. Collins was suspended by the US Anti-Doping Agency based on patterns observed in her blood and urine tests as well as evidence in the Balco investigation. As well as being hit with the ban, Collins was stripped of her 2003 world and US indoor 200m titles. The San Francisco-based Balco laboratory is at the centre of the scandal which has rocked the sport. The company has been accused of distributing illegal performance-enhancing drugs to elite athletes.

sport 027.txt Holmes feted with further honour Double Olympic champion Kelly Holmes has been voted European Athletics (EAA) woman athlete of 2004 in the governing body's annual poll. The Briton, made a dame in the New Year Honours List for taking 800m and 1,500m gold, won vital votes from the public, press and EAA member federations. She is only the second British woman to land the title after- Sally Gunnell won for her world 400m hurdles win in 1993. Swedish triple jumper Christian Olsson was voted male athlete of the year. The accolade is the latest in a long list of awards that Holmes has received since her success in Athens. In addition to becoming a dame, she was also named the BBC Sports Personality of the Year in December. Her gutsy victory in the 800m also earned her the International Association of Athletics Federations' award for the best women's performance in the world for 2004. And she scooped two awards at the British Athletics Writers' Association annual dinner in October.

sport 028.txt Campbell to extend sprint career Darren Campbell has set his sights on running quicker than ever after deciding not to retire from sprinting. Campbell, who won Olympic 4x100m relay gold, had been unsure about his future. But he told Five Live's Sportsweek: I had to get back into training before I could decide because if I didn't have the same hunger I'd have to walk away. ""I've started back and I'm thoroughly enjoying it. I'm looking forward to it. I've got to run under 10 seconds (for 100m) and under 20 seconds (for 200m)." Campbell was part of the British quartet who shocked the Americans to win relay gold in Athens in August. The Newport-based athlete and team-mates Jason Gardener", Marlon Devonish and Mark Lewis-Francis were rewarded with MBEs in the New Year Honours List. Campbell's relay triumph made up for his disappointing displays in the individual 100m and 200m events in Athens, when he failed to reach the finals. The 31-year-old, who won Olympic 200m silver in Sydney in 2000, said during the Games that a hamstring injury had stopped him from running at his best. He was criticised at the time by former Olympic champion Michael Johnson," who cast doubt on Campbell's injury claims. ""To go to Athens and finally get the gold I've been trying to get for 24 years was a big relief", " said Campbell. It was a chance for me to prove that if I'd been fit I would have been challenging for the (individual) medals. ""Every season I go and challenge for the medals so why would last season have been any different? ""It's

just unfortunate that I picked up that injury just before the Olympics." " Campbell set his 100m personal best of 10.04secs when he won the European title in Budapest in 1998. And he ran 20.13secs in the quarter-finals of the 200m in Sydney on the way to Olympic silver.

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"sport 029.txt Isinbayeva heads for Birmingham Olympic pole vault champion Yelena Isinbayeva has confirmed she will take part in the 2005 Norwich Union Grand Prix in Birmingham on 18 February. ""Everybody knows how much I enjoy competing in Britain. I always seem to break records there", said Isinbayeva. As Olympic champion there will be more attention on me this year," but hopefully I can respond with another record in Birmingham." "Kelly Holmes and Carolina Kluft are among other Athens winners competing. The organisers are hoping that Isinbayeva's main rival", fellow Russian Svetlana Feofanova, will also take part in the event. The pair had a thrilling battle in Athens which ended with Isinbayeva finally jumping a world record of 4.91m to claim the gold medal. Isinbayeva, 22, has set 10 world records in the pole vault, three of which have come on British soil.

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"sport 030.txt 2004: An Irish Athletics Year 2004 won't be remembered as one of Irish athletics' great years. The year began with that optimism which invariably and unaccountably", seems to herald an upcoming Olympiad. But come late August, a few hot days in the magnificent stadium in Athens told us of the true strength of Irish athletics - or to be more accurate, the lack of it. Sonia O'Sullivan's Olympic farewell apart, there was little to stir the emotions of Irish athletics watchers. But after the disastrous build-up to the games, we shouldn't have been surprised. At the start of the year, an O'Sullivan had been earmarked as Ireland's best medal prospect but as it turned out, walker Gillian never even made it to the start line because of injury. Less than a week before the Olympics, the sport was rocked by news that 10,000m hope Cathal Lombard had tested for the banned substance EPO. Lombard's shattering of Mark Carroll's national 10,000m record in April had already set tongues wagging but even the most cynical of observers, were surprised when he was rumbled after an Irish Sports Council sting operation. The Corkman quickly held his hands up in admission and was promptly handed a two-year ban from the sport. Back at pre-Olympic ranch in Greece, it must have seemed that things couldn't have got any worse but they very nearly did with walker Jamie Costin lucky to escape with his life after being involved in a car crash near Athens. Once the track and field action began in Athens, a familiar pattern of underachievement emerged although Alistair Cragg's performance in being the only athlete from a European nation to qualify for the 5,000m final did offer hope for the future. Our beloved Sonia scraped into the women's 5K final as a fastest loser and for a couple of days, the country attempted to delude itself into believing that she might be in the medal shake-up. As it happened, she went out the back door early in the final although there was nothing undignified about the way that she insisted on finishing the race over a minute behind winner Meseret Defar. It later transpired that Sonia had been suffering from a stomach bug in the 48 hours before the final although typically, the Cobhwoman played down the effects of the illness. Amazingly, she was back in action a couple of weeks later when beating a world-class field at the Flora Lite 5K road race in London and while her major championship days may be over, it's unlikely that we have seen the last of her in competition. At least Sonia managed to make it to Athens. At the start of the year, several Northern Ireland athletes had genuine hopes of qualifying for the Ga

mes but come August, an out-of-form and injured Paul Brizzel was the lone stand ard bearer for the province. The Ballymena man gave it a lash but his achilles problem, and a bad lane draw, meant a time of 21.00 and an early exit. James M cIlroy, Gareth Turnbull, Zoe Brown and Paul McKee all had to be content with wa tching the Athens action on their television screens. 800m hope McIlroy never g ot near his best during the summer and a fourth place in the British trials eff ectively ended his hopes of making the plane. The injury-plagued Turnbull gamel y travelled round Europe in search of the 1500m qualifying mark but 3:39 was th e best he could achieve, after missing several months training during the previ ous winter. A lingering hamstring probem and a virus wrecked McKee's Athens amb itions and both he and Turnbull deserve a slice of better fortune in 2005. Pole vaulter Brown had hoped for a vote of confidence from the British selectors aft er she had achieved the Athens B standard but the call never came. As the summe r ended, stalwarts Catherina McKiernan and Dermot Donnelly hung up their compet itive spikes. McKiernan had to candidly acknowledge that time had crept up on h er after several injury-ravaged years. Donnelly and his Annadale Striders team mates later suffered tragedy when their friend and clubman Andy Campbell was fo und dead at his home on 18 December. A large turnout of athletics-loving folk t urned out in west Belfast to offer their respects to the Campbell family and An dy's many friends. As only death can, it put the year's athletics happenings in a sharp perspective.

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"sport 031.txt Sprinter Walker quits athletics Former Eur opean 200m champion Dougie Walker is to retire from athletics after a series of six operations left him struggling for fitness. Walker had hoped to compete in the New Year Sprint which is staged at Musselburgh Racecourse near Edinburgh on Tuesday and Wednesday. The 31-year-old Scot was suspended for two years in 1998 after testing positive for nandrolone. ""I had intended to race but I'm running like a goon", said Walker. He told the Herald newspaper: I'm not in great shap e," after missing about a month of training. ""I missed a big chunk of speed wo rk over about three weeks",, and then another week working in America. ""If I'd had a half-decent mark it might have motivated me more",, but I won't be racin g. ""I still enjoy training", but feel it's time to move on," and concentrate o n a career.""

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"sport 032.txt Bekele sets sights on world mark Olympic 1 0",000m champion Kenenisa Bekele is determined to add the world indoor two mile record at February's Norwich Union Grand Prix in Birmingham. The 22-year-old w ill again be chasing a record held by his compatriot and mentor Haile Gebrselas sie," who set the mark at the same meeting in 2003. ""I am still as hungry to d o as much as I can in this sport",, said Bekele. And aiming for the two mile wo rld record in Birmingham is the next of those targets.// Gebrselassie's current record stands at eight minutes", 04.69 seconds. And Bekele is no stranger to ov erhauling world marks at the National Indoor Arena. The Ethiopian broke the wor ld indoor 5,000m record on his debut at the meeting last year. Compatriots Mulu geta Wondimu, Abiyote Abate and Markos Geneti, the world indoor bronze medallis t over 3000m, will race against Bekele on 18 February. The meet has already att racted a crop of Olympic talent. Britain's 800m and 1500m champion Kelly Holmes is taking part in the 1000m. Swedish heptathlon gold medallist Carolina Kluft w ill contest the 60m hurdles. While men's 4x100m relay gold medallists Jason Gar ener and Mark Lewis-Francis will go head-to-head in the 60m.

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"sport 033.txt Greek sprinters suspended by IAAF Greek sprinters Kostas Kenteris and Katerina Thanou have been suspended after failing to take drugs tests before the Athens Olympics. Athletics' ruling body the IAAF said explanations from the pair and their former coach as to why they missed the tests were ""unacceptable"". It added that Kenteris and Thanou had been ""provisionally suspended pending the resolution of their cases"". They face two-year bans if found guilty by the Greek Athletics Federation. The suspension also covers the athletes' controversial coach", Christos Tzekos. Kenteris, the 2000 Olympic 200m champion, and Thanou, the women's 100m silver medallist from the same Games in Sydney, also face a criminal hearing in Greece over the missed tests. They failed to appear to give samples in Chicago and Tel Aviv shortly before the Athens Games and again in Athens on 12 August," the eve of the opening ceremony. Greek prosecutors have also charged them with faking a midnight motorcycle crash which led to them spending four days in hospital. Some medical staff have been charged with writing false medical reports. Wednesday's statement said the Greek Federation (SEGAS) would convene a disciplinary hearing for the trio to determine whether there had been doping violations. ""There will be a final right of appeal from the decision of the Greek Federation to the Court of Arbitration for Sport", the IAAF said. Tzekos insisted he and the runners had nothing to hide. The IAAF's decision means nothing," he said. We'll be presenting all our arguments to SEGAS - we're innocent.""  
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"sport 034.txt Athens memories soar above lows Well", it's goodbye to another Olympic year and as usual there were plenty of highs and lows in Athens. Obviously," there's no getting away from the differing fortunes of Kelly Holmes and Paula Radcliffe. But I want to remind you of a few more events that made 2004 another year to remember - or forget - for athletics. One of my favourite Olympic moments was Kelly's success in the 800m. Winning that race was the key to her success because if she won that then the 1500m would be a bit of a formality. Kelly had been full of ""should I", "shouldn't I?"" thoughts about going for the double in Athens. I thought why wouldn't you do the 800m", it's your best event? It was such good fun to commentate on her 1500m and it was nice to be able to be part of her Athens story. The victory for the British men's 4x100m relay team was a bit of a surprise but a great climax to the Games. I think the four of them - Jason Gardener, Darren Campbell, Marlon Devonish and Mark Lewis-Francis - knew deep down that it was their best chance of a medal. The lads had run poorly in the individual sprints so maybe they did lift their game when they knew something was really at stake. Hicham El Guerrouj's Olympic double is a much bigger achievement than Kelly's on a global scale. He was the first man since for 80 years to win both the 1500m and 5,000m titles. As soon as he had added the 5,000m crown and I had finished commenting, I jumped up, ran down the stairs, pushed everyone out the way and just gave him a big hug. He is one of the few African runners who has embraced the tradition of the mile and he loves to hear all the Roger Bannister stories. Hicham is someone I enjoy having a bit of time with, even though my French and his English are not very good. What happened to Paula in Athens this year is the obvious low on a personal level and for the expectations of the nation as well. There were a set of circumstances around Athens that conspired to produce a very dramatic ending which I think has been greatly misunderstood. Dropping out of the marathon was the right thing to do but starting in the 10,000m five days later was not wise. That was her heart and not her head reacting. Paula had a lot of little things going wrong in her preparation and on the day. Things like ni

gling injuries, not being able to do all her running sessions and feeling the pressure of the race looming ahead of her. I think she came to the start line in Athens physically and emotionally drained. And if even the smallest thing doesn't feel right when you are preparing to race a marathon, 10 miles down the road it will hit you like a brick wall. The positive thing to take from Paula's Olympics is that she will have learned a lot from it and so will a lot of people - including me. Purely as a race, Paula's victory in the New York Marathon has to go down as one of the most thrilling. It was so nip-and-tuck between her and Kenya's Susan Chepkemei and you don't usually get that kind of excitement in marathons. It was also a real delight for all athletics fans because, to use one of my favourite words, "Paula showed real ""bouncebackability"". And it was a bit of a rarity for me too because I genuinely did not have an inkling how the race was going to pan out. Kelly and the 4x100m boys' victories papered over the cracks in the general performance of the British team. We should be concerned that we're not producing enough people who are capable of reaching finals at senior level. The only individual men's finalist on the track was Michael East in the 1500m. I am beginning to look down and wonder where are the new breed? And that's where things begin to look even gloomier for British athletics as we did not win any medals at the world junior championships in Italy. Danielle Barnes came fourth in the 1500m and she was the highest finisher for Team GB. The thing is if we don't have athletes getting into the finals at junior level then it really doesn't look good for the Beijing Olympics and beyond. I tell you what I really enjoyed this year", Benita Johnson winning the world cross country championships back in March. In the absence of Paula, we tend to think of the event as something of an African preserve. So to have an Australian come up and deliver such a surprise was something special. To be honest, I'm getting bored with all the drug scandals, especially Balco. I just wish the whole thing would come to a head so we can move on. Having said that, I'm always pleased when drugs cheats are caught because it shows the sport is standing up to it and not turning a blind eye anymore. And one of the positive things to come out of Balco is people are starting to blow the whistle. We need more people to come forward and help the authorities kick out the cheats. As regards the case against Greek sprinters Kostas Kenteris and Katerina Thanou, well suspicions have been hanging over Kenteris for a while. The bottom line is we cannot keep letting drugs damage the sport because if we do then it stops everyone enjoying it.

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"sport 035.txt Collins banned in landmark case Sprinter Michelle Collins has received an eight-year ban for doping offences after a hearing at the North American Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS). America's former world indoor 200m champion is the first athlete to be suspended without a positive drugs test or an admission of drugs use. Collins' ban is a result of her connection to the federal inquiry into the Balco doping scandal. The 33-year-old was found guilty of using performance-enhancing drugs. The US Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) decided to press charges against Collins in the summer. The sprinter has consistently protested her innocence but the CAS has upheld USADA's findings. ""The USADA has proved", beyond a reasonable doubt, that Collins took EPO, the testosterone/epitestosterone cream and THG," said a CAS statement. Collins used these substances to enhance her performance and elude the drug testing that was available at the time." So far a total of 13 athletes have been sanctioned for violations involving drugs associated with the Balco doping scandal. World record holder Tim Montgomery is also facing a lifetime ban after being charged by the USADA. His hearing before the CSA has been rescheduled for June next year. Drug enforcement chiefs in the US have vowed to crack down on cheats. US

ADA chief executive officer Terry Madden said the action taken against Collins was further proof of that. ""The CAS panel's decision confirms that those who violate the rules will be sanctioned as part of USADA's ongoing efforts to protect the rights of the overwhelming majority of US athletes that compete drug-free,"" said Madden. The USADA has built its cases on verbal evidence given to the federal investigation into Balco rather than test results. The San Francisco-based Balco laboratory faces steroid distribution and money laundering charges. The trial is expected to open next March.

sport 036.txt Jones doping probe begins An investigation into doping claims against Marion Jones has been opened by the International Olympic Committee. IOC president Jacques Rogge has set up a disciplinary body to look into claims by Victor Conte, of Balco Laboratories. Jones, who says she is innocent, could lose all her Olympic medals after Conte said he gave her performance-enhancing drugs before the Sydney Olympics. But Rogge said it was too early to speculate about that, hoping only that the truth will emerge"". Any decision on the medals would be taken by the IOC's executive board and could hinge on interpretation of a rule stating that Olympic decisions can only be challenged within three years of the Games closing. The Sydney Olympics ended more than four years ago", but World Anti-Doping Agency chief Dick Pound said the rule may not apply because the allegations are only coming out now. ""We will find a way to deal with that", Pound said. In a statement released through her attorney Rich Nichols, Jones repeated her innocence and vowed she would be cleared. Victor Conte's allegations are not true and the truth will be revealed for the world to see as the legal process moves forward", she said. Conte is someone who is under federal indictment and has a record of issuing contradictory," inconsistent statements."

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sport 037.txt Johnson accuses British sprinters Former Olympic champion Michael Johnson has accused Britain's top sprinters of lacking pride and ambition. ""At the moment", the biggest factor on the mind of British sprinters is to be number one in Britain," the world 200m and 400m record holder told Five Live. Athletics at the moment is all about international competitions and they need to show a little more pride."" However", Linford Christie countered: ""It's easy to criticise when you haven't gone through the system here." Johnson was involved in a verbal spat with Britain's Darren Campbell earlier this year. The American had cast doubt on Campbell's claims he had torn a hamstring in the wake of his failure to reach the Olympic 100m and 200m finals. And the American remains highly critical of aspects of British sprinting. ""The only time you see British sprinters getting upset or riled is when there is a debate as to which one is better than the other", he claimed. Athletes here have to compete more outside the UK. Their focus has to be on being the best in the world and not just on being the top British sprinter."" Speaking at an elite coaches' conference in Birmingham", Johnson also argued that although there has been more investment in the sport in Britain," it had not necessarily reaped the rewards. ""You can't fix everything with money", he admitted. You contrast the situation here to that of some US athletes who have no funding. ""Those who aren't funded might be hungrier and more motivated because their road to success is a lot more difficult and challenging. ""So when they get to the top they are more appreciative.""

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sport 038.txt Radcliffe proves doubters wrong This won't go down as one of the greatest marathons of Paula's career. But as a test of ch

aracter", it was the toughest race she's ever taken part in. A win in the New York marathon doesn't make up for the disappointment of Athens in any shape or form, but it will offer hope and reassurance for next year. If Paula's last experience of the year had been Athens, it would have been very difficult to look forward with any optimism. She can now draw a line under this year and make plans about her future. Even if she'd lost this race, there would have been a lot of positives to take out of it. She knows she can dig deep if she needs to. It was a strong field, with a number of the girls going into the race with expectations of winning. And although two hours 23 minutes wasn't one of Paula's best times, it wasn't far off the record on a difficult course. I was speaking to Paula in the lead-up to this race and she said that in many ways she was facing a no-win situation. She thought that if she won," people would say ""why could n't she do that in Athens?"" And if she lost", people would say her career was over. And a lot of people were wondering what would happen if Paula was forced to drop out of this race, as she did in the marathon and 10,000m in Athens. But that was never on the cards. She might have been beaten, but she would have kept running. The reasons she was forced to pull out in Athens - the niggling injuries, her lack of energy and the oppressive conditions - weren't at play here. The only question was what position she could finish in. Most important of all, despite all the hype in the media ahead of this race, there were never doubts in Paula's mind. If she wasn't confident, she wouldn't have run. After all, if you're the best in the world at an event, you'll always have expectations of winning. Now Paula will take part in the Run London 10km race in London at the end of the year, have a well-earned rest over Christmas and go into next year with a lot of optimism.

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"sport 039.txt Jones medals 'must go if guilty' World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) chief Dick Pound says Marion Jones should be stripped of all her medals if found guilty of taking banned substances. Victor Conte", of Balco Laboratories," claims the American sprinter regularly used drugs to enhance her performance. ""If she is found guilty she should be stripped of all her medals and banned for two years"," said Pound. Asked if there was a timescale as to what medals could be taken, Pound said: That is not an issue at all."" However", under International Olympic Committee (IOC) rules, athletes can only be stripped of their medals if caught within three years of the event. Jones, who won five medals at the 2000 Olympics," denies using drugs and says she will take legal action over Conte's allegations. Balco Laboratories is the firm at the centre of a wide-reaching investigation into doping in the US. Pound continued: ""If she has indeed taken drugs it is going to be a big disappointment for a lot of people.""

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"sport 040.txt Radcliffe tackles marathon tasks Paula Radcliffe faces arguably the biggest test of her career in the New York City Marathon on Sunday. Back under the spotlight of public scrutiny she will attempt to erase the double disappointment of the Athens Olympics", where she failed to finish the marathon and then the 10,000m. BBC Sport examines the challenges facing Radcliffe ahead of the big race. The ability to run a gruelling 26.2 miles relies largely upon an athlete's belief that they can do it. Every runner will hit the wall at some stage and see written on it," ""Are you strong enough to finish?"" The question could hit Radcliffe hard after she was unable to complete her last two races in high-profile and emotional circumstances. Sports psychologist Hugh Richards says the 30-year-old must draw on her past achievements to

conquer a potential crisis of confidence. ""There is an old adage", 'get straight back on the horse that threw you,'"" Richards told BBC Sport. ""Paula has got all those great runs in her history as well as the two upsets in Athens. ""She must not lose faith in what has already been proven is a very effective strategy for distance running. ""If she were to change her preparation and tactics that would be madness. ""She wants to start rebuilding her confidence through performance accomplishment." For much of the watching media and public there can only be two possible outcomes in New York - win or lose. If Radcliffe crosses the line first she will have proved her critics wrong. But if she fails to triumph", she risks being labelled a has-been and her profile will suffer. And for any athlete that can have repercussions in terms of sponsorship," appearance fees as well as further self esteem issues. ""Athletes need to try and stay focused on their internal controls and ignore external questions", explains Richards, who has worked with past Olympians. She must not get caught up in someone else's agenda." Radcliffe's best friend and fellow distance runner Liz Yelling revealed the 30-year-old is already aware she will be exposing herself to more public scrutiny in New York. ""She just thought", 'well, they can't think any worse of me now,'"" Yelling told BBC Sport. ""She's just doing what she wants to do and not thinking about the consequences of it." Radcliffe described her decision to enter the New York marathon as ""impulsive"" but she is certain to have a tick-list of personal goals. Her aims could be as simple as completing a race and making sure she is still enjoying running but Richards says she must avoid more emotional targets", such as redemption. ""You can't change history", warned Richards. Only one person can win the marathon but lots of people can be successful. ""Paula has to figure out what sort of things will she feel satisfied achieving by the end of the race." The course from Staten Island to Central Park is renowned as one of the toughest in the world. It is also not the kind of fast course that tends to suit Radcliffe better", with the undulating finish through the park testing the legs' final reserves. Radcliffe has never raced there before and will enter the unknown just 77 days after the Athens marathon. ""It's suggested after a major marathon you take a full month off and start building up again", said Yelling, herself a marathon runner. But that is only for long-term health and fitness. ""When you finish a marathon you are still very fit and can recover quickly. So physically it is possible for Paula." Richards also points out conditions in New York will be more conducive to a strong physical display from Radcliffe. ""The heat stress was the primary factor that tripped her up in Athens", he said. And that just isn't going to be there in New York," that's been taken out of the equation." Radcliffe concedes she will probably learn a lot from her bad experiences in Athens in time. And Richards and Yelling agree she could turn the trauma to her advantage", starting in New York. ""How you respond to adversity is what marks you out as elite or not", argues Richards. One of the challenges of massive set backs is how you turn them into opportunities." And Yelling says: ""I think this will probably make Paula." ""I think it will drive her on and she'll come out of it a better athlete.""  
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"sport 041.txt Gatlin and Hayes win Owen awards American Olympic stars Justin Gatlin and Joanna Hayes have been named the winners of the 2004 Jesse Owens Awards", USA Track & Field's (USATF) top honour. Gatlin,22, won the closest 100m final in Games history with a career-best time of 9.85 seconds in Athens. He also won bronze in the 200m and silver in the 4x100m relay, becoming the only male athlete to win three athletics medals this summer. Hayes,27, set an Olympic record of 12.37 in winning the 100m hurdles. Established i

n 1981," the Jesse Owens Awards - named in honour of the late Olympic great who won four gold medals at the 1936 Berlin Games - are presented annually to the outstanding US male and female track and field performers. The 2004 awards will be presented on 3 December in conjunction with the USATF annual meeting in Portland. ""It is such a great honour to win the Jesse Owens Award"," said Gatlin. It is one of the biggest honours in track and field and it is a great end to a great year. "" Hayes said: ""Knowing some of the great people who have won this award before me and knowing what it represents," I feel a sense accomplishment and pride which lets me know that everything that I have worked for is and always will be worth it.""

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"sport 042.txt Radcliffe enjoys winning comeback Paula Radcliffe made a triumphant return to competitive running with victory in the New York Marathon. The Briton", running for the first time since dropping out of the Olympic marathon and 10,000m, held off Kenyan Susan Chepkemei in a thrilling finish. The pair were locked together for the last few miles before Radcliffe finally sprinted clear to win in two hours," 23 minutes and 10 seconds. ""It's a good way to end the year", she said. I'm ready for a good rest now." Radcliffe decided only recently to run in the race and many had doubted whether she had sufficiently recovered from her Olympic ordeal just 11 weeks ago. But the world record-holder was prominent at the head of the field for the whole race as her rivals slowly dropped off the pace. Just Chepkemei and Radcliffe were left in contention as the race came into the final few miles. The Kenyan put in several bursts of speed to throw off Radcliffe but the Briton managed to hang in. Both runners looked to be suffering as they reached the final mile in Central Park. But it was Radcliffe who managed to dredge up a final sprint to see off Chepkemei in the closest finish in the race's history and in the process make a huge step in erasing the disappointment she suffered in Athens.

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"sport 043.txt Collins named UK Athletics chief UK Athletics has ended its search for a new performance director by appointing psychologist Dave Collins. Collins", who worked with the British teams at the 2000 and 2004 Olympics, takes over from Max Jones. Six candidates were interviewed for the job," including Denise Lewis' coach Charles van Commenee and former British triple jumper Keith Connor. ""We've searched long and hard to ensure we have found the right person", said UKA chief executive David Moorcroft. We have thoroughly tested the candidates. I believe David will make a great leader and I have great faith in what he will achieve." Collins said: ""It's a great challenge. Over the next few months I will spend time listening to those who already make a significant contribution to athletics and other elite sports in the UK." Collins", who has worked with javelin thrower Steve Backley in the past, started his career as a Royal Marine before becoming a PE teacher. He is currently professor of physical education and sport performance at Edinburgh University, where he helps competitors across many sports, including rugby, athletics, judo and football. He has specialised in helping competitors fulfil their potential through psychology and has worked with the Great Britain women's curling team, who won gold at the 2002 Winter Olympics. Mark Lewis-Francis sought Collins' advice in Athens when he was looking for inspiration before he ran the final leg of Britain's surprise triumph in the 4x100m relay. Collins has played rugby at regional level, was captain of the Great Britain American Football team, and competed at national level in judo and karate. He arrives with British athletics

at a crossroads. Despite Kelly Holmes' golden double and the success of the sprint relay squad, the GB team failed to live up to expectations in Athens. Many older competitors have retired or are coming to the end of their careers, and Britain failed to win a single medal at the world junior championships in Italy this year. Collins will not have day-to-day coaching contact with the athletes, but will be expected to make changes to the system and coaching set-up in order to secure medals at the Beijing Olympics in 2008. The appointment of a new performance director was one of the main recommendations in Sir Andrew Foster's review of the sport, which was published in May. It was commissioned by UK Sport and Sport England, which wanted UK Athletics to justify funding of more than £40m from the Government following the failure to hang on to the 2005 World Championships, which are now being held in Helsinki. Van Commenee dropped out of the selection process to take on the same role with the Dutch Olympic Committee, while Connor's application was rejected after an arduous interview process. Foster, however, "declared himself satisfied with how the appointment was made. ""The appointment of David Collins", with his strong mix of leadership skills and managerial experience, is testament to the professional and detailed recruitment process," he said.

sport 044.txt White admits to Balco drugs link Banned American sprinter Kelli White says she knowingly took steroids given to her by Bay Area Lab Co-Operative (Balco) president Victor Conte. Conte faces a federal trial next year on charges of distributing steroids and tax evasion, and White said at first he tried to cover up what he was doing. He's the one who told me that it wasn't what he said it was", White said in the San Francisco Chronicle. But she added: It was my decision to go to him," not anybody else's." White said Conte at first told her the substance was flaxseed oil", only to change his story later. White failed a drugs test after winning the 100m and 200m titles at the 2003 world athletics championships. She was subsequently handed a two-year ban in May this year and has admitted taking the stimulant modafinil. At first," White claimed she took the drug to combat narcolepsy but she now takes full responsibility for her actions. ""My whole belief about Victor is that he was selling a product", White said in the LA Times. Whether it be a good product or a bad product," he was selling a product." White was introduced to Conte through her coach Remy Korchemy", who is also a defendant in the Balco case. The 27-year-old believes doping is so common in sport she felt compelled to cheat herself if she was to have any chance of winning. ""I have no clue what it's going to take to change that", said White. I would say I made a mistake and I would never," ever go back. ""I would never recommend anyone to take that route." "

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sport 045.txt Trial date is set for Balco case A US judge has set a preliminary trial date for the Balco steroid distribution case which has rocked athletics. US district court judge Susan Ilston rejected an attempt by the defence team to have the case dismissed at a pre-trial hearing in San Francisco. And she set a March date for the case of the four men accused of distributing illegal performance-enhancing drugs to elite athletes to be heard. A firm decision on whether the trial takes place is expected in January. The judge said that she may conduct hearings in January into whether federal agents illegally searched the Balco headquarters and wrongfully obtained statements from the company's founder Victor Conte and its vice-president James Valente. The two men - along with personal trainer Greg Anderson and athletics coach Remy Korchemy - were all indicted earlier this year but have pleaded their innocence. The outcome of those hearings could result in some or all of the charges being dismissed. Conte said that he would be telling his side of the story on an Ameri

can TV show on Friday. ""The world deserves to know the truth about performance-enhancing drugs", he said. Balco (The Bay Area Laboratory Cooperative) is the company at the centre of the scandal. The company has been accused by the United States Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) of being the source of the banned steroid THG and modafinil. The USADA claims that 10 athletes have received sanctions for testing positive for THG and modafinil. Former double world champion Kelli White and Olympic relay star Alvin Harrison have both been banned on the basis of materials discovered during the Balco investigation. Britain's former European 100m champion Dwain Chambers is currently serving a two-year ban after testing positive for THG in an out-of-competition test in 2003.

sport 046.txt Radcliffe eyes hard line on drugs Paula Radcliffe has called for all athletes found guilty on drugs charges to be treated as criminals. The marathon world record holder believes more needs to be done to rid athletics of the suspicions and innuendoes"" which greet any fast time. ""Doping in sport is a criminal offence and should be treated as such", the 30-year-old told the Sunday Times. It not only cheats other athletes but also cheats promoters," sponsors and the general public." Radcliffe's comments come at a time when several American sports stars are under suspicion of steroid use. ""Being caught in possession of a performance-enhancing drugs should carry a penalty", she added. The current system does not detect many of the substances being abused by athletes. ""This means that often athletes do not know if they are competing on a level playing field", if their hard work and sacrifice is being trumped by an easier scientific route. ""Often", when an athlete puts in a good performance," they are subjected to suspicions and innuendoes instead of praise. ""Having been on the receiving end of accusations like this I can testify as to how much this hurts.""

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sport 047.txt Kenteris denies faking road crash Greek sprinter Kostas Kenteris has denied claims that he faked a motorbike crash to avoid a doping test days before the start of the Olympics. Kenteris and fellow sprinter Katerina Thanou are set to learn if they will face criminal charges this week. Part of the investigation has centred on whether they staged the crash. Kenteris insisted: ""The accident happened. I went crazy when I found out I had supposedly missed a test and I wanted to rush to the Olympic village." Kenteris", speaking on Greece's Alter Television station," also claimed that he asked to be tested for banned substances in hospital after the crash. ""I told the hospital", which was an Olympics-accredited hospital," to call the IOC and have me tested on the spot but no-one came." After a drama which dominated newspaper headlines in Greece as Athens prepared for the start of the Athens Games", Kenteris and Thanou eventually withdrew. But Kenteris has continually protested his innocence - and on Sunday blamed Greek Olympic Committee officials and his former coach Christos Tzekos for failing to inform him of the test. The 31-year-old insisted he will be happy if he is charged so he can clear his name. ""If a decision is taken to have charges filed against me", I will accept it gladly. ""A prosecution means that the case will be cleared... I want to go to the end and then we'll see who's right and who isn't." Kenteris", a Greek hero after winning gold in the 200m at the 2000 Olympics in Sydney," also confirmed that he was due to light the flame at the Athens opening ceremony. ""I had even rehearsed lighting the cauldron", he said.

sport 048.txt Greek pair set for hearing Kostas Kenteris and Katerina Thanou will fight the provisional two-year bans imposed on them by the IAAF at an independent tribunal this weekend. Athletics' ruling body took action against the pair for failing to take drugs tests before the Athens Olymp

ics. An independent tribunal of the Greek Track and Field Federation will meet to decide whether to ratify the sanction. The sprint duo face charges of failing to give information on their location and refusing to submit to a drugs test. Kenteris' lawyer Gregory Ioannidis told BBC Sport: We refute both charges as un substantiated and illogical. ""There have been certain breaches in the correct application of the rules on behalf of the sporting authorities and their officials," and these procedural breaches have also violated my client's rights. ""There is also evidence that proves the fact that my client has been persecuted." Ioannidis", who is a law lecturer at the University of Buckingham," added: ""One of the important rights and foundations of law and justice - that the accused should be presumed innocent unless proved otherwise - has been tarnished." The panel will also decide on the two-year ban imposed on the athletes' controversial coach Christos Tzekos by the IAAF. Kenteris", the 2000 Olympic 200m champion, and Thanou, the women's 100m silver medallist from the same Games in Sydney, quit the Olympics on 18 August after failing to give samples on the eve of the opening ceremony. Testers could not find them at the Olympic village and the duo were later admitted to hospital after claiming to have been involved in a motorcycle accident. They also missed tests in Tel Aviv, Chicago and Athens before the Games. In imposing two-year suspensions on the duo on 22 December, the IAAF described their explanations for missing the tests as ""unacceptable"". Whatever the findings of the independent tribunal", all parties will have the right to appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport. The tribunal hearing will take place at the Hellenic Olympic Committee building. It will start at 12 00 GMT on Saturday and is expected to finish early next week. The tribunal panel will consist of five members - president Konstantinos Panagopoulos and Panagiotis Dimakos, Haralabos Hrisanthakis, Stilianos Perakis and Ioannis Karmis. Kenteris and Thanou also face criminal charges in Greece for allegedly faking the motorcycle accident. Eight criminal charges have been laid against the sprinters as well as Tzekos, an eyewitness to the accident and hospital officials. But there has been speculation that the charges could be dropped.

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"sport 049.txt Jones files Conte lawsuit Marion Jones has filed a lawsuit for defamation against Balco boss Victor Conte following his allegations that he gave her performance-enhancing drugs. The Sydney Olympic gold medallist says Conte damaged her reputation and she is seeking \$25m (£13m) in the suit. Conte", whose company is at the centre of a doping investigation, made the claims in a US television programme. He and three others were indicted in February by a federal grand jury for a variety of alleged offences. In an email to the Associated Press on Wednesday," Conte said: ""I stand by everything I said"". Jones won three gold medals and two bronzes in Sydney in 2000. Her lawsuit", filed in the US District Court in San Francisco," said the sprinter had passed a lie detector test and that she ""has never taken banned performance-enhancing drugs"". Conte's statements", the suit added," were ""false and malicious"". After the ABC television program earlier this month", Jones' lawyer Richard Nicholls said: ""Marion has steadfastly maintained her position throughout: she has never", ever used performance-enhancing drugs. ""Victor Conte is a man facing a 42-count federal indictment", while Marion Jones is one of America's most decorated female athletes. Mr Conte's statements have been wildly contradictory. ""Mr Conte chose to make unsubstantiated allegations on television", while Marion Jones demanded to take and then passed a lie detector examination. ""Mr Conte is simply not credible. We challenge him to submit to the same lie detector procedure that Marion Jones passed."" The sport's ruling body", the IAAF," is taking a cautious approach to Conte's allegations but contacted the US A

nti-Doping Agency. Communications director Nick Davies said the IAAF would seek to contact Conte "for further information". But Davies stressed it would be up to the American authorities to decide whether they will take action against Jones in light of Conte's television interview and the world governing body would monitor the situation closely. "If it is felt there is case to answer", it would be for its national governing body (USA Track and Field) to take the appropriate disciplinary action," he added. The US Anti-Doping Agency has proved itself to be very diligent in its anti-doping war. "And I am sure", like ourselves, they will be watching the television programme with great interest." Jones, who is under investigation for steroid use by the US Anti-Doping Agency, has continually denied ever taking illegal substances since being investigated in the Balco scandal, although she praised a zinc supplement Conte marketed. Jones, who did not win any medals in Athens in August, has never failed a drugs test. Meanwhile, Conte, who has been charged along with three other men of distributing illegal steroids and money laundering, is due to face trial in March.

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"sport 050.txt IAAF awaits Greek pair's response Kostas Kenteris and Katerina Thanou are yet to respond to doping charges from the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF). The Greek pair were charged after missing a series of routine drugs tests in Tel Aviv, Chicago and Athens. They have until midnight on 16 December and an IAAF spokesman said: "We're sure their responses are on their way." If they do not respond or their explanations are rejected", they will be provisionally banned from competition. They will then face a hearing in front of the Greek Federation, which will ultimately determine their fate. Their former coach Christos Tzekos has also been charged with distributing banned substances. Under IAAF rules, the athletes could receive a maximum one-year suspension. Kenteris and Thanou already face a criminal trial after being charged with avoiding a drug test on the eve of the Athens Olympics and then faking a motorcycle crash. No date for the trial has yet been set and again Tzekos is also facing charges. The IAAF issued an official warning to the trio last year after they were discovered training in Qatar rather than in Crete, where they had said they would be. All athletes must inform their national federations where they are at all times, so they can be available for out-of-competition drugs tests. But Kenteris and Thanou then went on to skip tests in Tel Aviv and Chicago, when they decided to fly back to Greece early. Then just before the Olympics, the pair dramatically missed another test in Athens and withdrew from the Games.

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"sport 051.txt IAAF to rule on Greek sprint pair Greek sprinters Kostas Kenteris and Katerina Thanou are expected to find out on Wednesday if they will be banned for missing drugs tests this summer. The International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) council held a conference call on Tuesday and are set to announce their decision. Kenteris and Thanou could be suspended for up to two years. The duo withdrew from the Olympics after missing a test but claimed they had suffered a motorcycle crash. The Greek authorities have also brought criminal charges against the sprinters for avoiding a drugs test and faking an accident. Their former coach Christos Tzekos is also facing charges and all three are awaiting a trial date. However", the IAAF will determine the sprinters' future on the track after carefully considering all the evidence. The sport's ruling body is expected to direct the Greek federation in what action it should take against the sprinters. Kenteris and Thanou can appeal against any decision at the Court of Arbitration for Sport. The sprinters both s

ent written explanations to the IAAF, which have been taken into account. The IAAF sent an official warning to the sprinters and coach Tzemos after they were discovered training in Qatar rather than in Crete, where they had said they would be. But Kenteris and Thanou then went on to skip tests in Tel Aviv and Chicago, when they decided to fly back to Greece early. Just before the Olympics, the pair dramatically missed another test in Athens before withdrawing from the Games. Kenteris, 31, won gold in the 200m at the Sydney Olympics in 2000, where Thanou, 29, won silver in the 100m.

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"sport 052.txt Holmes starts 2005 with GB events Kelly Holmes will start 2005 with a series of races in Britain. Holmes will make her first track appearance on home soil since winning double Olympic gold in January's Norwich Union International in Glasgow. She will also run in the Grand Prix in Birmingham in February and may defend her indoor AAA 800m title in Sheffield earlier that month. ""I am still competitive and still want to win", she said. I'm an athlete and I can't wait to get back on the track." She added: "These events are also a great opportunity to thank the British public for the enormous levels of support they have given me from the moment I stepped off that plane from Greece." The Glasgow meeting will see Holmes compete over 1500m in a five-way match against Sweden", France, Russia and Italy.

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"sport 053.txt Gebrselassie in London triple bid Double Olympic 10", "000m champion Haile Gebrselassie will race in the London Marathon for the next three years. The Ethiopian legend won Sunday's Almeria half-marathon in Spain on his return from an operation on his Achilles tendon. He was third in London in 2002 in his first serious attempt at the marathon. ""It is a coup for us to secure Haile's presence for the next three years and it guarantees a quality race", said race director David Bedford. Gebrselassie will face Olympic champion Stefano Baldini, world champion Jaouad Gharib, and arch-rival Paul Tergat, the current world record holder. If I didn't think I could win I would not be here", said Gebrselassie, who has set world records on 18 occasions in his illustrious career and is keen to add the marathon record to his collection. There are a lot of fantastic runners in the race but I shall be doing my utmost to upset them."

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"sport 054.txt Thanou bullish over drugs hearing Katerina Thanou is confident she and fellow sprinter Kostas Kenteris will not be punished for missing drugs tests before the Athens Olympics. The Greek pair appeared at a hearing on Saturday which will determine whether their provisional bans from athletics' ruling body the IAAF should stand. ""After five months we finally had the chance to give explanations. I am confident and optimistic", said Thanou. We presented new evidence to the committee that they were not aware of." The athletes' lawyer Grigoris Ioanidis said he believed the independent disciplinary committee set up by the Greek Athletics Federation (SEGAS) would find them innocent. ""We are almost certain that the charges will be dropped", said Ioanidis. We believe that we have presented [a case] that the charges are unreasonable." Thanou", the 2000 Olympic women's 100m silver medallist, and Sydney 200m champion Kenteris were suspended by the IAAF for missing three drugs tests. The third was supposed to take place on the eve of the Athens Games last Augus

t," but the pair could not be found in the athletes' village. They were later taken to hospital after claiming to have been involved in a motorcycle accident. Thanou's coach Christos Tzekos was also suspended by the IAAF. ""We were asked [by the disciplinary committee] all kinds of questions about the night of 12 August", said Tzekos. We did not leave any gaps. As far as I am concerned there is no such issue [of refusing to be tested]," and I am very optimistic." "Tzekos", Thanou and Kenteris, who have all denied the charges," can expect a decision within a month. ""Deliberations will start after some additional documents are brought in by Thursday", " said committee chairman Kostas Panagopoulos. I estimate that the final ruling will be issued by the end of February." "

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"sport 055.txt Holmes is hit by hamstring injury Kelly Holmes has been forced out of this weekend's European Indoor Athletics Championships after picking up a hamstring injury during training. The double Olympic champion said: ""I am very disappointed that I have been forced to withdraw. ""I can hardly walk at the moment and I won't be able to do any running for two or three weeks although I'll be keeping fit as best I can." " Holmes will have now have intensive treatment in South Africa. The 34-year-old made a cautious start to the season but looked back to her best when she stormed to the 1",000m title at the Birmingham Grand Prix 10 days ago. After that race and more progress in training," Holmes revealed she had decided to compete at the European Indoors before her plans were wrecked last weekend. ""On Saturday night I pulled my hamstring running the last bend on my final 200m of the night", said Holmes. I was going really," really well when I felt a massive spasm in my left leg and my hamstring blew. ""I saw the doctor here and he has said it is not serious but it's frustrating missing Madrid when I knew I was in great shape." " Holmes has now been advised by her coach Margot Jennings not to rush back into training and it is unlikely she will compete again until the summer. Helen Clitheroe now goes to Madrid as the only British competitor in the women's 1500m while there will be no representative in the 800m.

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"sport 056.txt Kluft impressed by Sotherton form Olympic heptathlon champion Carolina Kluft was full of admiration for Britain's Kelly Sotherton as the pair prepared to clash in Birmingham. Both will be in action on Friday in the 60m hurdles and long jump ahead of the European Indoor Championships later this month in Madrid. Sotherton finished third behind the Swede in Athens", " and Kluft said: ""I knew about her", " she's a great girl. ""She looked very good early in the season and was competing really well." " Kluft showed impressive early-season form on Tuesday in Stockholm's GE Galan meeting", winning the sprint hurdles, the long jump and the 400m. Sotherton has also displayed promise, with a new high jump personal best in Sheffield at the combined Norwich Union European trials and AAA Championships, and a second place in the long jump behind Jade Johnson.

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"sport 057.txt What now for Kelly Holmes? Last April", Kelly Holmes spoke to the BBC Sport website about her loneliness, her fight to stay fit and her decision not to contest both the 800m and 1500m at the Olympics. It just goes to show even the most meticulous and measured athletes cannot predict what fate has in store for them. Four months later, Holmes stormed to double Olympic gold and has since been made a Dame, won the BBC Sport Personality of

the Year and written a book whilst still finding time to coach aspiring athletes. With so much time spent in the spotlight, Holmes has increasingly dropped hints that her ambition on the track has begun to wilt. And when asked about her plans for both the indoor and outdoor seasons ahead," the 34-year-old has repeatedly chosen to tick the ""don't know"" box. Holmes has now pulled out of this weekend's European Indoor Championships", where she was selected for both the 800m and 1500m," because of a hamstring injury. But should we be surprised if the Olympic champion over both those distances decides she just does not feel like racing anymore? ""Well", it's a lot easier being the double Olympic champion, being feted by everybody, than training to be at the top in middle distance running," points out former Olympian and BBC pundit Steve Cram. You have to have a real strong desire to carry on doing it even if you're very talented.""" Holmes' drive and determination have always been unquestionable - that is the reason she has battled back from a string of injuries that threatened to see her finish her career empty-handed. But alarm bells start ringing when the Kent athlete begins questioning herself. ""Will I have as much commitment", "desire and energy to go through a major championship?"" Holmes asked in the New Year. ""That is what I don't know." At 34", Holmes will also be aware that time is running out. US 400m and 200m legend Michael Johnson, a five-time Olympic gold medallist, retired shortly after his 34th birthday as did Britain's double Olympic champion decathlete Daley Thompson. The physical demands of the day-to-day grind will only get harder for Holmes," who has already admitted she ""doesn't like the training anymore.""" Whilst out on the circuit the allure of defeating a double Olympic champion will spur her opponents on. Holmes will not want to needlessly suffer the indignity of being beaten. Unless she is certain she has a strong chance of winning any race", she will not step onto the track. But if the Kent athlete finds the form that fuelled her ambitions last summer, there are more prizes up for grabs. The day after completing her double in Athens, the 34-year-old revealed she would still like to win her first indoors title. Holmes' wish could easily be met in Madrid before she goes on to prepare for the outdoor season where there are still scores to be settled, such as a first gold at the World Championships in Helsinki. There is just one small truth which could gnaw away at Holmes' motivation - the realisation that no matter how hard she trains, nothing she wins now can surpass her achievements in Athens. On the other hand," if those achievements cannot be matched shouldn't they be at least shared and celebrated? ""You don't get the chance very often in your career to step onto the track as the double Olympic champion", "agreed Cram. You want to be able to take your bow in front of the fans because it's a fantastic feeling. ""I think deep down Kelly wants to run. I think she will compete and run races on the circuits but whether or not she runs in the major championships is much less certain.""" Athletics fans had every reason to believe they would see the new-look Kelly Holmes tearing up the track again. After her Olympic glory she emphatically denied she planned to retire. So", why is Holmes dragging her heels about making a decision on where," when or whether to even bother competing again? ""That's just Kelly", "explains Cram. She's always been like that. ""She enjoys people trying to guess what she is going to do next. She knows every time she makes a pronouncement now it's headline news. ""Kelly has to figure out for herself what it is she wants and that will be based on athletics decisions", whether she can be competitive," if she is fit enough to put her neck on the line. ""And if she decides not to run again", "no-one is going to turn round and say 'you're making the wrong decision.'""

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"/" sport 058.txt Gardener battles to narrow win Jason Garde

ner fought all the way to the line to narrowly claim the men's 60m title at the Norwich Union Indoor trials and AAAs Championships. The world 60m champion got off to a rolling start and had to dig deep to dip ahead of Mark Findlay and Darren Chin," who both set personal bests. ""It was a close race"," admitted Gardener. I stumbled out the blocks but my experience told through. ""I still feel there's more life in me and I believe I can go faster." Gardener's performance in Sheffield could have been affected by the news", which he heard before his semi-final, that his European record had been broken Frenchman Ronald Pognon, who will be a real threat at the European Championships, set a new time of 6.45," one-hundredth of a second faster than Gardener's previous mark. Favourite delivered a powerful performance to take the women's 60m title in 7.27 seconds. ""You'll see me in Madrid and I feel there is a lot more to come along", said the 22-year-old. Katherine Endacott battled hard to take second and dip under the European qualifying mark. Defending champion Joice Maduaka had pulled out of the final with a chest infection. was on record-breaking form as she stormed to the women's 60m hurdles crown. The 25-year-old set a new British record for the second time in seven days, clocking 7.96 seconds to finish ahead of rival Diane Allahgreen. I'm so happy", a tearful Claxton told BBC Sport. All the years I've been running and I'm getting recognition." Claxton's time was also good enough to qualify for the European Championships. The men's 800m went to form in Sheffield as dominated the race from start to finish. The Northern Ireland athlete went off at a startling pace but had to hold off the challenge of Welshman Jimmy Watkins over the final 200m to win in one minute", 47.96 seconds. Both McIlroy and Watkins, who set a life-time best of 1:48.32," had already booked their places in Madrid and were again well within the qualifying time. ""I had to go out and go through all the gears before the Europeans and I won't run again until then", said McIlroy. could not reach the European mark in the women's race as she crossed the line to win in 2:04.45. Olympic bronze heptathlon medallist rounded off a useful weekend with two more personal bests in Sheffield. The 28-year-old reached 1.80m in the high jump and clocked 8.47secs in the heats of the 60m hurdles. I've surprised myself," said Sotherton. I'm starting to thrive on the pressure but if I don't perform then it's not the end of the world." Pole vaulter made a winning return to major competition after a drugs ban. The Trafford athlete", who has served a two-year ban after testing positive for anabolic steroids, clinched the title with a championship record 4.25m. also set a new championship mark in the men's triple jump title in Sheffield. The 26-year-old, who has been training in Australia over the winter," landed 17.30m with his final effort - the longest leap in the world this year. ""I didn't have a clue", said Idowu. I've not jumped indoors before and I just wanted the qualifying mark. ""But this isn't a bad start and hopefully I'll come back from Madrid with a gold medal." Nathan Douglas continued his steady progress this season as he set a life-time best of 16.76m in second while Jonathan Moore took third. and resumed their rivalry in the long jump competition", both achieving the European standard. Commonwealth champion Morgan reached a personal best of 7.96m on his very first jump and then promptly retired with a bruised heel. Olympian Tomlinson tried to play catch up with his six jumps but had to settle for a season's best jump of 7.91m. ""I was advised not to jump by my doctor and so I'm pleased to come here and get the qualifying mark", said Tomlinson. , now based at Loughborough, sprinted past front runner Catherine Murphy in the final 100m to steal the women's 400m title. The 21-year-old ran a personal best of 53.45 seconds to win her first indoor title. Wall's time was just short of the qualifying mark - something Murphy already has. Ireland's took the men's title in 46.46 ahead of promising Channel Islands decathlete Dale Garland. Sudanese 18-year-old Rabah Yusuf, who is seeking British citizenship, showed his raw talent a

s he burst through in third. cleared the required 1.90m to qualify for the European championships and claim the AAAs title in the women's high jump. In the men's 3,000m, powered to a new personal best of seven minutes, 56.86 seconds to defend his AAAs title in style. It was the first time in 11 years the eight-minute barrier has been broken at the championships and was just within the European mark. took the women's 1500m AAAs title in the absence of Kelly Holmes. Her time of 4:19.11 was not good enough to qualify for Madrid but Ovens had already opted out of the championships. The men's race was won by , who had to fight off a closing pack to claim the title in 3:45.87.

sport 059.txt European medal chances improve What have the European Indoor trials told us? Well, I think we could be heading to the European Championships with half a dozen medal prospects. It was good to see athletes beginning to make steps forward, to see a few new faces and there were lots of personal bests kicking around. The best performance on the track for me was Sarah Claxton's win in the 60m hurdles. Running sub-eight seconds twice in a week puts her right up there and if she repeats that in Madrid she will be close to picking up a medal. But what was great about Sunday's performance was that she was under pressure to produce the goods when it counted. Diane Allahgreen has been our best hurdler for some time now and I think she was surprised to be beaten by Sarah. And knowing that she got the better of Diane in a head-to-head race will give Sarah confidence. In the men's race on Saturday, Allan Scott was right in there and there is definitely more to come from him. In fact, the men's 60m hurdles is so strong, I think the selectors will pick three hurdlers to go to Madrid. Phillips Idowu lit up the field events, not only with his hair, but also with his leap of 17.30m, which puts him at the top of the world rankings. I had a chat with him before the competition and he was really looking forward to getting out there. He feels he is in great shape and has some big jumps inside him - but then Phillips always has. A lot of the athletes said the runway was not very helpful, so for Phillips to jump like that is a good performance. He is such a huge talent but just needs some consistency - and if he does that then the big jumps will get even further. Across the board I thought Kelly Sotherton had a great weekend and continued to show she is developing. She picked up three personal bests in the long jump, high jump and 60m hurdles and you can't ask for more than that. Kelly will be up against Carolina Kluft in the pentathlon at the European Championships but she has every chance of a medal on the basis of what we've seen so far. She has a complicated training regime where different people help her with different disciplines but it seems to be working really well. It wasn't all good news in Sheffield. I thought both the 60m races were disappointing in different ways. Jason Gardener may have won but he wasn't at his best. I chatted to him afterwards and he knows it was an off-day for him. He's there to be shot at and the other lads nearly got a big scalp out there. In the women's race, Jeanette Kwayke was hoping to run against defending champion Joice Maduaka. The pair are enjoying a bit of rivalry but Joice had to pull out with a chest infection. If she had made the final I think Jeanette would have gone a bit quicker. Janine Whitlock competed well in the pole vault on her return following a two-year drugs ban. But the most disappointing thing in the wider view is that she is our best pole vaulter by a long way and that shouldn't be the case. The event has moved on immensely since Janine has been away and if there was more domestic competition I think that would help her. A couple of other interesting topics to look out for are the citizenship issues surrounding Mark Findlay and Rabah Yusuf. Findlay is a Londoner who has chosen to represent Trinidad and Tobago but has never run for them so he could still compete for Great Britain. Yusuf, who came third in the 400m, is from the Sudan but is trying to gain British citizenship. He came to Britain as a high jumper but dama

ged his toe, started doing more running and found his talent. So we shall have to see what happens to both of them.

sport 060.txt McIlroy wins 800m indoor title James McIlroy motored to the AAA's Indoor 800m title in Sheffield on Sunday in a time of one minute, 47.97 seconds. The Larne athlete dominated the race from start to finish although he had to hold off a late challenge from Welshman Jimmy Watkins in the final 100 metres. I had to go out and go through all the gears before the Europeans and I won't run again until then", " said McIlroy. "I thought if I got lucky I'd get close to the British record but I blew up in the end." McIlroy has been in superb form at the start of the season and will now start his build-up for the European Indoors at Madrid on 4-6 March. Meanwhile, Paul Brizzel and Anna Boyle reached the semi-finals of the 60m hurdles with Boyle setting a season's best of 7.48. In the women's 60m final, Ailis McSweeney broke Michelle Carroll's long-standing Irish record by clocking 7.37 which left her in third place. David Gillick showed that he is a genuine medal contender in the European Indoor Championships by claiming an impressive 400m victory. Gillick was more than half-a-second clear when taking gold in 46.45 - .02 outside his personal best set in Saturday's semi-finals. The Irishman is now the fastest European this season. Derval O'Rourke broke her own Irish 60m hurdles record by clocking 8.06 which left her third behind new British record holder Sarah Claxton (7.96). James Nolan (3:46.04) took second in the men's 1500m behind Neil Speaight (3:45.86) but the Offaly man was outside the European Indoor standard. Colin Costello was seventh in the 1500m final in 3:48.82). Deirdre Ryan was second in the women's high jump with a clearance of 1.87m while Aoife Byrne took silver in the 800m in a personal best of 2:06.73. Lisburn's Kelly McNeice Reid (4:31.34) was seventh in the women's 1500m while Gary Murray (8:11.22) was 11th in the men's 3000m. Meanwhile, Stephen Cairns and Jill Shannon claimed the individual titles at Saturday's Northern Ireland Cross Country Championship in Coleraine. Cairns came in ahead of Paul Rowan and Allan Bogle in the men's race. Willowfield claimed their first men's team title in 72 years while Shannon helped Lagan Valley win the women's team honours.

sport 061.txt Johnson edges out rival Sotherton Jade Johnson edged out rival Kelly Sotherton with her last effort to claim the AAAs long jump title at the Norwich Union European Indoor trials. Olympic heptathlon bronze medallist, Sotherton, led the event with her first leap of 6.43m - a personal best. But Johnson, who has not competed indoors for five years, leapt to a life-time best of 6.50m in her last jump, after four fouls. Both Johnson and Sotherton passed the European Championships qualifying mark. Although Sotherton's main aim in Madrid next month will be the pentathlon where she will take on Olympic heptathlon champion Carolina Kluft. Ireland's delivered a shock in the men's 200m as he stormed to his first major title in 21.01 seconds. British favourite Chris Lambert had to settle for second place while defending champion Ireland's Paul Brizzel took third. There was some consolation for Lambert as he set a personal best of 20.94 in the first round - good enough to qualify for Europe. Two-time AAAs champion Allyn Condon and Ian Mackie had no such luck as they were disqualified in the heats. There was plenty of hot action in the men's 60m hurdles where Scotland's was vying for top spot with Olympian Andy Turner. Scott, 22, smashed his personal best on the way to the final, where he broke it again to win the AAAs title in 7.58 seconds. Turner finished second in 7.82 after previously setting a personal best on the 7.83 in the semi-finals, while Damien Greaves did not finish the final. The trio of athletes have reached the European qualifying mark this season though one of them is set to miss out on a call-up to the British squad. comfortably defended her 3,000m title, clocking eight minutes, 49.87 seconds to easily surpass the European qualifying mark. The Euro

pean cross country bronze medallist is ranked number one in Europe this season and will go to Madrid with high hopes. Helen Clitheroe was agonisingly close to the 9:05.00 qualifying mark as she claimed the runners-up spot in a personal best of 9:05.73. In the men's 800m heats, qualified fastest in the 800m heats to lay down a challenge to in-form . The Welsh runner attacked the last 200m to come through ahead of James Thie in one minute, 49.87 seconds. McIlroy, who is third in the European rankings, eased across the finish in 1:50.87 to set up a showdown in Sunday's final in Sheffield. Both Watkins and McIlroy have already achieved the European qualifying mark. Scotland's Susan Deacon stole 's thunder in the final of the women's 200m. Fraser became the fastest British woman over the distance this season when she qualified for the final in 23.68 seconds - though that time is outside the European standard. But Deacon claimed her first AAAs title over the distance, edging Fraser into second in 23.67. In the women's shot put veteran claimed her fourth AAAs title with a throw of 15.27m. But that mark was not good enough for the 39-year-old to book her place at next month's European Indoor Championships in Madrid. Soherton finished fifth after producing two throws of 13.77m. In the absence of injured British number one Carl Myerscough, claimed the men's shot put title with a throw of 17.64m, which was below the qualifying mark. Sale's Robert Mitchell climbed to a season's best of 2.20m - just 3cm short of the European standard - to claim the British indoor high jump title. could only clear 2.16m to finish in fourth but the 27-year-old's disappointment will be tempered as he had already achieved the qualifying mark at a meeting in Slovenia on Tuesday. There was bad luck for British number one in the pole vault as he failed to clear the bar after deciding to come in at 5.45m. The AAAs indoor title went instead to Ashley Swain, who climbed to a season's best of 5.25m And Ireland's Tanesha Scanlon set a new national record of 13.28m in the women's triple jump.

sport 062.txt Brizzel to run AAA's in Sheffield Ballymena sprinter Paul Brizzel will be among eight of Ireland's European Indoor hopefuls competing in this weekend's AAA's Championships. US-based Alistair Cragg and Mark Carroll are the only Irish athletes selected so far for the Europeans who will not run in Sheffield. Brizzel will defend his 200m title in the British trials. In-form James McIlroy will hope to confirm his place in the British team for Madrid by winning the 800m title. McIlroy has been in tremendous form on the European circuit in recent weeks. He is one of the fastest 800m runners in the world this winter and already seems assured of a place in Madrid. Corkman Mark Carroll confirmed in midweek that he would join Cragg in the European Championships. Carroll is ranked number three in the world 3000m ranking at the moment with Cragg occupying top spot. Meanwhile, nine-times champion Dermot Donnelly will not be coming out of retirement to compete in the Northern Ireland Cross Country Championships in Coleraine on Saturday. An injury crisis in the Annadale Striders squad led to Donnelly being entered by coach John McLaughlin but the athlete told BBC Sport on Friday evening that he would not be running. Willowfield's Paul Rowan will go in as individual favourite but Annadale could have a tough job holding on to their team title as Andrew Dunwoody and Noel Pollock are unlikely to run.

sport 063.txt Holmes urged to compete at Worlds Jolanda C eplak has urged Britain's Kelly Holmes to continue competing at the major championships. Double Olympic gold medallist Holmes has strongly hinted she will not run in this year's Worlds and is undecided about next month's European Indoors. But World Indoor 800m record holder Ceplak said: There is never an easy race when she is in the field. There is only excitement at what might happen. "It is good for the sport. She always fetches the best out of everyone." Ceplak has been a great rival of Holmes' during the Briton's career and the pair fell out

when Holmes questioned the manner of the Slovenian's runaway 800m victory at the 2002 European Championships. But the controversy has since been forgotten", "with Ceplak acting as pacemaker for Holmes' failed attempt on the British Indoor 1500m record at the Norwich Union Grand Prix in Birmingham in 2003. Ceplak added: ""I like running against her - you know the race is always going to be fast. ""That is the sort of competition that I like. She is special to me. She was like my idol from the beginning of my career." " Meanwhile", Ceplak will be looking to follow up last Saturday's win in Boston with a fast time and victory in Friday's Night of Athletics in Erfurt, Germany. Britain's Jason Gardener had been expected to defend his 60m title in Erfurt but instead he will save himself for a competition in Leipzig on Sunday. Gardener's decision means Scotland's 400m man Ian Mackie will carry British hopes in what looks sure to be a tough preparation for next weekend's Norwich Union European trials in Sheffield.

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"sport 064.txt McIlroy continues winning streak James McIlroy stormed to his second international victory in less than a week", claiming the men's 800m at the TEAG indoor meeting in Erfurt. The Northern Ireland runner set a new personal best of one minute," 46.68 seconds - a time good enough to qualify for the European Indoor Championships. ""I'm qualified now and that's what matters most", " said the 28-year-old. McIlroy is now hoping to gain a late entry into Sunday's international indoor meeting in Leipzig. The Northern Irish man is hoping manager Ricky Simms can swing it for him to compete after he initially withdrew after contracting a cold. After three successive wins over the past fortnight, McIlroy is brimming with confidence. I've been waiting over six years for this to happen and now I'm certain my career has turned the corner." "On Friday", McIlroy delivered an impressive run despite suffering from his bad cold. The AAA indoor and outdoor champion accelerated away from the field in the final 300m, beating German Wolfram Mulle by 0.90 seconds. McIlroy set a world-leading mark for 1,000m at the Sparkassen Cup in Stuttgart last weekend. And his time in Erfurt makes him third fastest over 800m in the world this year.

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"sport 065.txt Radcliffe will compete in London Paula Radcliffe will compete in the Flora London Marathon this year after deciding her schedule for 2005. The 31-year-old won the race in 2002 on her marathon debut," defended her title 12 months later and will now seek a third title in the 17 April race. ""It doesn't get any better than this for the 25th anniversary", " said race director David Bedford. After announcing the greatest men's field ever we now have the greatest women's distance runner ever." " Three years ago Radcliffe smashed the women's world record in two hours 18 minutes 15 seconds. The Bedford star returned to London 12 months later", lowering her mixed-race world record of 2:17:18, which she set in Chicago in October 2003, by one minute 53 secs. Radcliffe's career took a setback when she failed to complete the Olympic marathon and later dropped out of the Athens 10,000m last August. But the 31-year-old bounced back to win the New York Marathon in November. Radcliffe, however," passed up the chance to go for the ""Big City"" marathon grand slam. With wins in Chicago", London and New York," only the Boston Marathon remains to be conquered but that takes place a day after London. ""Boston is definitely a race I want to do at some point", but London is very special to me," said Radcliffe. I don't pick races thinking about things like pressure. I pick the ones in my heart I really want to do. ""I love the atmosphere", " crowds and course and know it will always be a great quality race. ""It is also the 25th anniversary this year which adds to the occasion." "

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"sport 066.txt Britain boosted by Holmes double Athletics  
fans endured a year of mixed emotions in 2004 as stunning victories went hand-in-hand with disappointing defeats and more drugs scandals. Kelly Holmes finally fulfilled her potential by storming to double gold on the track at the Olympic Games. Holmes helped erase the gloom hanging over Team GB after their biggest medal hope", Paula Radcliffe, dropped out of the marathon and then the 10,000m. Britain's men's 4x100m relay team also did their bit by taking a shock gold. Holmes had started the year in disappointing style, falling over in the final of 1500m at the World Indoor Championships where she was favourite. Her Olympic build-up was clouded by self doubt but that proved unfounded as she overhauled rival Maria Mutola to win the 800m - her first global title. Just five days later, the 34-year-old made it double gold in the 1500m. It was the first time in 84 years a Briton has achieved the Olympic middle-distance double. While Holmes left Athens as the star of Team GB, it was Radcliffe who carried expectations before the August Games. The 30-year-old marathon world record holder went into the Athens event as favourite but an exhausted Radcliffe dropped out after 23 miles in tears. Her decision to enter the 10,000m five days later also backfired as she again pulled out with eight laps remaining. But Radcliffe helped put her Olympic trauma behind her with a thrilling win in November's New York Marathon. The 4x100m team grabbed some last-gasp glory for the British men's Olympic squad after a poor start to the Games. It seemed as though Athens would be the first Games where the men would fail to win a medal with Michael East the only individual track finalist in the 1500m. But Darren Campbell, Jason Gardener, Marlon Devonish and Mark Lewis-Francis made amends in the sprint relay. The quartet held off favourites the USA to win Britain's first relay medal since 1912 in 38.07 seconds. Gardener added the Olympic relay crown to his World Indoor title over 60m and, just like Holmes, finally lived up to his promise in 2004. Kelly Sohertton completed Team GB's athletics medal haul in Athens with a surprise bronze in the heptathlon. The 28-year-old won her first championship medal since becoming a full-time athlete in 2003. But it was a different story for Britain's defending champion Denise Lewis, who withdrew on day two of the competition after some poor results. Lewis, who was troubled by injury, has ruled out retiring while Sohertton is tipped to build on her success. The Athens Olympics proved to be a landmark occasion for Steve Backley, who retired from competition after finishing fourth in the javelin. The battling 35-year-old leaves the sport with a vast medal haul including two silvers and one Olympic bronze. And Backley's departure was balanced by the return of injury-hit decathlete Dean Macey, who came fourth in Athens. The continued improvement of sprinter Abi Oyepitan and long jumper Chris Tomlinson also boosted Team GB. Sadly, the 2004 Olympics did not escape the problems of drugs misuse. On the eve of the Games, Greek sprinters Kostas Kenteris and Katerina Thanou missed a drugs test and claimed to have been involved in a road crash. Kenteris, the 200m champion in 2000, and Thanou have since been charged by the Greek authorities and await trial. At the Games, Adrian Annus (hammer), Robert Fazelas (discus) and Irina Korzhanenko (shot) were all stripped of their titles because of doping issues. Hungarian compatriots Annus and Fazelas both refused to give urine samples while Russian Korzhanenko tested positive for the steroid stanozolol. The fallout from the THG scandal, which rocked the sport in 2003, continued to impact in Olympic year. Britain's 4x100m team took gold without the services of Dwain Chambers, who was handed a two-year ban in February after testing positive for steroid THG. American Kelli White was suspended and stripped of her world 100m and 200m titles after failing a drugs test. And world 400m champion Jerome Young landed a life ban

from US chiefs after a second doping offence. Russian pole vaulter Yelena Isinbayeva provided some light relief by smashing the world record seven times on her way to the World Indoor and Olympic titles. Her rivalry with compatriot Svetlana Feofanova livened up the field events. Morocco's Hicham El Guerrouj also delighted fans by racing to a historic Olympic double in the 1500m and 5,000m. And though there was no Paula Radcliffe in the London Marathon, there was plenty of drama as Kenyans Evans Ratto and Margaret Okayo took the titles. Ratto held on to win despite slipping on some cobblestones and tumbling into a barrier. Okayo also had to battle back after mistiming her tactics but clinched victory on her debut.

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"sport 067.txt Lewis-Francis eyeing world gold Mark Lewis-Francis says his Olympic success has made him determined to bag World Championship 100m gold in 2005. The 22-year-old pipped Maurice Greene on the last leg of the 4x100m relay in Athens to take top honours for Team GB. But individually, the Birchfield Harrier has yet to build on his World Junior Championship win four years ago. "The gold medal in Athens has made me realise that I can get to the top level and I want to get there again. It can happen", I don't see why not," he said. Lewis-Francis has still to decided what events will feature in his build-up to the worlds - with one exception. He has confirmed his participation in the Norwich Union Grand Prix in Birmingham on 18 February, where he will take on another member of Britain's victorious men's relay team - Jason Gardener - over 60m. He added: It's a bit too early to make any predictions for Helsinki, but I have my eyes open and I know I can be the best in the world."

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"sport 068.txt GB select Holmes for double bid Kelly Holmes has been chosen for both the 800m and 1500m at next month's European Indoor Championships - despite not yet confirming her availability. The double-Olympic champion is still undecided about whether to compete in her first European Indoors in Madrid. But UK Athletics chief Max Jones believes it is likely Holmes will race. He said: "It's worth a punt", isn't it? She's gone back to training. If she's confident she will pick one (distance). The programme does not permit both." If Holmes does take her place in the GB side, she has already indicated that 1500m will be her favoured distance. Under championship rules, she does not have to decide until 24 hours before the event begins in Madrid on 4 March. Jones added: "She was pleased with her run in Birmingham (at last weekend's Grand Prix). "I am inclined to think she will (compete). It could depend on how training goes and she will have to be close to top form." And he admitted Holmes' presence would be a great boost to the rest of the Norwich Union GB team. "She is a very good team member and is very good to have there", he added. Meanwhile, there is no surprises in the rest of the Great Britain team announced on Tuesday. Defending 60m champion Jason Gardener is included and will be chasing his third successive gold medal. He will be joined in the event by Mark Lewis-Francis - runner-up behind him three years ago in Vienna - and new boy Darren Chin. Kelly Sotherton has been invited by championship organisers to compete against Carolina Kluft in the pentathlon. Sotherton finished third in the Olympic heptathlon in Athens, where the Swede took gold. There are 16 newcomers at this level of competition in GB's 46-strong team. The championships will be the last to be attended by Jones before he retires to be succeeded by Dave Collins. Jones said: The Olympic Games is the overwhelming target for UKA and therefore it is beneficial to start the next four-year cycle with a not-so-pressurise

d major games. "The European Indoor Championships always provide a chance for the young and inexperienced to make a name for themselves and the current indoor season has produced some exciting new talent. "Madrid is the first small step on a long journey to Beijing and the 2008 Olympics but for some of the emerging athletes", this will be a very important step." 60m: D Chin (Belgrave Harriers), J Gardener (Wessex and Bath), M Lewis-Francis (Birchfield Harriers). T Abeyie (Woodford Green with Essex Ladies), C Lambert (Belgrave Harriers). D Garland (Channel Islands AC). J McIlroy (Windsor, Slough, Eton and Hounslow AC), Jimmy Watkins (Cardiff AAC). Ed Jackson (Aldershot, Farnham and District), N Speaight (Belgrave Harriers), J Thie (Cardiff AAC). A Baddeley (Harrow AC), M Farah (Windsor, Slough, Eton and Hounslow AC), J Mayock (Barnsley AC). D Greaves (Newham and Essex Beagles), A Scott (Shaftesbury Barnet Harriers), A Turner (Notts AC). B Challenger (Belgrave Harriers). Pole vault: N Buckfield (Crawley AC). N Morgan (Birchfield Harriers), C Tomlinson (Newham and Essex Beagles). L Achike (Shaftesbury Barnet Harriers), N Douglas (Oxford City AC), P Idowu (Belgrave Harriers). D Cossins (Birchfield Harriers), R Davenport (Gloucester AC), D Garland (Channel Islands AC), R Preddy (Gloucester AC), G Warburton (Cardiff AAC). K Endacott (City of Plymouth AC), J Kwakye (Woodford Green with Essex Ladies), J Maduaka (Woodford Green with Essex Ladies). K Wall (Basildon AC). K Holmes (Ealing, Southall and Middlesex AC). H Clitheroe (Preston Harriers), K Holmes (Ealing, Southall and Middlesex AC). J Pavey (Exeter Harriers). D Allahgreen (Trafford AC), S Claxton (Belgrave Harriers). J Crane (Sale Harriers Manchester), S Jones (Trafford AC). J Whitlock (Trafford AC). J Johnson (Herne Hill Harriers). K Sotherton (Birchfield Harriers). D Fraser (Croydon Harriers), L McConnell (Shaftesbury Barnet Harriers), C Murphy (Woodford Green with Essex Ladies), M Purkiss (Southampton AC).

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"sport 069.txt Holmes back on form in Birmingham Double 0  
lympic champion Kelly Holmes was back to her best as she comfortably won the 1,000m at the Norwich Union Birmingham Indoor Grand Prix. The 34-year-old, running only her second competitive race of the season, shook off the rust to win in two minutes, 35.39 seconds. But she is still undecided about competing in the European Championships in Madrid from 4-6 March. "I'll probably be entered and make my mind up at the last minute", she said. My training hasn't gone as well as expected but I've got two weeks to decide. "I need to take my time and make sure I feel good about what I'm doing. "I felt very good here but with the crowd behind you", you feel like you can do anything." American was the eventual winner of the men's 60m race which almost ended in farce. Three athletes were disqualified for false starting", including Britain's Mark Lewis-Francis, who was the first man guilty of coming out of his blocks too quickly. World 100m champion Kim Collins clinched second spot ahead of world 60m record holder and Scott's training partner Maurice Greene. Jason Gardener's unbeaten run came to an end as he came fifth and he will need to improve if he is to defend his European title in Madrid. "You can't win them all", said Gardener afterwards. And I was very disappointed as I know I'm capable of doing better." Russian was back on record-breaking form in the pole vault at the National Indoor Arena. The Olympic champion set a new world mark of 4.88m to break her own record - which she set just six days ago - and beat Russian rival Svetlana Feofanova. It was Isinbayeva's 11th world record - indoors or out - since July 2003. "I'm so happy and I will do my best to break the 5m barrier soon", the 22-year-old told BBC Sport. Jamaica's stormed to a personal best of 7.13 seconds to claim the women's 60m sprint. Belgian Kim Gevaert, who will be one of the favourites for next month's European title, took second while American Muna Lee was third. The

re was disappointment for British pair Jeanette Kwakye and Joice Maduaka who finished seventh and eighth respectively. Jamaican stretched her unbeaten record to 25 races as she effortlessly claimed the 200m. The Olympic champion set a new indoor personal best of 22.38 seconds - the fastest time in the world this season. fought off fellow Briton Tim Abeyie to take the men's 200m in a personal best of 20.88. continued her outstanding start to the season, beating a strong international field, which included two-time Olympic 100m hurdles bronze medallist Melissa Morrison, to claim the women's 60m hurdles. The 25-year-old Briton clocked 7.98 seconds while pre-European Championships favourite Russian Irina Shevchenko finished down in sixth. Ethiopia's failed in her bid to smash compatriot Berhane Adere's world 3,000m record but still won the event in emphatic style. The Olympic 5,000m champion was inside record pace but dropped off over the final third, finishing in eight minutes, 33.05 seconds - the fourth fastest time ever recorded for the event. Britain's Jo Pavey bravely decided to go with Defar as she strode away from the field and took second in a season's best 8:41.43. Kenyan also missed out on the indoor 1500m world record, which Hicham El Guerrouj has held for the last eight years. Lagat settled for silver behind El Guerrouj in Athens and was almost four seconds short of the Moroccan's world best, clocking 3:35.27 in Birmingham. And was still struggling to find his form after the death of his fiancee this year. The Olympic 10,000m champion had comfortably led the men's two mile race after his younger brother Tariku had set the pace. But fellow Ethiopian appeared ominously on Bekele's shoulder with two laps to go before surging past him at the bell to win in 8:14.28. Jamaican made the most of a blistering start to take the men's 400m title in 45.91 seconds. World indoor champion, Alleyne Francique, faded badly and finished in fourth while American duo Jerry Harris and James Davis took second and third respectively. Swede showed her class in the long jump as she stole top spot from Jade Johnson with the very last jump of the competition. The Olympic heptathlon gold medallist reached 6.66m to better Johnson's mark of 6.52m - her second personal best inside a week. I was quite surprised because I didn't think I'd end up with second place", said Johnson, who wore London's 2012 Olympic bid slogan, Back the Bid""," on her shorts. ""But I'm pleased and hopefully I'll get a bit better for the Europeans. I really want to win a medal." won the men's event with a season's best of 7.95m", taking the scalp of world indoor champion Savante Stringfellow of the USA.

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"sport 070.txt Record fails to lift lacklustre meet Yelen Isinbayeva may have produced another world pole vault record", but her achievement could not hide the fact it was not the best meet we have ever seen in Birmingham. And hey, there are not many meets that go by without the Russian breaking a world record. Apparently, Isinbayeva has cleared five metres in training and I would just love her to put us out of our misery and have a go at it rather than extending the indoor record by one centimetre at a time. Athletics to me is all about pushing the barriers and being the best you can, and I would like to see her have a go at 5m in competition. Mind you, every time she breaks the record she gets \$30,000 so she can afford to be deliberate about it. World records aside, I thought it was a very encouraging evening's work for Kelly Holmes. She looked good and was very positive. Agnes Samaria, who came second, is in very good shape and is in the world's top three 800m runners this season. Yes, Samaria let Kelly get away, but there was no coming back over the last 200m as Kelly dominated the race, so beating Samaria is a bit of a benchmark for Kelly. My gut feeling is that Kelly would like to run in the European Indoor Championships, but she just hasn't convinced herself she is fit enough to do so. On

the other hand, I think Jason Gardener is struggling to come near what is going to be required to win the men's 60m in Madrid. He started well in the final but still could not stay with the front-runners. Jason has a lot of experience indoors but for some reason he is struggling to maintain his pace through to the finish. It would have been nice to see what Mark Lewis-Francis could have done in the final, if only he hadn't got himself disqualified. He was blatantly playing the false-start game to his advantage, but it tripped him up and made him look a bit silly. My view is you're meant to go when the gun goes and not before. And if you try to unsettle your rivals by employing the false-start tactic you have to remember not to false start yourself again. Having said that, Mark is looking in much better shape. But I haven't seen anything from Mark or Jason yet which suggests France's Ronald Pognon - who has run 6.45 seconds - will be under threat at the Europeans. From a British point of view, Sarah Claxton's victory in the 60m hurdles was the best thing to come out of the meet. Something else that probably went unnoticed was Melanie Purkiss winning the women's national 400m race in a new personal best of 52.98 seconds. AAAs champion Kim Wall came second in another lifetime best so we have a very strong 4x400m squad going to the European Championships. Scotland's Lee McConnell is probably going to run too, so we have a real prospect of a medal. From an international perspective, I thought Meseret Defar was disappointing in the 3,000m, but I don't think the pace-making was great. Canadian Heather Hennigar set a fast early pace but could not maintain it and if Jo Pavey had been in last year's shape she would have given Defar a real run for her money. She had a go but just could not hang in there. We were also expecting a bit more from Bernard Lagat in the men's 1500m. But he has only just come over from the USA, so he may not be that sharp and I still think he is in great shape. As for Kenenisa Bekele, he was well beaten by Markos Geneti. But we only had half expectations for Bekele as he has been struggling this season. It was very hot in the National Indoor Arena and I felt uncomfortable in the commentary box. I think those conditions affected the distance runners and in fact Defar complained to her coach after the race that she could not get her breath properly.

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"sport 071.txt Tomlinson stays focused on Europe Long jumper Chris Tomlinson has cut his schedule to ensure he is fully fit for the European Indoor Championships. The 23-year-old has a minor injury and has pulled out of international meets in Madrid and Lievin this week as well as warm-warmer training in Lanzarote. "It's nothing serious," said his coach Peter Stanley. He strained a muscle in his abdomen at the Birmingham meeting but is back in full training." Sprinter Mark Lewis-Francis will also not compete in Madrid on Thursday. The Birmingham athlete", who clocked a season's best of 6.61 seconds over 60m in Birmingham last week, also prefers to focus his attentions on next month's European Indoor Championships. Lewis-Francis, who was runner-up to British team-mate Jason Gardener at the Europeans three years ago, will continue his training at home. Meanwhile, Tomlinson is still searching for this first major medal and this season he has shown he could be in the sort of form to grab a spot on the podium in Madrid. The Middlesbrough athlete jumped a season's best of 7.95m at the Birmingham Grand Prix - good enough to push world indoor champion Savante Stringfellow into second.

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"sport 072.txt Running around the Olympics It was back to official duties last week in my role as an ambassador to London's 2012 Olympic bid. But I still managed to do all my marathon training. All the sporting peop

le on the capital's bid team think I'm mad to be taking part in the London Marathon. The bid chairman", Lord Coe, admitted he would never dream of running a marathon, even though he was an Olympic middle-distance runner. Kelly Holmes, former hurdler Alan Pascoe and former sprinter Frankie Fredericks - who is now a n IOC member - all wanted to know why anyone would want to run that far. You'd have thought all these athletes, who have been running for most of their lives, wouldn't think it would be that bad. But the only person who was positive about my intentions was Tanni Grey Thompson, who has won the London Marathon wheelchair race six times. Even though it was a very busy week entertaining the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) Evaluation Commission, I actually found my running schedule easier to follow. When I'm at home, I get distracted by all sorts of things but for the five days I was in London, I was in a pressurised situation, but I found it easy to relax by running. On Wednesday, the presentations to the IOC team did not finish until the early evening, so I just managed to squeeze in a 45-minute run. We had an early start on Thursday because we had to visit all the Olympic sites around London, that was pretty shattering, but when we got back to the hotel, I got back on the treadmill. On Friday evening I went along to the special dinner at Buckingham Palace which was a nice occasion. I never feel guilty about eating, especially when I'm exercising. And because it was a rest day I didn't have to feel bad about missing my training either. Anyway, I managed to do another quick run on Saturday ahead of the final IOC presentations, before heading home for my daughter's birthday. When I was in London I did all of my runs on the treadmill, which isn't the same as exercising outdoors. One of the IOC's technical staff from Australia ran alongside me one day. We talked about the Sydney Olympics and that made the time go past more quickly. I do find it quite comfortable running in the gym because there is more cushioning. But when you're gearing up to running on the road you need your body to get used to that jarring feeling when your feet hit the pavement. It was good to get out on the road for my long run on Sunday. After the week I'd had I was a bit concerned I wouldn't be able to complete it. But I coped with it very well and, even though it was bitterly cold, I put in 15-and-a-half miles - only another 11 to go then. - This year Steve will donate all the proceeds from his London Marathon efforts to victims of the tsunami. Steve will be writing a regular column on the ups and downs of his marathon training for the BBC Sport website. He will be raising money through the Steve Redgrave Trust which supports the Association of Children's Hospices, the Children With Leukaemia charity, and the Trust's own project which aims to provide inner-city schools with rowing equipment.

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"sport 073.txt Johnson uncertain about Euro bid Jade Johnson is undecided about whether to contest next month's European Indoor Championships in Madrid despite winning the AAAs long jump title on Saturday. The 24-year-old delivered a personal best of 6.50m to win the European trials but had to wait until her final jump after four failures. ""I don't want to go if I am not going to get a medal,"" said Johnson. I will have to see how I am jumping in the next competition and I'll have to have a conversation with my coach." John son", who finished seventh in last year's Olympic Games," has not competed indoors since 2000. And the Commonwealth and European silver medallist believes her lack of experience in the early part of the season has knocked her confidence. ""It's the stress", said Johnson. I am not used to feeling this," this early. I am just used to training. ""But if I'm doing this kind of thing," then I will have to see how it goes." Johnson next competes in the high-class Birmingham Grand Prix on 18 February.

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"/" "sport 074.txt Pavey focuses on indoor success Jo Pavey will miss January's View From Great Edinburgh International Cross Country to focus on preparing for the European Indoor Championships in March. The 31-year-old was third behind Hayley Yelling and Justyna Bak in last week's European Cross Country Championships but she prefers to race on the track. ""It was great winning bronze but I'm wary of injuries and must concentrate on the indoor season," she said. Because of previous injuries I don't even run up hills in training." "Pavey", who came fifth in the 5,000m at the Athens Olympics, helped the British cross country team win the team silver medal in Heringsdorf last week. She is likely to start her 3,000m season with a race in either Boston or Stuttgart at the end of January.

"/" "sport 075.txt Gardener wins double in Glasgow Britain's Jason Gardener enjoyed a double 60m success in Glasgow in his first competitive outing since he won 100m relay gold at the Athens Olympics. Gardener cruised home ahead of Scot Nick Smith to win the invitational race at the Norwich Union International. He then recovered from a poor start in the second race to beat Swede Daniel Persson and Italy's Luca Verdecchia. His times of 6.61 and 6.62 seconds were well short of American Maurice Greene's 60m world record of 6.39secs from 1998. ""It's a very hard record to break", but I believe I've trained very well," said the world indoor champion, who hopes to get closer to the mark this season. It was important to come out and make sure I got maximum points. My last race was the Olympic final and there was a lot of expectation. ""This was just what I needed to sharpen up and get some race fitness. I'm very excited about the next couple of months." "Double Olympic champion marked her first appearance on home soil since winning 1500m and 800m gold in Athens with a victory. There was a third success for Britain when edged out Russia's Olga Fedorova and Sweden's Jenny Kallur to win the women's 60m race in 7.23secs. Maduaka was unable to repeat the feat in the 200m", finishing down in fourth as took the win for Russia. And the 31-year-old also missed out on a podium place in the 4x200m relay as the British quartet came in fourth, with Russia setting a new world indoor record. There was a setback for Jade Johnson as she suffered a recurrence of her back injury in the long jump. Russia won the meeting with a final total of 63 points, with Britain second on 48 and France one point behind in third. led the way for Russia by producing a major shock in the high jump as he beat Olympic champion Stefan Holm into second place to end the Swede's 22-event unbeaten record. won the triple jump with a leap of 16.87m, with Britain's Tosin Okere fourth in 15.80m. won the men's pole vault competition with a clearance of 5.65m, with Britain's Nick Buckfield 51cm adrift of his personal best in third. And won the women's 800m, with Britain's Jenny Meadows third. There was yet another Russian victory in the women's 400m as finished well clear of Britain's Catherine Murphy. Chris Lambert had to settle for fourth after fading in the closing stages of the men's 200m race as Sweden's held off Leslie Djhone of France. France's won the men's 400m, with Brett Rund fourth for Britain. took victory for Sweden in the women's 60m hurdles ahead of Russia's Irina Shevchenko and Britain's Sarah Claxton, who set a new personal best. Italy grabbed their first victory in the men's 1500m as kicked over the last 200 metres to hold off Britain's James Thie and France's Alexis Abraham. A botched changeover in the 4x200m relay cost Britain's men the chance to add further points as France claimed victory.

"sport 076.txt African double in Edinburgh World 5000m champion Eliud Kipchoge won the 9.2km race at the View From Great Edinburgh Cross Country. The Kenyan", who was second when Newcastle hosted the race last year, was in front from the outset. Ethiopian duo Gebre Gebremariam and Dejene Berhanu made last-gasp efforts to overtake him," but Kipchoge responded and a burst of speed clinched victory. Gavin Thompson was the first Briton in 12th place while Nick McCormick held off his British rivals to win the 4km race. The Morpeth Harrier led from the end of the first lap and ended Mike Skinner and Andrew Baddeley's hopes with a surge in the last lap. ""My training has gone so well I wasn't really worried about the opposition as I knew I was in great shape"," said McCormick, who now hopes to earn a 1,500m place in the British team for the World Championships in Helsinki. In the women's race, Ethiopia's Tirunesh Dibaba won a battle with world cross country champion Benita Johnson to retain her title. Australian Johnson, who shocked her African rivals in Brussels last March, looked to be on course for another win in the 6.2km race. But world 5000m champion Dibaba made a telling strike for the finishing line in the final 20 metres. Britons Kathy Butler and Hayley Yelling were out of contention early on.

sport 077.txt Yelling takes Cardiff hat-trick European cross-country champion Hayley Yelling completed a hat-trick of wins in the Reebok Cardiff Cross Challenge in Bute Park on Sunday afternoon. The part-time maths teacher beat Irish international Jolene Byrne by 40 metres in the six-kilometre race. Another Great Britain international, Louise Damen, finished third as part of the contingent representing England. Peter Riley, who secured bronze for the GB men's team at last month's European Championships, won the men's 9km race. Riley, representing England, moved away over the last two kilometres to win by 25 metres from Ireland's Gary Murray. Glynn Tromans - the reigning UK Inter-Countries and England Cross-Country champion - came in third place as he continues his comeback from a five-month injury lay-off.

sport 078.txt Butler strikes gold in Spain Britain's Kathy Butler continued her impressive year with victory in Sunday's 25th Cross Internacional de Venta de Banos in Spain. The Scot, who led GB to World Cross Country bronze earlier this year, moved away from the field with Ines Monteiro half way into the 6.6km race. She then shrugged off her Portuguese rival to win in 20 minutes 38 seconds. Meanwhile, Briton Karl Keska battled bravely to finish seventh in the men's 10.6km race in a time of 31:41. Kenenisa Bekele of Ethiopia - the reigning world long and short course champion - was never troubled by any of the opposition, winning leisurely in 30.26. Butler said of her success: I felt great throughout the race and hope this is a good beginning for a marvellous 2005 season for me." Elsewhere", Abebe Dinkessa of Ethiopia won the Brussels IAAF cross-country race on Sunday, completing the 10,500m course in 33.22. Gelete Burka then crowned a great day for Ethiopia by claiming victory in the women's race.

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"sport 079.txt Wada will appeal against ruling The World Anti-Doping Agency (Wada) will appeal against the acquittal of Kostas Kenteris and Katerina Thanou on doping charges," if the IAAF does not. The pair were cleared of charges relating to missing dope tests by the Greek Athletics Federation last week. Wada chairman Dick Pound said: ""I am convinced the IAAF will appeal against the decision"," and we will support them. ""But if they accept the federation's ruling we will go before the Court of Arbitration for Sport"," he added. Kenteris's lawyer, Gregory Ioannidis, reacted angrily to Pound's comments. Comments like these only help to embarrass the sporting governing bodies", create a hostage situation for the IAAF and strengthen our case further," he tol

d BBC Sport. Kenteris, 31, and Thanou, 30, had been charged with avoiding drugs tests in Tel Aviv, Chicago and Athens and failing to notify anti-doping officials of their whereabouts before the Olympics. They withdrew from the Athens Games after missing a drugs test at the Olympic village on 12 August. But an independent tribunal ruled that the duo had not been informed that they needed to attend a drugs test in Athens. However, their former coach Christos Tzemos was banned for four years by the tribunal. Kenteris and Thanou still have to face trial on charges brought separately by Greek prosecutors of missing the drugs tests and faking a motorcycle accident to avoid testing at the Athens Games.

sport 080.txt Greek sprinters 'won't run again' The careers of sprinters Kostas Kenteris and Katerina Thanou are over, says the boss of the organisation that cleared them of missing a drugs test. Greek Athletics Federation boss Vassilli Sevastis told the country's parliament: I believe Kenteris and Thanou won't race again. ""The damage to their commercial interests has been done", he added. Athletics bosses are considering its response to the ruling, while the athletes face a trial in a Greek court. Greek prosecutors have brought separate charges of missing the drugs test and faking a motorcycle accident. Speaking to the Greek Parliament on Tuesday, Sevastis said that the evidence sent by the International Olympic Committee and athletics governing body the IAAF was not strong enough for the Greek Association to find the sprinters guilty. We were given the task of getting the snake out of its hole but we were not given any evidence to do it with", he said. So how can you as a Greek with your hand on your heart try the athletes?"" he added. The athletes are technically free to compete while the IAAF reviews its response to the decision to clear Kenteris and Thanou. But Sevastis said: ""It does not matter if they are found guilty at the Court of Arbitration for Sport and the current decision is reversed.""

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sport 081.txt IAAF will contest Greek decision The International Association of Athletics Federations will appeal against the acquittal of Greek athletes Kostas Kenteris and Katerina Thanou. The high-profile duo were cleared of doping offences by the Greek Athletics Federation (Segas) last month. Now the IAAF will lodge an appeal with the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) and has suspended both athletes. An IAAF statement said: ""The Doping Review Board concluded that the decision is erroneous." The statement continued: ""Both athletes' cases will be referred to arbitration before the CAS. The decision in both cases will be final and binding." Segas said the IAAF appeal was ""expected"" and ""understandable." "Now we are going to await the final result", which we cannot prejudge," said Segas chairman Vassilis Sevastis. Kenteris, who won Olympic 200m gold at the 2000 Olympics, and Thanou were suspended by the IAAF last December after failing to take routine drugs tests before the Athens Games. However, the independent tribunal overturned those bans, clearing the sprinters of avoiding tests in Tel Aviv, Chicago and Athens and failing to notify anti-doping officials of their whereabouts before the Olympics. Kenteris' lawyer Gregory Ioannidis described the IAAF's decision as not unexpected"" but told BBC Sport he did not expect the organisation to take action so quickly. ""The IAAF's timing is extremely surprising and it creates concerns and questions", said Ioannidis. The IAAF has not yet received the complete file of proceedings which include statements, testimonies," the closing speeches of defence counsel... and nine audio tapes. ""We have the evidence and it is time the world discovered the truth." Kenteris and Thanou dramatically withdrew from last summer's Olympics after missing a drugs test at the Olympic Village on 12 August. The pair then spent four days in a hospital", claiming they had been injured in

a motorcycle crash. It was the International Olympic Committee who demanded the IAAF investigate the affair. Thanou and Kenteris still face a criminal trial later this year for allegedly avoiding the test and then faking a motorcycle accident

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"sport 082.txt Greek duo cleared in doping case Sprinters  
Kostas Kenteris and Katerina Thanou have been cleared of doping offences by an independent tribunal. The duo had been provisionally suspended by the IAAF for allegedly missing three drugs tests", including one on the eve of the Athens Olympics. But the Greek Athletics Federation tribunal has overturned the bans - a decision which the IAAF can now contest at the Court of Arbitration for Sport. The pair's former coach, Christos Tzekos, has been banned for four years. Kenteris, 31, and Thanou, 30, had been charged with avoiding drug tests in Tel Aviv, Chicago and Athens and failing to notify anti-doping officials of their whereabouts before the Olympics. They withdrew from the Olympics after missing a drugs test at the Olympic Village on 12 August. The pair then spent four days in a hospital, claiming they had been injured in a motorcycle crash. It was the International Olympic Committee's demand that the IAAF investigate the affair that led to the hearing of the Greek tribunal. The head of that tribunal, Kostas Papanopoulos," said it had not been proven that the athletes refused to take the test in Athens. ""The charge cannot be substantiated", he said. In no way was he (Kenteris) informed to appear for a doping test. The same goes for Thanou." "Kenteris's lawyer", Gregory Ioannidis," said: ""The decision means Mr Kenteris has been exonerated of highly damaging and unfounded charges which have been extremely harmful for his career. ""He has consistently maintained his innocence and this was substantiated by further evidence we were able to submit to the tribunal following its deliberations in January. ""This evidence shows Mr Kenteris was never asked to submit to a test by the International Olympic Committee so he could not possibly have been guilty of deliberately avoiding one. It shows he has no case to answer. ""Mr Kenteris should now be given the opportunity he deserves to rebuild his career in the full knowledge that there is no stain on his character. ""He has suffered greatly throughout this ordeal that has exposed both himself and his family to enormous pressures." " But the IAAF said it was ""very surprised"" by the verdict. Spokesman Nick Davies said: ""We note the decision of the Greek authorities with interest. ""Our doping review board will now consider the English version of the decision.""  
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"sport 083.txt Johnson too strong for GB runners Britain's Kathy Butler and Hayley Yelling were no match for Benita Johnson in the 51s t Cross International Zornotza in Amorebieta", Spain. Butler and Yelling finished fourth and fifth as Australian world champion Johnson romped to a five-second victory in the 6km race ahead of Edith Masai. Masai's fellow Kenyan Alice Timbili finished third. Johnson said: ""I ran comfortably for the first 3km and then I tried to leave the others but it wasn't an easy task." " Butler clocked a time of 22 minutes 45 seconds - 22secs behind the winner but four ahead of Yelling", who last month succeeded Paula Radcliffe as European champion. Johnson, will be one of the star attractions at the Great Edinburgh International Cross Country on 15 January.

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"sport 084.txt Holmes starts 2005 with GB events Kelly Ho

lmes will start 2005 with a series of races in Britain. Holmes will make her first track appearance on home soil since winning double Olympic gold in January's Norwich Union International in Glasgow. She will also run in the Grand Prix in Birmingham in February and may defend her indoor AAA 800m title in Sheffield earlier that month. ""I am still competitive and still want to win", she said. I'm an athlete and I can't wait to get back on the track." She added: ""These events are also a great opportunity to thank the British public for the enormous levels of support they have given me from the moment I stepped off that plane from Greece."" The Glasgow meeting will see Holmes compete over 1500m in a five-way match against Sweden", France, Russia and Italy.

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," sport 085.txt Tulu to appear at Caledonian run Two-time Olympic 10",000 metres champion Derartu Tulu has confirmed she will take part in the BUPA Great Caledonian Run in Edinburgh on 8 May. The 32-year-old Ethiopian is the first star name to enter the event. Tulu has won the Boston, London and Tokyo Marathons, as well as the world 10,"000m title in 2001. ""We are delighted to have secured the services of one the most decorated competitors the sport has ever seen", said race director Matthew Turnbull. Her record speaks for herself and there are few other women distance runners who would dare compare their pedigree with Tulu's, he added. She might be 33 next month, but that didn't stop her winning the Olympic 10,"000m bronze medal last summer. She's an ultra-consistent championships racer."

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," sport 086.txt Disappointed Scott in solid start Allan Scott is confident of winning a medal at next week's European Indoor Championships after a solid debut on the international circuit. The 22-year-old Scot finished fourth in the 60m hurdles at the Jose M Cagigal Memorial meeting in Madrid. ""It was definitely a learning curve and I certainly haven't ruled out challenging for a medal next week", said the East Kilbride athlete. The race was won by Felipe Vivancos, who equalled the Spanish record. Sweden's Robert Kronberg was second, with Haiti's Dudley Dorival in third. Scott was slightly disappointed with his run in the final. He won his heat in 7.64secs but ran 0.04secs slower in his first IAAF Indoor Grand Prix circuit final. I should have done better than that", he said. I felt I could have won it. I got a poor start - but I still felt I should have ran faster." Vivancos slashed his personal best to equal the Spanish record with a time of 7.60secs while Kronberg and Dorival clocked 7.62secs and 7.63secs respectively.

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," sport 087.txt GB quartet get cross country call Four British athletes have been pre-selected to compete at the World Cross Country Championships in March after impressive starts to the season. Hayley Yelling", Jo Pavey," Karl Keska and Adam Hickey will represent Team GB at the event in France. Yelling clinched the women's European cross country title last month and Pavey followed up with bronze. Keska helped the men's team to overall third place while Hickey finished in 10th place on his junior debut. ""Winning the European cross country title meant so much to me", said Yelling. And being pre-selected for the Worlds means that I can focus on preparing in the best way possible." The 32-year-old will race alongside Olympic 5",000m finalist Pavey in the women's 8km race on 19 March. Keska, who has made a successful return from a long-t

erm injury lay-off, contests the men's 12km race on 20 March, while 16-year-old Hickey goes in the junior men's 8km on the same day. The rest of the team will be named after the trials at Wollaton Park in Nottingham, which take place on 5 March.

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"sport 088.txt Jones files lawsuit against Conte Marion J ones has filed a lawsuit for defamation against Balco boss Victor Conte followi ng his allegations that he gave her performance-enhancing drugs. The Sydney Ol ympic gold medallist says Conte damaged her reputation and she is seeking \$25m (£13m) in the suit. Conte", whose company is at the centre of a doping investig ation, made the claims in a US television programme. He and three others were i ndicted in February by a federal grand jury for a variety of alleged offences. In an email to the Associated Press on Wednesday," Conte said: ""I stand by eve rything I said"". Jones won three gold medals and two bronzes in Sydney in 200 0. Her lawsuit", filed in the US District Court in San Francisco," said the spr inter had passed a lie detector test and that she ""has never taken banned perf ormance-enhancing drugs"". Conte's statements", the suit added," were ""false a nd malicious"". After the ABC television program earlier this month"," Jones' l awyer Richard Nicholls said: ""Marion has steadfastly maintained her position t hroughout: she has never"," ever used performance-enhancing drugs. ""Victor Con te is a man facing a 42-count federal indictment"," while Marion Jones is one o f America's most decorated female athletes. Mr Conte's statements have been wil dly contradictory. ""Mr Conte chose to make unsubstantiated allegations on tele vision"," while Marion Jones demanded to take and then passed a lie detector ex amination. ""Mr Conte is simply not credible. We challenge him to submit to th e same lie detector procedure that Marion Jones passed."" The sport's ruling bo dy", the IAAF," is taking a cautious approach to Conte's allegations but contac ted the US Anti-Doping Agency. Communications director Nick Davies said the IAA F would seek to contact Conte ""for further information"". But Davies stressed it would be up to the American authorities to decide whether they will take act ion against Jones in light of Conte's television interview and the world govern ing body would monitor the situation closely. ""If it is felt there is case to answer", it would be for its national governing body (USA Track and Field) to t ake the appropriate disciplinary action," he added. The US Anti-Doping Agency h as proved itself to be very diligent in its anti-doping war. ""And I am sure", like ourselves," they will be watching the television programme with great inte rest." Jones", who is under investigation for steroid use by the US Anti-Dopin g Agency, has continually denied ever taking illegal substances since being inv estigated in the Balco scandal, although she praised a zinc supplement Conte ma rketed. Jones, who did not win any medals in Athens in August, has never failed a drugs test. Meanwhile, Conte, who has been charged along with three other men of distributing illegal steroids and money laundering, is due to face trial in March.

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"sport 089.txt Thanou desperate to make return Greek spri nter Katerina Thanou says she is eager to compete again after being cleared of missing a drugs test by an independent Greek tribunal. Thanou",30, was provisi onally suspended for missing a test before the Olympics," but the decision was overturned. ""The IAAF will decide if we can compete again in Greece and abroa d"," Thanou told To Vima newspaper in her first interview since the Athens Olym pics. If given the green light I will run again - that's the only thing I wan t." Thanou",30," and her compatriot Kostas Kenteris were provisionally suspend

ed by the IAAF in December for missing three drugs tests. The third was alleged to have been on the eve of the opening ceremony of the Athens Olympics. But an independent tribunal of the Greek Athletics Federation overturned the provisional ban on 18 March. The IAAF - which said it was ""very surprised"" by the decision of the Greek tribunal - is deciding whether to appeal against the decision at the Court of Arbitration for Sport. However", Dick Pound, the chairman of the World Anti-Doping Authority," has said he will appeal against the decision if the IAAF does not. And Thanou and Kenteris face a criminal trial later this year for allegedly avoiding the test and then faking a motorcycle accident. Thanou said: ""I can see how people can think the accident seemed like a childish excuse. ""I cannot deny that we made a lot of mistakes during that time. I always said we needed a PR person. ""An athlete would have to be very stupid to take illegal substances when he or she knows that they will undergo tests at any given moment. ""I am a champion. I cannot risk everything I've achieved in such a silly way.""

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"sport 090.txt Relay squad thrilled with honours Jason Gardener says being made an MBE in the New Year Honours List underlines the achievement of Great Britain's 4x100m relay squad at the Olympics. "Gardener", Darren Campbell, Marlon Devonish and Mark Lewis-Francis have all been awarded MBEs after beating pre-race favourites USA to gold. ""I think this award reinforces what we did on that fantastic night", he said. This recognition is really inspiring and makes me want to have more success," said Lewis-Francis. The British sprint quartet produced a string of faultless baton changes in the final to put pressure on the Americans. And when the USA stumbled with a poor switch between Justin Gatlin and Coby Miller at the 300m stage, Britain edged ahead going into the final bend. Then, on cue, Lewis-Francis ran a textbook final leg, holding off Maurice Greene to bring Team GB home in 38.07 seconds - just one hundredth of a second ahead of their rivals. Winning the gold medal was the highlight of my athletics career so far", said the Birchfield Harrier. This award is not just for me, but for all my friends," family and the people who have helped me to get to this level in my sport." Gardener added: ""All of us had worked very hard for a long", long time to carry off what most believed was an impossible task. ""Of course this award is very special", but for me nothing will ever take away winning an Olympic gold medal. It's all I ever wanted. ""All my life that is what I dreamed of doing. Life since then has been fantastic." Campbell agreed receiving the honour capped off what has been a difficult year for the sprinter. ""I think the MBE is important because the people closest to me know my journey", said the Newport-based athlete. I've not just stumbled upon this. ""It gives me a lot of joy and satisfaction to know the stuff you do for your country does mean something." - There was also recognition for James Clarke", chairman of the London Marathon. He becomes an OBE.

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"sport 091.txt Balco case trial date pushed back The trial date for the Bay Area Laboratory Cooperative (Balco) steroid distribution case has been postponed. US judge Susan Illston pushed back a preliminary evidentiary hearing - which was due to take place on Wednesday - until 6 June. No official trial date has been set but it is expected to begin in September. Balco founder Victor Conte along with James Valente", coach Remy Korchemny and trainer Greg Anderson are charged with distributing steroids to athletes. Anderson's clients include Barry Bonds, and several other baseball stars have been asked to appear before a congressional inquiry into steroid use in the major leagues. Th

e Balco defence team have already lost their appeal to have the case dismissed at a pre-trial hearing in San Francisco but will still argue the case should not go to trial. The hearing in June will focus on the admissibility of evidence gathered during police raids on Balco's offices and Anderson's home. Conte and Anderson were not arrested at that point but federal agents did obtain statements from them. The defence are expected to challenge the legality of those interviews and if Ilston agrees she could reject all the evidence from the raids. Balco has been accused by the United States Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) of being the source of the banned steroid THG and modafinil. Former double world champion Kelli White and Olympic relay star Alvin Harrison have both been banned on the basis of materials discovered during the Balco investigation. Britain's former European 100m champion Dwain Chambers is currently serving a two-year ban after testing positive for THG in an out-of-competition test in 2003. And American sprinter Marion Jones has filed a lawsuit for defamation against Conte following his allegations that he gave her performance-enhancing drugs.

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''' "sport 092.txt Collins calls for Chambers return World 10  
0m champion Kim Collins says suspended sprinter Dwain Chambers should be allowed to compete in the Olympics again. Chambers was banned for two years after testing positive for the anabolic steroid THG and his suspension runs out in November this year. But Collins says the British Olympic Association should reverse the decision to ban him from the Olympics for life. ""It was too harsh," Collins told Radio Five Live. They should reconsider." Chambers has been in America learning American football but has not ruled out a return to the track. Collins added: ""He is a great guy and I have never had any problems with him. We are friends. ""I would like to see Dwain come back and compete again. He is a good person. ""Even though he made a mistake he understands what he did and should be given a chance once more.""

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''' "sport 093.txt Costin aims for comeback in 2006 Jamie Costin should be paralysed. He says so himself in a matter-of-fact way as he recalls the car accident which occurred nine days before he was scheduled to step out into the Olympic Stadium in Athens for the 50K Walk. There is an ironic chuckle as he talks of his immediate thoughts after a lorry", driving on the wrong side of the road," had ploughed into his rental car. ""I was in a lot of pain and I guessed that one of my toes was broken," says the Waterford man. But I was thinking maybe with a cortisone injection you never know. ""In my back," it felt as though all the muscles had been ripped off my pelvis but I was thinking maybe we could do something with laser therapy and ultra sound and hopefully I'd be able to race." It took over 10 hours before Jamie knew with certainty that he would not be competing in his second Olympics. ""My back had been broken in two places and with one of my vertebrae," the bottom part had exploded so I'm fierce lucky not be paralysed. ""I'd fractured my big toe as well which was on the brake." Jamie didn't finally arrive at hospital in Athens until some nine and a half hours after the accident. ""For the first nine hours," I had no pain killers which was ridiculous in 35 degrees heat. ""But once I got the scans and saw them it was a case of moving on and thinking:'OK'," I've got a different set of circumstances now'." Within three days he was arriving back in Ireland by air ambulance. Doctors in Athens had wanted to operate on Jamie's back immediately but he insisted on delaying any surgery until he arrived back home -

something he is now very relieved about. ""The Greek doctors were going to put three or four inch titanium rods either side of my spinal cord up through my vertebrae. ""That would have fused all my lower back and I would never have been able to race again. They were really putting a lot of pressure on me to agree to the surgery. ""But when I got to the Mater in Dublin they said it was possible for it to heal totally naturally which is giving me the chance to get back into competition which is very important to me. The people at the Mater have been absolutely fantastic." Jamie had to wear a body cast for three and a half months after the accident and spent most of that time flat on his back. He then progressed to crutches for six weeks until he was finally able to walk unaided on 10 January. ""Walking without the crutches seemed like something finally really measurable in terms of my recovery." Physio sessions with Johnston McEvoy in Limerick have been a vital part of his recovery. ""Johnston uses an advanced type of acupuncture and it's very effective. ""Needles get put right close up to my spine. A two and a half inch needle went in yesterday and I'm fairly incapacitated today as a result." Jamie has also travelled to receive treatment at the Polish training centre in Spala where he has trained with triple Olympic champion Robert Korzeniowski over the past five years. ""I was there for over a fortnight earlier this month and underwent a fair extreme treatment called cryotherapy. ""Basically," there's a small room which is cooled by liquid nitrogen to minus 160 degrees centigrade and it promotes deep healing." Jamie heads to Poland again on Sunday where he will be having daily cryotherapy in addition to twice-daily physio sessions and pool-work. All these sessions are small steps on the way to what Jamie hopes will be a return to racing in 2006. ""It's all about trying to get mobility in my back. Lying down for three and a half months didn't really help with the strength. ""There's a lot of work involved in my recovery. I'm doing about six hours a day between physio and pool work. ""I'm also going to the gym to lift very light weights to try and build up my muscles. I'm fairly full on with everything I do. ""I'd hope to be training regularly by March. But training is just part of the process of getting back. ""At the moment", every time I go and do a big bit of movement, my whole pelvic area all down my lower back just tightens up. ""It's a case of waiting and seeing how it reacts. Hopefully," after four or five months my back won't tighten up as much."

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"sport 094.txt Lewis-Francis turns to Christie Mark Lewis-Francis has stepped up his preparations for the new season by taking advice from British sprint icon Linford Christie. The 22-year-old is set to compete at Sheffield this weekend and will then take on Maurice Greene and Kim Collins in Birmingham on 18 February. ""Training in Wales and getting advice from Linford Christie is broadening my mind", said Lewis-Francis. The sprinter has also shed weight since winning relay gold at the Athens Games. Last year I was 91kg, now I am 86.9kg - hopefully my times will come down," he said. This has been brought about by eating the right foods and cutting out the snacks. It is just discipline and being more focused about what I am doing. ""I am still keeping up my weights work and I can see the improvement in my running." Despite playing his part in Britain's successful 4x100m relay team", Lewis-Francis still feels the frustration of missing out on the individual 100m final at the 2004 Olympics. ""That was heartbreaking", but I had made it to the semi-final and for me, on a personal level," that was an achievement. ""I just have to be patient and build up for the next Olympics. That is my goal and whatever I do between now and then will be geared to making the final."

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"sport 095.txt Man Utd stroll to Cup win Wayne Rooney made a winning return to Everton as Manchester United cruised into the FA Cup quarter-finals. Rooney received a hostile reception", but goals in each half from Quinton Fortune and Cristiano Ronaldo silenced the jeers at Goodison Park. Fortune headed home after 23 minutes before Ronaldo scored when Nigel Martyn parried Paul Scholes' free-kick. Marcus Bent missed Everton's best chance when Roy Carroll, who was later struck by a missile, saved at his feet. Rooney's return was always going to be a potential flashpoint, and he was involved in an angry exchange with a spectator even before kick-off. And Rooney's every touch was met with a deafening chorus of jeers from the crowd that once idolised the 19-year-old. Everton started brightly and Fortune needed to be alert to scramble away a header from Bent near the goal-line. But that was the cue for United to take complete control with a supreme passing display on a Goodison Park pitch that was cutting up. Fortune gave United the lead after 23 minutes, rising to meet Ronaldo's cross from eight yards after the Portuguese youngster had been allowed too much time and space by the hapless Gary Naysmith. United dominated without creating too many clear-cut chances, and they almost paid the price for not making the most of their domination two minutes before half-time. Mikel Arteta played a superb ball into the area but Bent, played onside by Gabriel Heintze, hesitated and Carroll plunged at his fee to save. United almost doubled their lead after 48 minutes when Ronaldo's low drive from 25 yards took a deflection off Tony Hibbert, but Martyn dived to save brilliantly. And Martyn came to Everton's rescue three minutes later when Rooney's big moment almost arrived as he raced clean through, but once again the veteran keeper was in outstanding form. But there was nothing Martyn could do when United doubled their lead after 57 minutes as they doubled their advantage. Scholes' free-kick took a deflection, and Martyn could only parry the ball out for Ronaldo, who reacted first to score easily. Everton's problems worsened when James McFadden limped off with an injury. And there may be further trouble ahead for Everton after goalkeeper Carroll required treatment after he was struck on the head by a missile thrown from behind the goal. Rooney's desperate search for a goal on his return to Everton was halted again by Martyn in injury-time when he outpaced Stubbs," but once again Martyn denied the England striker. - Manchester United coach Sir Alex Ferguson: "It was a fantastic performance by us. In fairness I think Everton have missed a couple of players and got some young players out. ""The boy Ronaldo is a fantastic player. He's persistent and never gives in. ""I don't know how many fouls he had. He gets up and wants the ball again", he's truly a fabulous player." "Everton: Martyn", Hibbert, Yobo, Stubbs, Naysmith, Osman, Carsley, Arteta, Kilbane, McFadden, Bent. Subs: Wright, Pistone, Weir, Plessis, Vaughan. Manchester United: Carroll, Gary Neville, Brown, Ferdinand, Heinze, Ronaldo, Phil Neville, Keanе, Scholes, Fortune, Rooney. Subs: Howard, Giggs, Smith, Miller, Spector. Referee: R Styles (Hampshire)

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"sport 096.txt Van Nistelrooy set to return Manchester United striker Ruud van Nistelrooy may make his comeback after an Achilles tendon injury in the FA Cup fifth round tie at Everton on Saturday. He has been out of action for nearly three months and had targeted a return in the Champions League tie with AC Milan on 23 February. But Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson hinted he may be back early. He said: ""There is a chance he could be involved at Everton but we'll just have to see how he comes through training." "The 28-year-old has been training in Holland and Ferguson said: ""Ruud comes back on Tuesday and we need to assess how far on he is. ""The training he has been doing in Holland has been perfect and I am very satisfied with it." "Even witho

ut Van Nistelrooy", United made it 13 wins in 15 league games with a 2-0 derby victory at Manchester City on Sunday. But they will be boosted by the return of the Dutch international, who is the club's top scorer this season with 12 goals. He has not played since aggravating the injury in the 3-0 win against West Brom on 27 November. Ferguson was unhappy with Van Nistelrooy for not revealing he was carrying an injury. United have also been hit by injuries to both Alan Smith and Louis Saha during Van Nistelrooy's absence, meaning Wayne Rooney has sometimes had to play in a lone role up front. The teenager has responded with six goals in nine games, including the first goal against City on Sunday.

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"sport 097.txt Moyes U-turn on Beattie dismissal Everton manager David Moyes will discipline striker James Beattie after all for his headbutt on Chelsea defender William Gallas. The Scot initially defended Beattie, whose dismissal put Everton on the back foot in a game they ultimately lost 1-0," saying Gallas overreacted. But he has had a rethink after looking over the video evidence again. He said: ""I believe that I should set the record straight by conceding that the dismissal was right and correct."" Moyes added: ""My comments on Saturday came immediately after the final whistle and at a point when I had only had the opportunity to see one," very quick re-run of the incident." The club website also reported that Beattie", who seemed unrepentant after Saturday's match," insisting Gallas ""would have stayed down a lot longer"" if he had headbutted him", has now apologised. Moyes continued: ""Although the incident was totally out of character - James has never even been suspended before in his career - his actions were unacceptable and had a detrimental effect on his team-mates. ""James did issue a formal apology to myself," his team-mates and to the Everton supporters immediately after the game and that was the right thing to have done. He will now be subjected to the normal club discipline. ""He is a competitive player but a fair player and I know how upset he is by what has happened. However", I must say that I do still believe the Chelsea player in question did go down too easily." Speaking immediately after the game", Moyes said: ""I don't think it was a sending-off", I have been a centre-half in my time and I would have been ashamed to have gone down as easily as that. ""Not in a million years would John Terry have gone down in the same way. I have never heard of anybody butting somebody from behind while you are running after them. ""What has happened to big", strong centre-halves? I thought it was a push initially and I still don't think it was a sending-off." An angry Beattie initially said: ""He (Gallas) would have stayed down a lot longer if I had headbutted him. ""I can tell you it wasn't an intentional headbutt. We were chasing a ball into the corner and William Gallas was looking over his shoulder and blocking me off. ""He was stopping as we were running and I said to myself 'if you're going to stay in my way I'll go straight over you'. Our heads barely touched and it wasn't an intentional headbutt."

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"sport 098.txt Ronaldo considering new contract Manchester United winger Cristiano Ronaldo said he is close to agreeing to a new contract at Old Trafford. The Portugal star", who joined in August 2003 on a five-year-deal," is a regular in the United first-team. ""The United board have already made an offer to renew the contract but I'm trying not to think about it", he told the News of the World. My agent has spoken with the club and it will be resolved soon. I think we'll reach a good agreement for both sides." Ronaldo refused to commit his long-term future to the club. ""Nobody knows what will come

tomorrow. I like being here", but who knows," he added. There aren't many bigger and better clubs than this one. It's my ambition to be at a big club. I'm happy but nobody knows the future. ""

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'sport 099.txt Smith keen on Home series return Scotland manager Walter Smith has given his backing to the reinstatement of the Home International series. Such a plan is to be proposed by the new chief executive of the Northern Irish FA", Howard Wells," at the next meeting of the four home countries. The English FA has expressed doubt as to whether the fixtures could be accommodated at the end of each season. But Smith said: ""Bringing it back would add meaning to friendly games and that's something that's needed." "The Home International series was done away with in 1984", "with the traditional Scotland-England fixture continuing until 1989. That game is one Smith would be delighted to see reinstated. ""The Scotland v England match was a highlight of the end of the season", he added. I was in Italy for their friendly with Russia last week and they made seven substitutions while only around 20,000 fans turned up to watch. ""England were criticised for the 0-0 draw against Holland - the way Scotland were slammed in the past for poor results in friendlies. ""You have to put a performance on in friendly games. If you don't", "they can be de-motivating. ""It can be a dangerous road to go down", "if players don't apply themselves in the manner they should. ""So I would support the return of the home internationals - the only problem would be fitting them in to the fixture schedule." "

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'sport 100.txt Mido makes third apology Ahmed 'Mido' Hossam has made another apology to the Egyptian people in an attempt to rejoin the national team. The 21-year-old told a news conference in Cairo on Sunday that he is sorry for the problems that have led to his exclusion from the Pharaohs since July last year. Mido said: ""There isn't much I have to say today", "all there is to say is that I came specially from England to Egypt to rejoin the national team and to apologise for all my mistakes." "Mido was axed by former coach Marco Tardelli after failing to answer a national call-up", "claiming he had a groin injury. But he then played in a friendly for his club AS Roma within 24 hours of a World Cup qualifying match at home to Cameroon last September. Mido added: ""It's not my right to give orders and say when I want to play ... at the same time I will always make sure that I put the national's team's matches as my top priority. ""I feel that the national players are playing with a new spirit as I saw them play against Belgium (Egypt won 4-0 on Wednesday) and I simply want to add to their success. ""I do confess that I was rude to the Egyptian press at times but now I have gained more experience and know that I will never go anywhere without the press's support. ""Many of the international stars like David Beckham and (Zinedine) Zidane had the press opposing them. ""So I'm now used to the fact that the press can be against me at times and I don't have to overreact when this happens. Meanwhile", "Egypt FA spokesman Methat Shalaby welcomed the apology and said no one had exerted pressure on Mido to apologise. ""Mido's apology today does not negatively affect Mido in anyway", on the contrary it makes him a bigger star and a role model for all football players," Shalaby said. Shalaby earlier said that after an apology Mido would be available for the national side if coach Hassan Shehata chose him. Mido joined Tottenham in an 18-month loan deal near the end of the January transfer window, scoring twice on his debut against Portsmouth.

sport 101.txt Man City 0-2 Man Utd Manchester United redu

ced Chelsea's Premiership lead to nine points after a scrappy victory over Manchester City. Wayne Rooney met Gary Neville's cross to the near post with a low shot, which went in via a deflection off Richard Dunne, to put United ahead. Seven minutes later, the unfortunate Dunne hooked a volley over David James' head and into his own net. Steve McManaman wasted City's best chance when he shot wide from three yards in the first half. In the opening 45 minutes United had looked unlikely to earn the win they needed to maintain any chance of catching Chelsea in the title race. Their approach play was more laboured than patient and they managed to fashion just one chance - a Paul Scholes header over the bar. And City seemed to be content to sit back and try and hit their rivals on the break as the game settled into a tepid pattern. Only Shaun Wright-Phillips appeared capable of interrupting the monotony, looking lively down the right and causing Gabriel Heinze problems. Wes Brown also found Wright-Phillips to be a difficult opponent when the tricky winger embarrassed him near the touchline. Wright-Phillips' sublime skill and pace took him past Brown and he delivered a pinpoint centre to the feet of McManaman. But the former Liverpool player demonstrated why he has never scored against United by side-footing the easy chance wide. John O'Shea was forced off after an earlier clash with Sylvain Distin and Cristiano Ronaldo came on to replace him. He immediately caused Ben Thatcher some discomfort and looked set to inject some much-needed pace into the United attack. Rooney was being well marshalled by Dunne - but that was all about to change. After the break, United poured forward and there was a renewed urgency about their play. And when Neville delivered a cross in a carbon copy of City's best first-half chance, Rooney showed McManaman how to do it - even if he needed the help of Dunne's leg. Worse was to come for Dunne, who had been having a fine match. On 75 minutes, he scored a horrible own goal when attempting to volley clear Rooney's cross and United seemed home and dry. However, City did fight back and Fowler missed another great chance from close range. And United keeper Roy Carroll saved well from Kiki Musampa. But United could have had a third late on when substitute Ryan Giggs hit the post.

- Manchester City boss Kevin Keegan: We had a great chance to take the lead and the first goal was always going to be crucial. "We started off with a good tempo but then we allowed them to dictate the pace a bit too much. "But we still had four good chances", two after we'd gone 2-0 down," the one McManaman missed was very similar to the one Wayne Rooney scored from."

- Manchester United boss Sir Alex Ferguson: "It wasn't our best performance of the last three months but I think we're deserved winners. "At times", especially in the first half, we didn't play with enough speed. But with (Cristiano) Ronaldo and (Ryan) Giggs on," the speed improved. "Derby games can be like that", they can be scrappy, dull," horrible and it was maybe like that."

Man City: James, Mills (Bradley Wright-Phillips 83), Dunne, Distin, Thatcher, Shaun Wright-Phillips, Barton (Macken 68), Sibierski, McManaman, Musampa, Fowler. Subs Not Used: Weaver, Onuoha, Flood. Booked: Fowler, Sibierski. Man Utd: Carroll, Gary Neville, Ferdinand, Brown, Heinze, O'Shea (Ronaldo 33), Keane, Fortune, Fletcher (Giggs 64), Rooney, Scholes (Phil Neville 84). Subs Not Used: Howard, Bellion. Booked: Rooney, Scholes, Keane. Goals: Rooney 68, Dunne 75 og. Att: 47,111 Ref: S Bennett (Kent).

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"sport 102.txt Gerrard plays down European hopes Steven Gerrard has admitted that Liverpool have little chance of winning the Champions League this season. The 24-year-old Reds skipper spoke out ahead of Tuesday's first leg at home to Bayer Leverkusen in the last 16", which he will miss through suspension. "Let's be realistic", there are some fantastic teams left in the Champions League," he told BBC Radio Five Live. We are just going to try to

stay in as long as possible but we realise that maybe it is not our year this year." "Gerrard has made no secret of his desire to be involved in Europe's premier club competition. Last season he described qualification for the Champions League as the ""be all and end all"" - and rumours persist that he will leave Anfield if the Reds fail to secure a place in the competition. He has consistently been linked with a move away from Liverpool", "with Chelsea the favourites to snap up the England midfielder. And Blues boss Jose Mourinho backed Gerrard's view that Rafael Benitez's team could struggle to progress this season. ""Rafa has still time in front of him to build an even better team", maybe he's a little bit behind (right now)," he told BBC Radio Five Live. Gerrard, who fired Liverpool into the last 16 of this season's competition with a brilliant goal in December's win over Olympiakos, insisted he was still fully focused on helping Liverpool to glory this season. The Reds are currently fifth in the Premiership table, five points off the crucial fourth spot, which brings Champions League qualification - and they face Chelsea in Sunday's Carling Cup final. It's big couple of months for Liverpool", he added. We're fighting for the fourth spot for the Champions League for next season but we are still involved in two cup competitions," which are very important. ""We are confident we can upset Chelsea in the Carling Cup final and get to the last eight of the Champions League because", financially, it is big for the club and, personally for myself," it is very good."

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"sport 103.txt Duff ruled out of Barcelona clash Chelse a's Damien Duff has been ruled out of Wednesday's Champions League clash with Barcelona at the Nou Camp. Duff sustained a knee injury in the FA Cup defeat at Newcastle and manager Jose Mourinho said: ""He cannot run. His injury is very painful," so he is out." But Mourinho has revealed defender Willian Gallas and striker Didier Drogba will be in the starting line-up. The Blues boss took the unusual step of naming his side a day before the match", "with Jole Cole named in midfield. Mourinho said: ""We have one more session but I think Drogba will play", "and Gallas will play. ""Drogba trained on Monday with no problems and will do the same on Tuesday. Gallas feels he can play and wants to play. We are protecting him still but he will be okay to play." Drogba", Chelsea's £24m striker, has missed the last three weeks through injury. Cech, Ferreira, Carvalho, Terry, Gallas, Tiago, Makelele, Lampard, Cole, Drogba, Gudjohnsen.

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"sport 104.txt Chelsea clinch cup in extra-time (after extra-time - score at 90 mins 1-1) John Arne Riise volleyed Liverpool ahead after 45 seconds but Steven Gerrard scored a 79th-minute own goal. Blues boss Jose Mourinho was sent off for taunting Liverpool fans after the goal and he watched on television as his side went on to win the game. Drogba and Kezman scored from close range before Antonio Nunez's header made for a tense finale. It was an amazing climax which gave Mourinho his first silverware as Chelsea manager. Yet it was controversial too", after Mourinho's sending off, apparently for putting his finger to his lips to hush the Liverpool fans. There was no hushing them after the extraordinary opening in which the Reds took a stunning lead inside the first minute. Riise could not have connected any better with Morientes' cross as he smashed a left-foot volley past Petr Cech. The goal, the quickest-ever in a League Cup final, stunned a Blues side whose previously rock-solid confidence had been shaken by consecutive losses to Newcastle and Barcelona in the previous week. The Blues' attacking chances were limited, and Jerzy Dudek was equal to Frank Lampard's powerfully-struck drive and Drogba's low shot. Despite their fr

ustration, Chelsea began to dominate midfield without seriously threatening to break Liverpool's well-organised defence. Joe Cole had a shot blocked and a promising Damien Duff break was halted by a good tackle from Djimi Traore, but the Reds reached half-time without any major scares. The Blues began the second half with more urgency and pegged Liverpool back. Nevertheless, Liverpool were living dangerously and they needed a fantastic double save from Dudek on 54 minutes, first at full stretch from Gudjohnsen's header, then to smother William Gallas' follow-up. And despite Chelsea's possession, it was Liverpool who fashioned the next clear opportunity as Luis Garcia fed Dietmar Hamann whose shot forced a superb save from Cech. And the Blues' increasingly adventurous approach saw Liverpool earn another chance on the break on 75 minutes as Paulo Ferreira denied Gerrard with a last-ditch tackle. But Gerrard was on the scoresheet minutes later - in the most unfortunate fashion - as he inadvertently deflected Ferreira's free-kick past his own keeper and in off the post to bring Chelsea level. That prompted Mourinho's reaction which saw him sent off, but Chelsea still pressed and Duff had a chance to win the game with seven minutes remaining. Dudek saved bravely at the Irishman's feet, while Milan Baros shot wildly at the other end to ensure extra time. Drogba almost headed Chelsea in front two minutes into extra-time but the striker saw the ball rebound off the post. But seconds after the half-time interval, Drogba made no mistake, picking the ball up from Glen Johnson's long throw inside the six-yard box and sidefooting home. And Kezman appeared to have made the game safe as he netted from close range after Gudjohnsen's cross in the 110th minute. There was still drama as Nunez beat Cech to a high ball with six minutes remaining to head his side level, but despite Liverpool's desperate attacks, Chelsea clung on to win. Dudek, Finnan, Carragher, Hyypia, Traore (Biscan 67), Luis Garcia, Gerrard, Hamann, Riise, Kewell (Nunez 56), Morientes (Baros 74). Subs Not Used: Pellegrino, Carson. Hyypia, Traore, Hamann, Carragher. Riise 1, Nunez 113. Cech, Paulo Ferreira, Ricardo Carvalho, Terry, Gallas (Kezman 74), Jarosik (Gudjohnsen 45), Lampard, Makelele, Cole (Johnson 81), Drogba, Duff. Subs Not Used: Pidgeley, Tiago. Lampard, Kezman, Drogba, Duff. Gerrard 79 og, Drogba 107, Kezman 112. 78,000 S Bennett (Kent).

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"sport 105.txt Newcastle 2-1 Bolton Kieron Dyer smashed home the winner to end Bolton's 10-game unbeaten run. Lee Bowyer put Newcastle ahead when he fed Stephen Carr on the right flank", then sprinted into the area to power home a header from the resultant cross. Wanderers hit back through Stelios Giannakopoulos, who ended a fluid passing move with a well-struck volley. But Dyer had the last word in a game of few chances, pouncing on a loose ball after Alan Shearer's shot was blocked and firing into the top corner. Neither side lacked urgency in the early stages of the game, with plenty of tackles flying in, but opportunities in front of goal were harder to come by. Bolton keeper Jussi Jaaskelainen had to make two saves in quick succession midway through the first-half - keeping out Shearer's low shot and Dyer's close-range header - but that was the only goalmouth action of note. And it was almost out of nothing that the Magpies took the lead on 35 minutes. Bowyer found space with a neat turn on the half-way line and striding forward picked out Carr to his right. He then continued his run and with perfect timing made his way into the box where he met Carr's cross with a downward header into the far corner. Bolton had produced little going forward at this point but they responded well. They were level within six minutes thanks to a smart finish from Giannakopoulos. Jay-Jay Okocha twisted and turned on the edge of the area and after a neat exchange of passes involving Kevin Davies and Gary Speed, the Greek striker found the bottom corner

with a first-time strike. The Magpies were opened up again before half-time as Davies set Giannakopoulos in space and Given had to block at his near post. But the home side survived, and they should have re-taken the lead with the first meaningful attack of the second half. Fernando Hierro cynically chopped down Dyer on the edge of the area with the midfielder clean through. But the veteran defender escaped with a booking as there were other defenders nearby," and from the resultant free-kick Laurent Robert curled the ball just wide. Bolton were creating little going forward and they seemed content to frustrate the Magpies. Their strategy seemed to be working until the 69th minute. Alan Shearer's snap-shot was charged down and Dyer reacted first to smash the ball past the despairing Jaaskelainen from six yards. - Bolton boss Sam Allardyce "I am bitterly disappointed with the result"," but I am probably more disappointed with the second-half performance. ""In the first half we had put them under a lot of pressure"," and our goal matched theirs in quality. ""I thought it would lift us and that they might be tired after playing a lot of games"," but unfortunately we were not up for the battle in the second half. ""We allowed them to heap too much pressure on us"," and in the end we cracked." - Newcastle boss Graeme Souness "We deserved the win. We had a really good second half. ""Bolton are a difficult side to play. You have to match them physically first but we did that"," and then we played some football. ""We had a slow first 45 minutes when we looked a bit tired but we got going after that. The scoreline flattered them and we could have had one or two more goals." Newcastle: Given", Carr, Boumsong, Bramble, Babayaro, Dyer, Faye, Bowyer, Robert (Jenas 77), Ameobi, Shearer. Subs Not Used: Butt, Harper, Milner, Hughes. Goals: Bowyer 35, Dyer 69. Bolton: Jaaskelainen, Hunt (Fadiga 14), N'Gotty, Ben Haim, Candela, Giannakopoulos, Okocha (Vaz Te 77), Hierro (Campo 64), Speed, Gardner, Davies. Subs Not Used: Jaidi, Poole. Booked: Ben Haim, Hierro. Goals: Giannakopoulos 41. Att: 50,430 Ref: S Dunn (Gloucestershire).

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"sport 106.txt Middlesbrough 2-2 Charlton A late header by teenager Danny Graham earned Middlesbrough a battling draw with Charlton at the Riverside. Matt Holland had put the visitors ahead in the 14th minute after his shot took a deflection off Franck Queudrue. But Middlesbrough peppered the Charlton goal after the break and Chris Riggott stroked home the equaliser. Shaun Bartlett's strike put Charlton back in front but that lead lasted just six minutes before Graham rushed onto Queudrue's pass to head home. The match burst to life from the whistle and Charlton defender Hermann Hreidarsson had sight of an open goal after just six minutes. Hreidarsson received Danny Murphy's free-kick from the right but he crashed his free header wide of the far post. The Iceland international looked such a danger the Boro bench could be heard issuing frantic instructions to mark him. Charlton's early pressure paid off when Bartlett received a long ball from Talal El Karkouri in the box and laid it off to Holland who buried his right-footed strike. Szilard Nemeth", recalled in place of Joseph-Desire Job, was twice denied his chance to get Middlesbrough back on level terms by Dean Kiely. The striker played a great one-two with Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink only to see Kiely get down well to smother his shot before directing a header straight into the keeper's arms. Boro had plenty of time on the ball but the Addicks comfortably mopped up the pressure - with Kiely tipping a Hasselbaink header over the bar - to take their lead into half-time. It was all one-way traffic after the break at the Riverside as Middlesbrough poured forward and Kiely even saved Hreidarsson's blushes when he palmed the ball away to prevent a Charlton own goal. But the Addicks keeper could do nothing about Riggott's equaliser in the 74th minute. The Boro defender looked suspiciously offside as

he got on the end of Gareth Southgate's misdirected effort, but despite the Charlton protests his goal stood. The Addicks did not let their heads drop and Bartlett left the Boro defence standing," picking up Hreidarsson's cross to easily sink his right-footed strike. But substitute Graham was on hand to grab a share of the points for the home side. The 19-year-old striker nodding home the equaliser - and his first Premiership goal - with five minutes left on the clock.

"I felt we did enough to win the game even though the first half was lackluster. " "We dominated after the break", the players showed a fantastic response and we should have gone on to win. " "But for (Charlton goalkeeper) Dean Kiely", who made three tremendous saves," we could have scored five or six." " "To take the lead and then to get penned back", it feels a little bit like a defeat," admitted Kiely. We were winning but Middlesbrough kept knocking on the door. But we stood up and credit to us we didn't capitulate. " "We'll kick on now. Our short-term ambition is to progress from the seventh place finish from last year." " Nash", Reiziger (Graham 82), Riggott, Southgate, Queudrue, Parlour (Job 86), Dorriva, Nemeth (Parnaby 87), Zenden, Downing, Hasselbaink. Subs Not Used: Cooper, Knight. Riggott 74, Graham 86. Kiely, Hreidarsson, Perry, El Karkouri, Young, Konchesky, Murphy (Euell 78), Holland, Kishishev, Thomas (Johansson 72), Bartlett. Subs Not Used: Fish, Jeffers, Andersen. Konchesky, Hreidarsson, Perry. Holland 14, Bartlett 80. 29,603 M Riley (W Yorkshire).

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"sport 107.txt Dundee Utd 4-1 Aberdeen Dundee United ease d into the semi-final of the Scottish Cup with an emphatic win over Aberdeen. Alan Archibald prodded United ahead in 19 minutes and James Grady made it two from close range 10 minutes later. Richie Byrne's header gave Aberdeen a way back into the game", but Stevie Crawford restored United's lead from 18 yards before half time. The scoring was completed by Grady just after the break - a superb shot on the turn making it 4-1. Tony Bullock in the United goal was called in to action for the first time with just over a quarter-of-an-hour on the clock. Noel Whelan laid the ball off to Jamie Winter on the edge of the box, but his first-time effort was gathered by the United keeper. Moments later though, the home side took the lead. Barry Robson whipped in a free kick from the right, which Stevie Crawford caught on the volley. Russell Anderson failed to deal with it and Whelan's clearance off the line landed kindly at the feet of Archibald, who poked the ball into the net. United doubled their lead after 29 minutes when Grady tapped the ball into an empty net after Robson had headed Mark Wilson's cross off the angle of post and bar. But only three minutes later Aberdeen clawed their way back into the match. A free kick from the left by Winter was met powerfully by the head of Byrne at the back post, leaving Bullock helpless. United restored their two-goal lead four minutes before the end of a highly entertaining first half. Jason Scotland played a perfectly-weighted pass into the path of the onrushing Crawford and he coolly beat Ryan Esson from 18 yards. United ended the game as a contest just two minutes after the interval. Grady received a pass from Crawford with his back to goal on the edge of the box and after taking one touch, he spun to volley the ball past the despairing dive of Esson. The home side were in complete control and it required a good stop from Esson to keep out Robson's drive after 62 minutes. The keeper denied the same player again 10 minutes later, beating away his fierce shot from the left of the penalty area. Robson saw another long-range effort tipped round the post before a cute lob was headed off the line. Bullock, Duff, Wilson, Ritchie, Archibald, Scotland (Samuel 63), Brebner, Kerr (Cameron 87), Robson, Crawford, Grady. Colgan, D odds, Kenneth. Brebner. Archibald 19, Grady 29, Crawford 41, Grady 47. Esson, Hart, Anderson, Diamond, Byrne (Morrison 75), McNaughton, Heikkinen (Foster

27), Winter, Clark (Stewart 51), Mackie, Whelan. Blanchard, McGuire. : Anders  
on, Diamond. Byrne 33. 8,661 K Clark

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"sport 108.txt Clyde 0-5 Celtic Celtic brushed aside Clyde to secure their place in the Scottish Cup semi-final", but only after a nervy and testing first half. The home side's Craig Bryson had a goal chopped off before Stan Varga headed Celtic into the lead. Alan Thompson scored from the penalty spot at the start of the second half after Shaun Maloney had been fouled. Stilian Petrov slid in a third, Varga tapped in his second and Craig Bellamy completed the rout with a fine drive. Bryn Halliwell was the busier keeper early on, saving from Bellamy, Chris Sutton and Juninho. Clyde had the ball in the net after half-an-hour through a tremendous strike from Bryson, but the referee had already blown for a foul by Petrov. From the resulting free kick, Darren Sheridan curled the ball round the Celtic wall only for the post to deny him. Back at the other end, Halliwell did well to come off his line and block Bellamy's effort to lift the ball over him. The keeper misjudged a corner that Stephane Henchoz headed wide, but a similar scenario five minutes before the break led to the opening goal. The ball was delivered from the left and Halliwell was left floundering as Varga glanced the ball into the net. Maloney replaced the injured Sutton at half time and he marked his first competitive appearance after a year out injured by helping his side take a two-goal lead just after the break. The young striker fired a free kick straight into the Clyde wall but as he collected the rebound, he was tripped by Bryson and Thompson converted the penalty. Sheridan and Bellamy were involved in something of a flare-up that led to both being booked after the intervention of the assistant referee. Juninho brought out another good save from Halliwell and then Petrov saw a tremendous effort come off the top of the bar. But Petrov and Juninho combined brilliantly to allow the Bulgarian to make it 3-0 on the hour mark - a quick one-two giving him the time and space to steer the ball past Halliwell from 12 yards. Varga got his second goal of the game as Celtic drove home their advantage - Thompson whipped in a corner from the right and the unmarked defender simply tapped the ball over the line from a couple of yards out. Celtic were utterly dominant by this stage and Bellamy opened his scoring account for the club after a fine move involving Aidan McGeady, Jackie McNamara and Maloney culminated in the Welshman hammering the ball into the net. Halliwell kept the deficit at five by pushing a McGeady shot wide as the game petered out. Halliwell, Mensing, Bolland, Balmer, Potter, Sheridan (Burns 61), Arbuckle (Gilhaney 61), Gibson, Bryson (Jones 78), Malone, Harty, Morrison, Wilson, Mensing, Sheridan, Douglas, Henchoz, McNamara, Bald e, Varga, Juninho Paulista, Thompson, Lennon (Lambert 70), Sutton (Maloney 45), Petrov (McGeady 70), Bellamy, Marshall, Laursen, Thompson, Bellamy. : Varga 40, Thompson 48 pen, Petrov 60, Varga 68, Bellamy 72. 8,200 C Thomson

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"sport 109.txt Hearts 2-1 Livingston Hearts wrapped up their Scottish Cup quarter-final tie against Livingston with two goals in the first 10 minutes. Lee Miller scored inside the opening 60 seconds", heading over Colin Meldrum and into the net from a Jamie McAllister free kick. McAllister himself scored the second when he met Saul Mikoliunas' cross at the back post to put the game beyond the visitors. Craig Easton headed in a controversial goal after an hour but Hearts held on. The opening goal came after Gus Bahoken had clumsily fouled Miller 35 yards from goal. McAllister floated the free kick into the Livi box and Miller outjumped the static visiting defence to loop his header from 10 yards over Meldrum. With just 10 minutes on the clock, the home side

doubled their lead. Mikoliunas sprinted down the right, crossed to the back post where McAllister raced in to head past Meldrum. Moments later Miller came close to grabbing his second with a first-time drive from 16 yards, which skimmed the bar. Then McAllister picked up a pass from Stephen Simmons and drove an angled shot from 20 yards narrowly past Meldrum's far post. The impressive Mikoliunas twice went close before half time - a low drive was comfortably gathered by Meldrum and then he curled a left-footed shot past the keeper's right-hand post. Livi manager Richard Gough made three changes at the interval, bringing on defender Goran Stanic, midfielder Gabor Vincze, and striker Ferenc Horvath for Bahoken, Derek Lilley and Mark Wilson. But, in the opening stages of the second period, little changed. However, the West Lothian side gave themselves a lifeline with a controversial goal. Eric Deloumeaux sent Jason Dair away on the right and he tried to give the ball to McPake, who looked to be in an offside position. The Livi striker ignored the pass, however, and Dair ran on to it and played Easton in at the back post and he headed home from close range. The home side called for offside against McPake but referee Alan Freeland ignored their claims and pointed to the centre-circle. Livi went all out for the equaliser. In the 87th minute, Burton O'Brien was hauled back at the edge of the box by Neil MacFarlane, but Dair sent his shot just inches wide. Gordon, Webster, Miller, Hartley, Neilson, McAllister, Simmons (MacFarlane 64), Berra, Burchill (Wyness 82), Mikoliunas (Cesnaskis 77), Wallace, Moilanen, Kizys, Berra, Webster, Miller 1, McAllister 10. Meldrum, McNamee, Bahoken (Stanic 45), Deloumeaux, Strong, Dair, Easton, Mark Wilson (Vincze 45), Lilley (Horvath 45), O'Brien, McPake, McKenzie, Hand. : Vincze, Horvath. Easton 60. 9,796 A Freeland

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"sport 110.txt Kenyon denies Robben Barca return Chelsea chief executive Peter Kenyon has played down reports that Arjen Robben will return for the Champions League match against Barcelona. "He's been responding well to treatment and started running on Friday", but we'll have to wait and see, he told BBC Five Live's Sportsweek. We're looking to getting him back as soon as possible," but he'll be back when it's right for him and for us. "There's no plans at the moment around the Barcelona game." His comments contradict those of chiropractor Jean Pierre Meersseman who treated the Dutchman after he fractured his foot at the start of February. Robben had been expected to be out for six weeks", but Meersseman hinted that the winger could be fit for the vital Stamford Bridge game on 8 March. "I hope he can be back and I will try to help him make that happen", Meersseman told the Mail on Sunday. I put everything right with Arjen's foot the last time I saw him 12 days ago. It was an obvious correction and easy to perform. "I know he was pleased with what I did and now that he is running again. I am due to see him one more time again in the next few days." Meersseman is the medical co-ordinator at Italian side AC Milan.

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," sport 111.txt Bridge could miss rest of season Chelsea left-back Wayne Bridge could miss the rest of the season with a suspected broken ankle. The England international", 24, was hurt in an innocuous challenge with Alan Shearer during the Londoners' FA Cup defeat at Newcastle on Sunday. "We think it's a big injury", said Jose Mourinho, whose Chelsea team this week meet Barcelona in the Champions League and Liverpool in the Carling Cup final. William Gallas and Damien Duff could also miss the Barcelona game. France defender Gallas and Ireland winger Duff both picked up their injuries in the closing stages of Chelsea's 1-0 defeat at St James' Park. With Bridge having gone off afte

r Mourinho used all three substitutes, those knocks plus Carlo Cudicini's red card meant Chelsea finished the game with seven able-bodied players. Cudicini would not have played against Barcelona, but had been promised a game in the Carling Cup final, although he will now miss the Cardiff showpiece through suspension. The manager is not planning to add any new names to his squad ahead of the trip to Barcelona, even though he has few options to replace Bridge at left-back. Celestine Babayaro left the club in January, ironically to join Newcastle, and although Gallas has deputised at left-back before, he is struggling to be fit himself. It could be that Paulo Ferreira, usually a right-back, is switched to left-back with Glen Johnson, who ended the Newcastle game in goal, playing on the right. Youngsters Ben Hudell, Joe Keenan and Sam Tille would be options should Mourinho decide to call up a replacement, but it is unlikely he would risk an untried prospect in a Champions League tie. Bridge's injury also means Mourinho, who reportedly wants to sign Ashley Cole from Arsenal, will not have a specialist, senior left-back for the run-in to the season. He (Bridge) has no chance of playing against Barcelona", probably will not play against Liverpool (in the Carling Cup final) and maybe not for the rest of the season, he said. The medical department will try to do everything to recover Gallas and Duff. We will have to wait and see," but I won't cry about injuries because we will have 11 players to play on Tuesday."" Shearer said he was unsure what caused Bridge's injury. ""I don't know what happened."" he said. ""It was just a shame. I don't think we even touched each other. ""By all accounts it's pretty serious. I went into the dressing-room after the game and wished him all the best."" Mourinho", whose team are chasing three trophies, has already lost winger Arjen Robben to a serious injury.

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"sport 112.txt Parry firm over Gerrard Listen to the full interview on Sport on Five and the BBC Sport website from 1900 GMT. But Parry", speaking exclusively to BBC Sport, also admits Gerrard, who has been constantly linked with Chelsea," will have the final say on his future. He told BBC Five Live: ""Steven is above money. He is the future of Liverpool. ""It doesn't matter if it's £30m", £40m or £50m," we will not accept offers. But we are also realistic enough to know we can't keep Steven against his will."" On the subject of Liverpool's finances", Parry also revealed the club is ready to explore the possibility of a sponsorship deal for its proposed new stadium. And responding to criticism from BBC Sport pundit and former Liverpool stalwart Alan Hansen, he insisted talks on new investment are ongoing, but added the door has not closed on shareholder and lifelong fan Steve Morgan. Parry joined Liverpool as chief executive in July 1998 from a similar role at the Premier League. There have been several highs and lows during his time in charge at Anfield - and he had a busy summer, overseeing the arrival of new manager Rafael Benitez and managing to hold on to Steven Gerrard. On the subject of Liverpool's captain and prize asset," Parry revealed Real Madrid did ask for an option on the England midfield man during negotiations for striker Fernando Morientes. He said: ""They were looking for ways of saying they got more out of the deal for Fernando Morientes", but the response to Real Madrid was the same - Steven is not for sale." But when asked if Gerrard would be a Liverpool player on the first day of next season", Parry said: ""I sincerely hope he will be. Steven knows my views. He knows Rafa's views. ""We have re-affirmed recently to Steven that we are trying to build a team around him. We crave success as much as he does. We know he's ambitious and nobody can argue with that. ""I think Steven would dearly love to win things with Liverpool more than he'd like to do anything else. ""We all want to see progress by next season. He's not alone in that. There are a lot

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"sport 113.txt Wright-Phillips to start on right England coach Sven-Goran Eriksson has revealed Shaun Wright-Phillips will start against the Netherlands. But Wright-Phillips will not make his first start for England playing on the left," as had been widely expected. "Shaun Wright-Phillips will probably start the game," said Eriksson. But I'm not going to start Wright-Phillips on the left." Eriksson also revealed that Wes Brown will start alongside Jamie Carragher in the injury-hit centre of defence. When asked if Brown and Carragher would start Eriksson replied: "I could tell you yes. "It's a blow that four or five central defenders are away because of injuries. "On the other hand it's good for Carragher and Brown to show what they can do at this level. That's positive." The England coach said that he had been impressed by Wright-Phillips' form for Manchester City. "He deserves his chance. He has been playing well all season and I look forward to seeing him." And he added that Andy Johnson and Stewart Downing - the other two new players in the squad - would also get a chance to impress. "Wright-Phillips", Downing and Johnson will start or get the chance to play some part. "Johnson was not in my plans a year ago but he is doing a great season and scoring a lot of goals. "Downing is another one making a great season. He is young," talented and there are not too many left-footed players in the squad."

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"sport 114.txt Robben sidelined with broken foot Chelsea winger Arjen Robben has broken two metatarsal bones in his foot and will be out for at least six weeks. Robben had an MRI scan on the injury", sustained during the Premiership win at Blackburn, "on Monday. "Six weeks is the average time to heal this injury and then I need a few more weeks to be completely fit again," he told Dutch newspaper *Algemeen Dagblad*. I had a feeling it was serious but because of the swelling it was impossible to make a final diagnosis." The 21-year-old missed the first three months of the season with a similar injury after a challenge with Roma's Olivier Dacourt. And he added: "It felt different than last summer when I had the same injury on my other foot. "Then I could walk already after three days but I stayed sidelined for a long period. I hope that it will now take me six to eight weeks." Chelsea physio Mike Banks was hopeful that Robben could return at some point in March. "The fractures are tiny and he could be playing next month", Banks told the club's website. One is a chip on the side of his foot," the other is a small break on the third metatarsal. "But this is not the traditional metatarsal that has become so famous since the last World Cup and which has kept Scott Parker out for two months." David B

eckham suffered a broken metatarsal in the build up to the 2002 World Cup in Korea and Japan. Robben", who has been a key part of the Blues' push for four trophies," claims he knew instantly something was wrong when he was felled by Blackburn midfielder Aaron Mokoena. ""I felt my leg go", he said. I felt it straight away after Mokoena hit me with a wild kick on my left foot.""

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"sport 115.txt Giggs handed Wales leading role Ryan Giggs will captain Wales as he wins his 50th cap in Wednesday's friendly against Hungary in Cardiff. John Toshack", in his first game as coach after succeeding Mark Hughes," admits he is surprised that Giggs has only just reached the landmark. ""With the games he's played for United", proportionately it doesn't seem that many for Wales," Toshack said. But he's one of the greatest of all Welsh internationals and on his 50th cap it's appropriate he's captain." Giggs admits he had briefly considered retirement from the international game", but is now targeting playing for Wales in the 2008 European Championships. The Manchester United wing revealed how club manager Sir Alex Ferguson talked him into extending his Wales career. ""I briefly discussed my international future with Sir Alex", but he urged me to carry on, Giggs said. He feels, like myself, that I have no weight problems and keep myself fit," so in three or four years' time I will be able to play in the European finals if we get there. ""The manager has always wanted me to play for my club and country and he was keen for me to continue because I am fit enough." Giggs admits he was wavering and considering joining the likes of former Wales skipper Gary Speed and United team-mate Paul Scholes in committing the remaining years of his career to club football. But Giggs is now focussed on making the Toshack era even more successful than the time Hughes spent at the helm. The Manchester United winger won his first cap as a 17-year-old in 1991", an away loss to Germany, and now faces his landmark appearance at the age of 31. With Giggs leading Wales out against Hungary, there is every chance that he will become the permanent successor to Speed. However," Toshack refused to reveal whether he sees Giggs as a long-term option. ""For this particular game I think it is appropriate that Ryan Giggs will be captain", it's his 50th cap and he's known for some time about that," Toshack said. On Wednesday night Toshack takes charge of his first match since replacing Hughes, and Giggs said: It's my 50th cap and I am looking forward to it", and I hope to play a lot more times from here on in. ""It's important to be here", all the players feel the same. It's a new start and all the top players certainly see it as important. ""I see myself leading by example", it is something I have taken on for Wales as well as United these past few seasons. ""The way John is looking at things", he is aiming to build his side around the experienced lads right up to the next tournament," the Euro 2006 event. ""I have told John I will be around for the next European tournament", by then I will be 35 so hopefully I will still be okay. ""A lot can happen", but I'm hoping to be around." Giggs' own personal future at Old Trafford is still up in the air as he has yet to reach an agreement on a new contract", with Manchester United offering one extra year and Giggs seeking two. ""I have put the contract thing to the back of my mind at the moment," said Giggs. It is an important period for the club and I am just concentrated on that. ""I've heard the suggestions", hopefully there is a two-year deal about to be offered because that is what I am looking for," to get it sorted out. ""I'm enjoying my football", the way United have been playing and my own form," you have to enjoy it. ""We have massive games coming up: Manchester City this week", then the Everton cup tie, followed by AC Milan in the Champions League, and my first Wales game under John Toshack," so it's an important time.""

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"sport 116.txt Bosvelt optimistic over new deal Mancheste  
r City's Paul Bosvelt will find out ""within a month"" whether he is to be offe  
red a new one-year deal. The 34-year-old Dutch midfielder is out of contract i  
n the summer and", although his age may count against him," he feels he can pla  
y on for another season. ""I told the club I would like to stay for one more ye  
ar. They promised me an answer within the next month so I am waiting to see", "  
he said. The main concern is my age but I think I have proved I am fit enough.  
Bosvelt joined City from Feyenoord in 2003 and at first he struggled to adapt t  
o life in England. But his professionalism and dedication impressed manager Kev  
in Keegan. ""He realised the pace of the game was faster than anything he was u  
sed to but he drove himself back into the team. He is an unsung hero", " said Ke  
egan.

sport 117.txt Sociedad set to rescue Mladenovic Rangers a  
re set to loan out-of-favour midfielder Dragan Mladenovic to Real Sociedad, des  
pite the closure of the January transfer window. Sociedad have been given spec  
ial permission by the Spanish FA to sign a player due to an injury crisis. Mlad  
enovic will effectively replace former Rangers midfielder Mikel Arteta, who has  
been loaned to Everton. Sociedad say they will pay Rangers £150,000, with an op  
tion to buy the Serbia & Montenegro international. Mladenovic's loan move is su  
bject to him passing a medical. The 28-year-old, who joined Rangers from Red St  
ar Belgrade for £1.2m in the close season, is expected in San Sebastian later t  
his week following his national side's game against Bulgaria. Sociedad are in 1  
5th place in the 20-strong Primera Liga, just two points above the relegation z  
one. Special permission from the Spanish FA came after an injury to central def  
ender Igor Jauregi. The versatile Mladenovic can also play in the back four. Hi  
s agent said last month that Rangers had told him to find the player a new clu  
b. Mladenovic's time at Ibrox has been plagued with injury and he has made just  
six starts in six months with the Glasgow club.

sport 118.txt Parry relishes Anfield challenge BBC Sport  
reflects on the future for Liverpool after our exclusive interview with chief e  
xecutive Rick Parry. Chief executive Parry is the man at the helm as Liverpool  
reach the most crucial point in their recent history. Parry has to deliver a ne  
w 60,000-seat stadium in Stanley Park by 2007 amid claims of costs spiralling a  
bove £120m. He is also searching for an investment package of a size and statur  
e that will restore Liverpool to their place at European football's top table.  
But it is a challenge that appears to sit easily with Parry, who has forged a r  
eputation as one of football's most respected administrators since his days at  
the fledgling Premier League. Liverpool have not won the championship since 19  
90, a fact that causes deep discomfort inside Anfield as they attempt to muscle  
in on the top three of Chelsea, Manchester United and Arsenal. Throw in the sma  
ll matter of warding off every top club in world football as they eye captain S  
teven Gerrard, and you can see Parry is a man with a lot on his plate. But in t  
he comfort of a conference room deep inside Liverpool's heartbeat - The Kop end  
- Parry spoke to us with brutal honesty about the crucial months ahead. He only  
dodged one question - when asked to reveal the name of the mystery investor cur  
rently courting Liverpool, a polite smile deflected the inquiry. But to his cre  
dit, he met everything else head on in measured tones that underscore the belie  
f that Liverpool still mean business. By business he means becoming title chal  
lengers again, and locking the pieces together that will help return the trophy  
to Liverpool is Parry's mission. Parry has already successfully put one of thos  
e planks in place in the form of new manager Rafael Benitez. And his enthusiasm  
for the Spaniard's personality and methods is an indication of his clear feelin

g that he has struck gold. Benitez's early work has given Parry renewed optimism about the years ahead. But it remains a massive task at a club with a unique history and expectations. This will not come as news to Parry, a lifelong Liverpool supporter, but his quiet determination suggests he is no mood to be found wanting... Captain Gerrard is central to Liverpool's plans and Parry's insistence that all offers will be refused is a firm statement of intent. As ever, the player will have the final say, and Parry acknowledges that, but he is determined to provide the framework and environment for Liverpool and Gerrard to flourish. In terms of the search for new investment, Hawkpoint were appointed as advisors to flush out interest in March 2004. Thailand Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra came and went, while the most serious statement of intent came from tycoon and lifelong fan Steve Morgan. Morgan had a succession of bids rejected, having come close in the summer only for talks to break down over potential costs for the new stadium. BBC Sport understands Morgan is still ready and willing to invest in Liverpool, and Parry has kept the door ajar despite currently seeking investment elsewhere. Morgan, however, has had no formal contact with Liverpool or their advisors since last December, blaming indecision at board level as he publicly withdrew his £70m offer. He was also convinced his interest was being used to lure in others, so any new approach would now have to come from Liverpool. Morgan will certainly not be making another call. So speculation continues about the new benefactor, with trails leading to the Middle East and America, but all met with an understandable veil of secrecy from Anfield. Parry meanwhile sees the new ground as crucial to Liverpool's future, but is refusing to become emotionally attached to the idea. He is determined the ground will only be built on an affordable basis and will not make future Liverpool management hostage to the new stadium. Parry will pull back the moment the figures do not stack up, but there has been a vital new development in North London that has reshaped Liverpool's thinking. Liverpool have publicly refused to entertain the idea of stadium sponsorship and potential naming rights - but the realism of Arsenal's stunning £100m deal for their new Emirates Stadium at Ashburton has changed the landscape. Parry labelled the deal an eye-opener"" and admits Liverpool would be missing a trick not to explore the possibilities. He knows some traditionalist Liverpool fans will reel at any attempt to call the new stadium anything other than just 'Anfield"', but the maths of modern-day football decree that multi-millions for stadium and team could ease the pain. I would take £50m if we had no investment, but if we did, keep him. As for the stadium, if it gets us cash what difference does it make really? £50m for Gerrard? I don't care who you are, the Directors would take the money and it is the way it should be. We cannot let that sum of money go, despite Gerrard's quality. Through a cleverly worded statement, the club has effectively forced Gerrard to publicly make the decision for himself, which I think is the right thing to do. Critical time for Liverpool with regards to Gerrard. Ideally we would want to secure his future to the club for the long term. I am hoping he doesn't walk out of the club like Michael Owen did for very little cash. £50m realistically would allow Rafa to completely rebuild the squad, however, if we can afford to do this AND keep Gerrard we will be better for it. I would however be happy with Gerrard's transfer for any fee over £35m. Parry's statements are clever in that any future Gerrard transfer cannot be construed as a lack of ambition by the club to not try and keep their best players. Upping the ante is another smart move by Parry. I would keep Gerrard. No amount of money could replace his obvious love of the club and determination to succeed. The key is if Gerrard comes out and says that he is happy. Clearly, if he isn't, then we would be foolish not to sell. The worrying thing is who would you buy (or who would come) pending possible non-Champions League football.

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"sport 119.txt Time to get tough on friendlies? For an international manager", a friendly provides an important opportunity to work with your players. The only problem is that the game itself can often be a farce. Some people have been saying it would be better to get the players together for the week, and do away with the 90 minutes at the end. I would say it's 50-50 whether you should have these games or not, and if you look at it that way you would probably say you're better not doing so. It would certainly keep club managers happy, as it would reduce the risk of players returning to domestic duty injured. But international bosses will tell you that scrapping friendlies is counterproductive because the only way for a team to get better is by playing. The more you play together, the easier it is when it comes to the crunch in games like World Cup quarter-finals against Brazil. Often in friendlies, though, a manager will play his strongest side for the first 45 minutes and then send out an entirely different one in the second half. And it's very difficult for any player to come on as substitute in a side with a few changes, let alone a whole team's worth. The debate will rage on, and I'm not sure there is a satisfactory solution. One manager who has got it right this week is Walter Smith. The new Scotland manager has decided to have a training camp instead of a friendly for his first international week since replacing Berti Vogts. It is the sort of move you would expect from Walter, who is a canny manager. The players have had such a hard time recently that he is better off getting them together in a relaxed atmosphere and trying to generate some team spirit before the next World Cup qualifiers. If he had sent them out on Wednesday and they had been badly beaten, it would have done them no good whatsoever. John Toshack has his first game in charge of Wales, and it will be important for him to get a decent result against Hungary. He will have his own ideas on individuals and how to play and will probably look more at the performance, but the public wants results. It's extremely difficult to get the balance for friendlies. If you win, people forget them, but if you lose it becomes a stat that can be used against you. England's game against Holland is a good example. It looks like a good opportunity to try out players like Middlesbrough winger Stewart Downing or Crystal Palace striker Andy Johnson. But you have got to remember Sven-Goran Eriksson's side were given a lesson by Spain in the last game they played. The injury problems in defence should at least give the likes of Wes Brown and Jamie Carragher a chance to impress. For the club managers, it will simply be a case of waiting at home with fingers crossed.

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"sport 120.txt Barcelona title hopes hit by loss Barcelon a's pursuit of the Spanish title took a blow on Sunday as they fell to a 2-0 defeat at home to Atletico Madrid. Fernando Torres gave Athletico an ideal start with a goal in the first minute. Ronaldinho wasted a second-half chance to equalise for Barca when he put a penalty wide", but Torres made no such mistake with a last-minute spot-kick. The defeat, coupled with Real Madrid's 4-0 win over Espanyol on Saturday, reduces Barca's lead to four points. Former Everton midfielder Thomas Gravesen scored his first goal for Real in the comfortable victory at the Bernabeu. Zinedine Zidane had opened the scoring before Raul bagged a brace. Gravesen, who replaced Zidane, completed the scoring in the 84th minute with a low shot. David Beckham, watched by Sven-Goran Eriksson, came off in the 67th minute with a shoulder injury but should be fit for England's game against Holland. England team-mate Michael Owen came on for Raul after 76 minutes with the game already won. Real have now won six consecutive Primera Liga games since

coach Wanderley Luxemburgo took charge.

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"sport 122.txt Bees handed potential Man Utd tie Brentford face a home tie against holders Manchester United in the FA Cup sixth round if they can come through their replay against Southampton. The League One side held the Saints at St Mary's in their fifth-round tie and were rewarded with a potential draw against Sir Alex Ferguson's side. Newcastle will be at home to either Tottenham or Nottingham Forest. Bolton host Arsenal or Sheffield United and Leicester will visit the winners of the Burnley and Blackburn replay. The ties will be played on the weekend of 12-13 March. was delighted to be paired with United", " although he admitted they still have plenty of work to do to set u

p a dream tie. ""We've got our work cut out next Tuesday but you can't deny it's exciting", he said. It would be a sell-out. It will probably be on television. We have financial problems and the revenue it could bring in would certainly help our situation. ""We're happy to be in the draw but we've still got to beat a Premiership team. ""We've got to beat Southampton first and that's going to be a hard game but if we do there will be some celebration." welcomed the opportunity to face United. ""We're not counting on anything yet", he said. It is obviously going to be a difficult replay judging by the way Brentford came back at us on Saturday and the fact that United have come out of the hat will give them even more incentive. ""But I've been drawn against United so many times in cups and beaten them at both Bournemouth and West Ham. ""There are no easy ties in the FA Cup and I'm sure nobody is counting on one." Newcastle v Tottenham or Nottingham Forest Southampton or Brentford v Manchester United Bolton v Arsenal or Sheffield United Burnley or Blackburn v Leicester

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"sport 123.txt England's defensive crisis grows England's defensive worries have deepened following the withdrawal of Tottenham's Ledley King from the squad to face Holland. Chelsea's John Terry and Wayne Bridge are also out", leaving coach Sven-Goran Eriksson with a real problem for Wednesday's match at Villa Park. Injured Rio Ferdinand and Sol Campbell were both left out of the squad, and Matthew Upson has already pulled out. Wes Brown and Jamie Carragher are likely to be the makeshift partnership. Terry, the captain of Chelsea as they push for the Premiership title, would have been a certain starter in the absence of Campbell and Ferdinand. But now he has pulled out with a bruised knee and is likely to be replaced by Carragher, alongside Brown. Manchester United's Brown last played for England in the defeat by Australia at Upton Park in February 2003. The 25-year-old was only called into the squad on Sunday night as cover following the enforced withdrawal of Upson, who has a hamstring injury. And Brown now looks certain to add to his tally of seven senior appearances for England. King was forced to pull out after his groin injury was assessed by England's medical staff. Eriksson has still not decided whether to call up any further back-up, having already summoned Phil Neville after Bridge pulled out with a foot injury.

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"sport 124.txt Ferdinand casts doubt over Glazer Rio Ferdinand has said he is unsure of Malcolm Glazer's motives after the American billionaire launched a new offer to buy Manchester United. The club have confirmed that the Glazer Family Partnership have submitted proposals of a third bid. ""A lot of people want the club's interest to be with people who have grown up with the club and have got its interests at heart", said Ferdinand. No one knows what this guy will be bringing to the table." The central defender added on BBC Radio Five Live: ""We will have to wait and see what Glazer comes with. ""I would like to see the situation resolved either way. ""I think people are getting bored with him coming in and out of the news with new proposals. ""The other stuff off the pitch takes the shine off what is going on the pitch." Glazer", currently owns a 28.1% stake in the club," and United's statement to the stock exchange said: ""The board has noted the recent press speculation on this subject. ""The board can confirm that it has now received a detailed proposal subject to various pre-conditions which may form the basis of an offer for Manchester United from Glazer. ""A further announcement will be made in due course." Glazer's previous bids for the club", which United supporters opposed, were rejected

by the board because of the high level of debt they would incur. But it is believed that Glazer has substantially reduced the borrowing required for his latest move. He will still need the approval of major shareholders John Magnier and JP McManus, who own 28.9% of the club to succeed. But the Irish duo have cut off talks with Glazer over the proposed sale of their stake, while fans remain opposed to his involvement.

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"sport 125.txt Premier League planning Cole date The Premier League is attempting to find a mutually convenient date to investigate allegations Chelsea made an illegal approach for Ashley Cole. Both Chelsea and Arsenal will be asked to give evidence to a Premier League commission", "but no deadline has been put on when that meeting will convene. ""It's hard to put a date on it", " a Premier League spokesman confirmed to BBC Sport. It's not a formal situation where they've got so much time to respond." "Arsenal and England defender Cole reportedly met Blues boss Jose Mourinho and chief executive Peter Kenyon in a London hotel 11 days ago. Chelsea have yet to officially confirm or deny the meeting", " which would be in breach of Premier League rule K3. Now the Gunners have asked for an inquiry to look into claims that their player has been ""tapped up"". Both clubs have pledged to co-operate with the inquiry which will be conducted on a single day as opposed to being run as an ongoing evaluation. Cole is in negotiations with the Gunners over extending his current deal which ends in 2007. And his Arsenal team-mate Robert Pires has urged the England left-back to stay at Highbury. Pires told the Evening Standard: ""He has been at Arsenal for ever. He is a very attacking left-back and I think he is enjoying his football because at Arsenal he plays in an offensive team. ""I am not sure he will get the same pleasure at Chelsea", " even though they are doing so well at the moment. ""I have built a fantastic playing relationship with Ashley. ""We play together so well - we could do it with our eyes shut. ""But you have to respect the decision of the player. Everybody has that right." "

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"sport 126.txt McCall earns Tannadice reprieve Dundee United manager Ian McCall has won a reprieve from the sack", " with chairman Eddie Thompson calling for an end to speculation over his future. It is understood that McCall would have been sacked if Sheffield Wednesday manager Paul Sturrock had been willing to return to Tannadice. But Sturrock has distanced himself from the position. ""We're in a difficult situation. We must get out of it through the efforts of current personnel", said Thompson. Ian McCall and I have had a long and detailed talk about a number of areas including the current league position and the manner of the exit from the League Cup, he added. However, the continuing speculation is doing no one any good," especially as we have several crucial games coming up. ""The minds of the coaching staff and the players have to be on those games and those games only. ""Our season would of course improve considerably if in the next few weeks we achieved some improved league results and there is also the potential of another cup semi-final", " subject to the draw. ""All that matters at the present time - is us all having a total focus on the games ahead and a positive series of results being achieved." "Dundee United players had expressed their solidarity with McCall after their side's 3-0 Scottish Cup win over Queen of the South. ""We want the boss to stay", we don't want someone else coming in," said Jim McIntyre. Hopefully now he gets the chance to stay." " Keeper Tony Bullock echoed McIntyre's sentiments. ""I think all the boys are behind Ian McCall", " he added. At the moment it is all speculation and

we have got to rise above all that and do a job on the pitch." " On Saturday", Sturrock insisted that he had unfinished business with Wednesday," who are fourth in League One. ""I've only been here five months and I don't expect to be leaving very", very soon," he said. I can appreciate the rumours because I've emphasised my thoughts and ambitions to go back to Dundee United. ""I can assure you the timescale is not the right one. ""It (Dundee United) is my team. I had five years there as a coach", six as a player, two years as a manager - once you've done that kind of thing," it's the result you look for. ""The important thing now is I've come here to do a job and I'm going to try to finish it." "

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"sport 127.txt Kewell waits as injury drags on Liverpool winger Harry Kewell is struggling to recover from his Achilles tendinitis problem and may not recover until March", claims his agent. Kewell, 26, "had hoped to play against Fulham last weekend and to be ready for the Champions League tie against Bayer Leverkusen on 22 February. But Bernie Mandic said: ""He's had scans which don't show anything substantial. ""But despite his best efforts at the moment he simply can't shake off the discomfort and get back on the park." " Mandic continued in the Sydney Morning Herald: ""Harry's struggling a bit but the club are doing everything they can to get him right. ""Harry was desperate to be fit for the Fulham game as part of his plan to play himself in for the Leverkusen match." " Kewell has not played since December 19 and misses out on international duty this week", with Australia facing South Africa in Durban on Wednesday.

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"sport 128.txt Smith aims to bring back respect Scotland manager Walter Smith says he wants to restore the national team's respectability in world football. Smith has joined his first squad for a three-day get-together near Manchester in preference to playing a friendly. While qualification for the 2006 World Cup appears to be beyond Scotland", "Smith is anxious that the remainder of the campaign should be positive. ""I think we have got to try to get a bit of respectability back in whatever way we can", "he said. We will have to approach each game differently. Obviously we will have to approach the Italian game away from home in a different manner to Moldova at home. ""We have to meet the challenge of each match." " Smith", meeting a number of his squad for the first time," brought them together on Monday to outline his ideas for improving the nation's fortunes. He said: ""I pointed out how I see the international team going forward and that was the main topic. ""This is a relaxed gathering and I don't think there is a lot of doom and gloom about the squad that a lot of people think exists." " A 25-man squad will spend the next three days based at the Mottram Hall hotel in Cheshire and will train at Manchester United's nearby Carrington complex. Smith will be absent for the final sessions", however, as he is due to fly out to Sardinia on Wednesday to watch Italy's friendly with Russia.

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"sport 129.txt Injury doubts beset Wales squad Wales have a clutch of injury worries before Wednesday's international friendly against Hungary in Cardiff. West Ham's Gavin Williams (ankle) looks certain to be out", so uncapped Wrexham defender Stephen Roberts is drafted in. Defenders Danny Gabbidon and Gareth Roberts, plus Ryan Giggs have hamstring concerns, while there are also doubts over Robbie Savage (groin). However, Manchester United winger G

iggs is expected to recover in time to earn his 50th cap at the Millennium Stadium. There were also doubts over Gabbidon's fellow Cardiff defender Rhys Weston, but the full-back appears to have shrugged off the knock he picked up in the Bluebirds' 1-0 loss to West Ham on Sunday. The news leaves Wales boss John Toshack short in defence for his first game in charge, with Aston Villa's Mark Delaney injured and James Collins with the Under-21s. That could clear the way for new faces Danny Collins and Dave Partridge to make their Wales debuts. Coyne (Burnley), Jones (Wolves), Roberts (Wrexham), Collins (Sunderland), Edwards (Wolves), Gabbidon (Cardiff), Page (Cardiff), Partridge (Motherwell), Ricketts (Swansea), Roberts (Tranmere), Weston (Cardiff), Davies (Tottenham), Fletcher (West Ham), Giggs (Man Utd), Koumas (West Brom), Robinson (Sunderland), Savage (Blackburn), Williams (West Ham), Bellamy (Newcastle), Earnshaw (West Brom), Hartson (Celtic).

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"sport 130.txt Weir poised for Sunderland move Larne's teenage star Robbie Weir is poised to join Sunderland after turning down a move to Stoke City. The 17-year-old Irish League midfielder was also being chased by Rangers and Fulham", but Mick McCarthy's side appear to have won the race. But Larne boss Jimmy McGeough has yet to confirm that Weir is on his way from Inver Park. "'I heard on Sunday that he has joined Sunderland", but not from the lad himself," he said. "'Robbie has an agreement with Larne that he can negotiate with interested clubs. 'Personally, I would rather see him making an impact at local level to build up his physique before moving into the full-time game. 'He has been on trial with a number of clubs. But it would be great to see him making it at Sunderland.'"

sport 131.txt Newry to fight cup exit in courts Newry City are expected to discuss legal avenues on Friday regarding overturning their ejection from the Nationwide Irish Cup. The IFA upheld its original decision to throw Newry out of the cup following the Andy Crawford registration row. "'A law firm will put a case forward for Newry FC, and see what the legal implications of all this is are,' said Newry boss Roy McCreadie. 'This is a big issue, now that we have an appeal pending,' On Wednesday, a fresh IFA hearing into Crawford registration saga, ruled that last week's original verdict had been correct. It meant that Bangor, beaten 5-1 by Newry on the field, will take on Portadown in the sixth round. Newry had claimed they had uncovered fresh evidence""", in respect of the dates relating to the registration. But McCreadie is not further annoyed that full details of Wednesday's meeting was not relayed to the club. "'Even to this day, we have as much information about what happened during the meeting on Wednesday as that told to the media. We are being kept in the dark,'" McCreadie told the News Letter . "'We want an explanation. There is no good sending us the same fax message the press people received. 'It's a real sad case. If we are not back in the Irish Cup after our appeal, and guided by our legal advise, we will seek to lodge an injunction in the courts to stop Bangor playing Portadown.'"

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"sport 132.txt Republic to face China and Italy The Republic of Ireland have arranged friendlies against China and Italy which will take place at Lansdowne Road in March and August. Brian Kerr's side will face the 54th ranked Chinese on 29 March - just three days after the World Cup qualifier against Israel in Tel Aviv. Italy will visit on 17 August in what will be a warm-up game ahead of the autumn World Cup qualifiers. In their last meeting", the Irish beat Italy in the 1994 World Cup Finals. However, that is the Republic's

only victory in eight attempts against the Italians who have won all the other seven games. The 29 March game will be the second time the Republic have played China - the previous encounter back in June 1984 with the Irish winning 1-0 in Sapporo," Japan. Brian Kerr said: ""China have made great progress over the last few years and will provide difficult opposition. ""We all witnessed the performances of the Asian teams in the last World Cup"," and China play a similar type of football. ""As for Italy"," they make a welcome return to Dublin and will be a massive attraction because they are one of the great traditional powers in the world. ""The game will be ideal preparation for the three important World Cup qualifiers in the autumn."" Ireland round off their World Cup campaign with games against France on 7 September", Cyprus on 8 October and Switzerland on 12 October.

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"sport 133.txt Finnan says Irish can win group Steve Finn  
an believes the Republic of Ireland can qualify directly for the World Cup finals. After Saturday's superb display in the draw in Paris", Ireland face minnows the Faroe Islands in Dublin on Wednesday. The versatile Finnan, who starred against the French," is confident the group is Ireland's for the taking. ""There is a chance for us now to go on", win our home games and why not win the group, even though it's a tough one," said the Liverpool player. Switzerland, Ireland, France and Israel are all now tied on five points from three matches - although the Republic look to have a slight edge after claiming away draws in Basel and Paris. In Basel we did not play great football", but when you go to these places the other teams are going to have the majority of the game. ""In Paris", we looked good throughout the team and a point was the least we deserved because we had a number of chances. ""Looking back", we had an opportunity to get the three points," but we are happy with a point and that will give us confidence going into Wednesday's game. ""On paper", we have got the toughest matches out of the way and we have set standards for ourselves. ""Automatic qualification is there. It would certainly be good to avoid a play-off", but on the back of a couple of good results I don't see why we can't win the group." Manager Brian Kerr was keen to mention the contribution of Stephen Carr and Finnan on Ireland's right flank at the Stade de France. Finnan's normal position is right-back but he looked assured in a more advanced position against the French. ""As I play on the right for my club and being a natural right-back", it was something he (Kerr) looked at because France play strongly down the left-hand side. ""So I was happy to play and Stephen Carr and I enjoyed the game", particularly as the defence and midfield held together well and nullified their attacks."

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"sport 134.txt Irish finish with home game Republic of Ireland manager Brian Kerr has been granted his wish for a home game as the final World Cup qualifier. Ireland will close their bid to reach the 2006 finals by playing Switzerland in Dublin on 12 October 2005. The Republic met the Swiss in their final Euro 2004 qualifier", losing 2-0 away and missing out on a place in the finals in Portugal. The Group Four fixtures were hammered out at a meeting in Dublin on Tuesday. The Irish open their campaign on 4 September at home to Cyprus and wrap up the 10-match series on 12 October 2005, with the visit of Switzerland. Manager Brian Kerr and FAI officials met representatives from Switzerland, France, Cyprus, Israel and the Faroe Islands to arrange the fixture schedule. Kerr had hoped to finish with a clash against France, but got the reigning European champions as their penultimate home match on 7 September 2005. The manager got his wish to avoid a repeat of finishing their bid to qualify with too

many away matches. Republic of Ireland v Cyprus; France v Israel; Switzerland v Faroe Islands. Switzerland v Republic of Ireland; Israel v Cyprus; Faroe Islands v France. France v Republic of Ireland; Israel v Switzerland; Cyprus v Faroe Islands. Republic of Ireland v Faroe Islands; Cyprus v France. Cyprus v Israel. France v Switzerland; Israel v Republic of Ireland. Switzerland v Cyprus; Israel v France. Republic of Ireland v Israel; Faroe Islands v Switzerland. Faroe Islands v Republic of Ireland. August 17 - Faroe Islands v Cyprus. France v Faroe Islands; Switzerland v Israel. Republic of Ireland v France; Cyprus v Switzerland; Faroe Islands v Israel. Switzerland v France; Israel v Faroe Islands; Cyprus v Republic of Ireland. France v Cyprus; Republic of Ireland v Switzerland.

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"sport 135.txt Israeli club look to Africa Four African players", including Zimbabwe goalkeeper Energy Murambadzo, are all ready to play for Israeli club Hapoel Bnei Sakhnin in the Uefa Cup. Bnei Sakhnin are the first Arab side ever to play in European competition and will play English Premiership side Newcastle United in the first round. Warriors' goalkeeper Murambadzo, who made a name for himself at the African Nations Cup finals in Tunisia, helped Bnei Sakhnin overcome Albania's Partizani Tirana 6-1 in the previous round. Murambadzo moved to Israel recently after a brief stint with South African club Hellenic. The club won the Israeli Cup final last season and are based in Sakhnin, which is near Haifa. The club have a strong ethic and are high profile promoters of peace and co-operation within Israel. The three other Africans at the club are former Cameroon defender Ernest Etchi, DR Congo's Alain Masudi and Nigerian midfielder Edith Agoye, who had a stint with Tunisian side Esperance.

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"sport 136.txt Iranian misses Israel match Iranian striker Vahid Hashemian will not travel to Israel for Bayern Munich's Champions League match against Maccabi Tel Aviv on Wednesday. The German club said the player had pulled out because of a back injury. Iran refuses to recognise Israel's right to exist and does not allow its citizens to travel to the country. A Bayern spokesman said on Monday that the decision not to take Hashemian to Israel had been motivated only by his physical condition. ""He's got back pain and he couldn't train", the spokesman said. It would have made no sense for him to go." Iran gave judo world champion Arash Miresmaeli a \$125",000 reward when he refused to fight an Israeli at the Athens Olympics. The International Judo Federation considered taking action against Miresmaeli but concluded he had been over weight for the fight and could not have taken part.

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''' "sport 137.txt Highbury tunnel players in clear The Football Association has said it will not be bringing charges over the tunnel incident prior to the Arsenal and Manchester United game. Arsenal's Patrick Vieira had earlier denied accusations that he threatened Gary Neville before the 4-2 defeat. Vieira also clashed with opposing skipper Roy Keane and referee Graham Poll had to separate them. ""The referee has confirmed that he is satisfied he dealt with the incident at the time", said an FA statement. It means United's win will pass off without further intervention from the governing body, whose new chief executive Brian Barwick was in the Highbury stands. I didn't threaten anybody. They are big enough players to handle themselves", said Vieira. I had a talk with Roy Keane and that's it. Gary Neville is a big lad," he can handle hi

mslef. ""They just played better than us and deserved to win." Neville admitted there had been incidents before the game", but insisted it had not distracte d his focus. ""There were a couple of things that did happen before the game wh ich disappoint you", he said. Especially from players of that calibre," but i t's a tough game and we've been around a long time." Neville admitted that he had not enjoyed the match", which was punctuated by fouls and the sending off of Mikael Silvestre for head-butting Freddie Ljungberg . ""I thought it was a h orrible game in the first half", and it was not much better in the second," he said. There is no way that should have happened in a football match." After t he match", Keane accused Vieira of starting the row. ""Patrick Vieira is 6ft 4 in and having a go at Gary Neville. So I said", 'have a go at me', he said. If he wants to intimidate our players and thinks that Gary Neville is an easy targ et," I'm not having it." Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson added: ""Vieira was well wound up for it. ""I've heard different stories. Patrick Viei ra has apparently threatened some of our players and things like that.""  
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"sport 138.txt Bellamy under new fire Newcastle boss Grae me Souness has reopened his dispute with Craig Bellamy after claiming the Welsh man was ""not good enough" for the Magpies. Bellamy left Newcastle to join Cel tic on loan after a major row with Souness. Souness - who refused to refer to t he 25-year-old by name - said Bellamy did not score enough goals ""The chap tha t's just gone has scored 9.3 goals a season in his time in senior football - ha lf of those weren't even in the top flight", said Souness. That's not good eno ugh for a striker at a club like this. ""We need to have two strikers who are n ear 20 goals on a regular basis."" Bellamy turned down a move to Birmingham in favour of joining Celtic after a disagreement about the Welsh international pla ying out of position quickly escalated. Earlier in the week", Souness had said that he risked losing the confidence of the players and damaging his own reputa tion if he had not taken a hard line after Bellamy accused him of lying. ""The re are certain things you can forgive and forget", said Souness. But if I'd be en seen to be weak in this case there was no future for me with the players in the dressing room or any job I have after Newcastle." He could then return to St James' Park - and he says that he wants to. However", it would seem unlikely he will play for Newcastle again as long as Souness remains in charge.

"sport 139.txt Chelsea denied by James heroics A brave de fensive display", led by keeper David James, helped Manchester City hold the le aders Chelsea. After a quiet opening, James denied Damien Duff, Jiri Jarosik a nd Mateja Kezman, while Paul Bosvelt cleared William Gallas' header off the lin e. Robbie Fowler should have scored for the visitors but sent his header wide. Chelsea had most of the possession in the second half but James kept out Frank Lampard's free-kick and superbly tipped the same player's volley wide. City wen t into the game with the proud record of being the only domestic team to beat C helsea this season. And there was little to alarm them in the first 30 minutes as Chelsea - deprived of Arjen Robben and Didier Drogba through injury - strug gled to pose much of a threat. Indeed, it was the visitors who looked likelier t o enliven a drab opening played at a lethargic pace. Shaun Wright-Phillips - wa tched by England boss Sven-Goran Eriksson - showed his customary trickery to bu rst into the right of the area and deliver a dangerous ball, which was blocked by John Terry. But Chelsea suddenly stepped up a gear and created a flurry of c hances. First, Duff got round Ben Thatcher and blasted in a shot that James par

ried to Kezman, who turned the ball wide. Soon afterwards, Jarosik found space in the area to powerfully head Lampard's corner goalwards but James tipped the ball over. Chelsea were now looking more like Premiership leaders and James kept out Kezman's fierce drive before Bosvelt and James combined to clear Gallas' header from Duff's corner. City broke swiftly up the field and the last chance of a frenetic spell should have resulted in Fowler celebrating his 150th Premiership goal. Wright-Phillips raced down the left and crossed to Fowler but City's lone man up front, left free by Terry's slip, contrived to head wide when it seemed a breakthrough was certain. The second half started as quietly as the first, although James was forced to divert a cross from the lively Duff away from Eidur Gudjohnsen's path. There was a nasty moment for Petr Cech, looking for a ninth straight clean sheet in the league, when a series of ricochets saw Fowler chase a loose ball in the area and collide accidentally with the Czech Republic stopper. Another quiet spell followed, which Duff interrupted with a surging run that was halted illegally on the edge of the penalty area by Bosvelt. Lampard stepped up to blast a shot through the wall and James somehow blocked it with his legs. Another timely challenge, this time from Richard Dunne in time added on, prevented Gudjohnsen from getting in a shot. There was still time for James to produce a sensational save to tip Lampard's volley round the post. Cech, Paulo Ferreira, Gallas, Terry, Bridge, Jarosik (Tiago 56), Lampard, Makelele, Duff, Gudjohnsen, Kezman (Cole 63). Subs Not Used: Johnson, Smertin, Cudicini. Makelele, Gudjohnsen. James, Mills, Distin, Dunne, Thatcher, Shaun Wright-Philips, Bosvelt, Barton, Sibierski (McManaman 85), Musampa, Fowler. Subs Not Used: Macken, Weaver, Onuoha, Jordan. Bosvelt. 42,093 H Webb (S Yorkshire).

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"sport 140.txt Chelsea ridiculed over complaint Barcelona  
assistant coach Henk Ten Cate has branded Chelsea's expected complaint to Uefa as ""pathetic"". The Blues are poised to complain about an alleged half-time incident during Wednesday's 2-1 loss at the Nou Camp. The source of Chelsea's anger was an alleged talk between Barca boss Frank Rijkaard and referee Anders Frisk", who later dismissed Didier Drogba. ""To react the way Chelsea have is pathetic. Mourinho lied with the line-ups", and now this," Ten Cate said. Uefa has said its own tunnel representative witnessed nothing unusual out of the ordinary during the half-time break. Spokesman William Gaillard said: Frisk says Rijkaard greeted him and apologised he had not had the opportunity to say hello before the game. ""We had two Uefa officials there and neither witnessed it. The referee's dressing room was locked and he and his assistants were the only people allowed in."" Indeed", it is the Londoners who could be on the receiving end of any punishment after failing to turn up for the compulsory press conference after the defeat. Uefa delegate Thomas Giordano added: ""The only unusual thing that happened as far as we are concerned is that Chelsea failed to present themselves in the press conference."" The referee is not expected to include any of the alleged incidents in his report to Uefa - weakening Chelsea's case. Rijkaard was critical of Mourinho's decision not to speak to the media after the match. ""There was a lot of talking before the game and now surprisingly there is a lot of talking after the game. It is not good behaviour after a match", he said. Maybe they want to start something and make it worse than it is. I really don't understand it. I am very calm about it." Barca midfielder Deco", formerly managed by Mourinho at Porto," agreed that it was not typical of his fellow Portuguese to lodge a protest. ""It's not normal behaviour on his part. It was not logical he did not give a news conference", he said. Rijkaard added: Chelsea is the team which has conceded fewest goals in the English league and they defend very well so I am very pleased with the win. ""My men deserved victory

ry and I am pleased to have won this match. I congratulate my players.""

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"sport 141.txt Benitez issues warning to Gerrard Liverpool manager Rafael Benitez has ordered captain Steven Gerrard not to play down their Champions League ambitions and be more positive. Gerrard told the BBC Liverpool were unlikely to win the trophy this year. Benitez responded: ""I spoke to Steven and said to him that in future it's better to think we can win the Champions League. Why not?"" He said: ""We need winners here and everyone thinking only of winning. I always want to win."" Benitez added: ""When we lose I only think of solutions. If you only think about winning the next game," you don't know what the draw will be. ""If we can win the next game", maybe we will draw a side that isn't so strong," or a side with injuries or suspensions." Benitez is hoping to win his first trophy since arriving at Liverpool from Valencia when they play Chelsea in the Carling Cup on Sunday in Cardiff.

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"sport 142.txt Owen determined to stay in Madrid England forward Michael Owen has told the BBC he is happy in Spain and has no plans to quit Real Madrid to return to the Premiership in the near future. But the 25-year-old", who has spent much of his time coming off the bench in La Liga," did not rule out a return to the Premiership at some stage. ""I'm pleased with the start I've made here", he told BBC Radio Five Live. England is my country. It's definitely part of me but who knows whether," if or when I'll be playing there again." Owen", who moved to the Bernabeu from Liverpool last summer, has grabbed 11 goals for Real but has been unable to replace Raul or Ronaldo in the starting line-up. However," he said he was delighted with the way his time in Spain was going and dismissed criticism of his decision to join Real. ""When I first came there was a lot of scepticism back in England", any maybe some out here, he said. People were saying 'fourth-choice striker," what are you going there for? You'll be sat on the bench all the time'. ""But as much as our press like to build it up as if I've permanently had my backside on the bench", I've played as many games as anyone else in the team this year. ""For a fourth-choice striker at the start I'm more than happy with the way I've settled in." Recent speculation has linked Owen with a move back to England", with Newcastle expressing their interest," but the England striker said he is not ready to return home. He added: ""I've got nothing against the Premiership", I mean that's where I first performed," that's where I made my name. ""I can't keep my eyes off the Premiership on television when I'm at home." When asked if it would have to be Liverpool if he returned Owen said: ""I've not really given it much thought. ""I've got great memories of Liverpool. No matter what happens it'll always be a club I have fond memories of and it will always have a place in my heart. ""It's very flattering to be linked to top clubs in England - I'm glad that no-one is forgetting me! ""But I couldn't have wished for a better start in Madrid." Listen to the full interview with Garry Richardson on BBC Radio Five Live's Sportsweek at 0900 GMT on Sunday.

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"sport 143.txt Wenger handed summer war chest Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger has been guaranteed transfer funds to boost his squad the summer. The club's managing director", Keith Edelman," stressed that the development of their new £350m stadium had no affect on Wenger's spending power. ""The money is there. Don't worry we've got it", Edelman told BBC Sport. Hopefully," w

e'll spend it this summer and in the coming years. Arsene attends all our board meetings and he knows our finances are very strong." Edelman added that it was pointless having a brand new stadium if the team did not match the surroundings. "It's great to have nice", new surroundings, but if the team aren't performing on the pitch, then there isn't great respect in having a fabulous stadium, he said. It's important that we had sufficient funds for our team in place," before we began on the stadium."

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sport 144.txt Souness delight at Euro progress Boss Graeme Souness felt Newcastle were never really in danger of going out of the Uefa Cup against Heerenveen. An early own goal followed by an Alan Shearer strike earned them a 2-1 win and a place in the Uefa Cup last 16. "Obviously with winning in the first leg it gave us a great advantage," he said after the 4-2 aggregate victory. We got our goals early and in the minds of some players the job was done but then they got a goal and perhaps made us a bit nervous." Shearer's goal moved him within 12 of Jackie Milburn's club scoring record of 200 for the Magpies. But Souness said he did not think beating the record would have any bearing on his decision to retire at the end of the season. "I think if he got it this year he would want to stay next year anyway," he added. He struck the ball very well - he always has done - and I think it was the power and pace that beat the goalkeeper." Souness also paid tribute to Laurent Robert", who was at the heart of much of United's attacking play. "In the first half he did really well and did everything you want from a wide player. More of the same in future please", he said.

sport 145.txt Downing injury mars Uefa victory Middlesbrough boss Steve McClaren hopes that Stewart Downing did not seriously damage his hamstring during the 2-1 Uefa Cup win over Graz AK. The winger was carried off on a stretcher in the closing stages as Boro booked their place in the last 16. McClaren said: Stewart has tweaked a hamstring," which is a blow for us. We will assess it in the morning. "But I'm delighted with the match result. They say in sport you can win ugly - and we certainly did." McClaren was relieved to make it through after a tough encounter at The Riverside. "To be fair to Graz", they had a gameplan - they knocked the ball forward, especially in the first half," and we struggled to deal with it. "In the second half we were better but it was frustrating because we got the goal - but one slip and they were back in it." Boro face Sporting Lisbon for a place in the quarter-finals after the Portuguese side saw off Feyenoord on Thursday. And McClaren added: "Sporting are technically very good - Portuguese sides always are. "But the journey goes on for us and we will now go to their magnificent stadium - after the first game here - we'll look forward to it." Goalscorer Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink added: "It wasn't a particularly beautiful match to watch - but they made it difficult for us. "We didn't play well at all. But you need a little bit of luck and I think we got that when my shot went through the legs of their goalkeeper. "I would have liked to play in Holland - that would have been a little bit special to me. "But so is going back to Portugal - I'll be playing against some lads I played with at Boavista."

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sport 146.txt Rangers seal Old Firm win Goals from Gregory Vignal and Nacho Novo gave Rangers a scrappy victory at Celtic Park that moves them three points clear of the champions. Rangers had rarely threatened until Celtic goalkeeper Rab Douglas let defender Vignal's 25-yard drive slip through his grasp and into the net. Opposite number Ronald Waterreus had been Ranger

s' hero", saving superbly from Craig Bellamy and John Hartson. Striker Novo secured victory, lobbing Douglas with eight minutes remaining. It ended Celtic's 11-game unbeaten run at home in Old Firm derbies and gave Rangers manager Alex McLeish his first victory at the home of his Glasgow rivals. Celtic had won their last six meetings on their home pitch, including twice already this season. They started confidently, with new signing Bellamy, on loan from Newcastle United, given his Celtic debut up front with Wales international colleague John Hartson and Chris Sutton dropping into midfield. It took Bellamy just four minutes to threaten, taking on Marvin Andrews before delivering a low drive that was held by Waterreus at the second attempt. He had an even better chance after Hartson dispossessed Sotiris Kyrgiakos and sent his strike partner clear with only the goalkeeper to beat. But Waterreus did well to beat away Bellamy's disappointing low drive from 16 yards. Waterreus came to the rescue again when the ball fell to Hartson just inside the box and the Dutch goalkeeper made a brave block. It was an Old Firm return for Barry Ferguson as McLeish stuck by the side that thumped four goals past Hibernian. But Rangers found Celtic harder to break down and Douglas was not threatened until 10 minutes after the break. Dado Prso turned inside Neil Lennon only for the Celtic goalkeeper to beat away his powerful 18-yard drive. A great defensive header by Andrews prevented Hartson pouncing from five yards out. Hartson foisted Vignal at the edge of the Rangers box, but the striker's shot on the turn was again beaten away by Waterreus. Rangers were beginning to dominate the midfield and Vignal, collecting a knock back from Fernando Ricksen, broke the deadlock, Douglas somehow letting the Frenchman's dipping drive slip through his grasp. Novo pounced on a moments' hesitation in the Celtic defence to latch on to a long ball from Ricksen and lob the ball over the advancing Douglas. Ricksen appeared to be hit by a coin, but it could not prevent Rangers' celebrations at the final whistle. : Douglas, McNamara, Balde, Varga, Laursen, Petrov, Lennon, Sutton, Thompson, Bellamy, Hartson. Subs: Marshall, Henchoz, Juninho Paulista, Lambert, Maloney, Wallace, McGeady. : Waterreus, Hutton, Kyrgiakos, Andrews, Ball, Buffel, Ferguson, Ricksen, Vignal, Prso, Novo. Subs: McGregor, Namouchi, Burke, Alex Rae, Malcolm, Thompson, Lovenkrands. : M McCurry

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"sport 147.txt SFA awaits report over Mikoliunas The Scottish Football Association is awaiting referee Hugh Dallas's report before acting against Hearts winger Saulius Mikoliunas. Mikoliunas", 20, barged linesman Andy Davis," who had advised Dallas to award Rangers an injury-time penalty in Hearts's 2-1 defeat at Tynecastle. ""He was sent off for violent conduct in the 90th minute but we don't know if he did something else after the whistle. ""We don't know how many red cards he was shown", " said an SFA statement. Hearts could also face action after three fans were arrested for throwing coins on the pitch. Rangers' striker Dad Prso was also sent off during the same incident when he received a second yellow card for wrestling the ball away from Craig Gordon and leaving the Hearts keeper on the ground. The SFA said: Once the referee's report comes in then we'll immediately look at things. ""We don't normally get the reports until a couple of days after the game but we're well aware of what happened here. ""Prso was sent off for two cautions", " and that will just be a one-match suspension." The SFA is certain to come down hard on Mikoliunas after Southampton's David Prutton was banned for 10-games on Wednesday by the English FA for shoving referee Alan Wiley. Hearts' boss John Robertson said: ""Mikoliunas has thrown his chest against the assistant referee's chest and got a red card for it. ""The officials have got to take into account the fact he's a young lad. ""But people have got to take into account why he was incensed. Why were 1

0","000 Hearts fans incensed? ""Why did nobody from the Rangers' bench claim for a penalty kick?"" Rangers' boss Alex McLeish accepted referee Dallas had no option but to send Prso off. McLeish said: ""I'm glad to see the spirit of the players fighting to the very end - literally with Dado trying to get the ball back from Craig Gordon. ""But it was over-zealousness and I don't think Hugh had any option.""

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"sport 148.txt Palace threat over Cantona masks Manchester United fans wearing Eric Cantona masks will not be allowed in Selhurst Park on Saturday. United fans are planning to mark the 10th anniversary of Cantona's infamous kung-fu kick on Crystal Palace fan Matthew Simmons by wearing the masks. But Palace stadium manager Kevin Corner has warned: ""If they wear them inside Selhurst Park they will be immediately rejected on safety grounds. ""And no fans wearing Cantona masks will be allowed entry to the stadium." United fans had declared Saturday as 'Cantona Day' and had planned to wear masks", that were popular during the Frenchman's time as a player at the Old Trafford club. Cantona received a nine-month ban following the incident and Palace are keen to avoid an incident that would stir up ill feeling between the two sets of supporters. Four months after the Cantona incident a Palace fan, Paul Nixon, was killed prior to an FA Cup semi-final at Villa Park.

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"sport 149.txt Legendary Dutch boss Michels dies Legendary Dutch coach Rinus Michels", "the man credited with developing ""total football""", has died aged 77. Referred to in the Netherlands as ""the General""", Michels led the Dutch at the 1974 World Cup - when they reached the final only to lose 2-1 to Germany. However," he guided his side to the 1988 European Championship title with a 2-0 win over the Soviet Union in the final. Michels played for Ajax and coached the side to four national titles between 1965-71 and a European Cup in 1971. His 1970s Dutch team was built around Johan Cruyff and Johan Neeskens and introduced the concept of 'total football' to the world. The strategy was to foster team coherence and individual imagination - with all players possessing the skills to play in any part of the pitch. Cruyff was the on-field organiser of a team whose players rotated in and out of defence at will and was encouraged to play creative attacking football. Michels had recently undergone heart surgery and Dutch football federation (KNVB) spokesman Frank Huizinga said: ""He was one of the best coaches we had in history." The no-nonsense coach also enjoyed spells at Barcelona", who he took to a Spanish title in 1974, FC Cologne and Bayer Leverkusen. Michels, named coach of the century by world football's governing body Fifa in 1999," also won five caps for the Netherlands as a bruising centre forward. Dutch sports minister Clemence Ross-van Dorp said: ""He was the man who", together with Cruyff," made Dutch football big." "

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"sport 150.txt Jol joy at 'professional' Cup win Tottenham manager Martin Jol acclaimed his players for their patience in their 3-0 FA Cup fifth-round victory over a determined Nottingham Forest side. ""We had the initiative but it wasn't easy. It was a professional sort of performance", the Dutchman said. Forest played with a lot of players behind the ball in the first half," but at 2-0 they were dead and buried." Looking ahead to the quarter-final," Jol said: ""Newcastle have got a very good side and they are always difficult." However", he added that his side, who are four places above the Magpies

in the Premiership," were ""not afraid of anyone""". Robbie Keane", skipper for the night and scorer of the crucial second goal," echoed his manager's sentiments on the last-eight match. ""They're on a high", but we're confident and in the last few games we've played well and hopefully we can go there and get the win," he said. He conceded the win over Forest, which included goals from Noe Pa marot and Mido, was not pretty to watch. It wasn't the best display but it's all about the result," the Irishman said. We knew it was going to be difficult with the conditions. The pitch wasn't the best but we still tried to pass it.

"We dug in and the gaffer said to us at half-time to keep being patient and that the goal will come."" Forest manager Gary Megson conceded his team did not deserve anything after a poor performance. ""If you play like we did and concede two goals from corners you're going to have an uphill battle against a very good team", he said. If we defend in the Championship like we did we'll not get another point. ""We were organised but I felt at times we thought the system would be enough but we didn't look like scoring.""

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"sport 151.txt Owen delighted with Real display Michael Owen revelled in his return to the to the Real Madrid starting line-up and inspired a 3-1 win over Real Betis on Wednesday by scoring the first goal. He said: ""I am happy I could play a game from the start again. ""I felt good all though the game and it is obvious that I am happy to have scored another goal. ""People have talked a lot about my performances and I think I have had some months that were not so good and others that were very good."" Owen", starting his third successive La Liga match, converted a low cross from Santiago Solari. Robert Carlos made it 2-0 at the break," smashing home an indirect free-kick. Midfielder Edu reduced the deficit after half-time but Ivan Helguera headed past keeper Antonio Doblas to seal victory for his team. Victory took Real to within six points of leaders Barcelona and Owen is confident Real can close the gap. He added: ""We had several chances against Betis and I think we can get back in touch with Barcelona. ""It is only six points between Barcelona and us and that is nothing. If we can beat them at the Bernabeu (on 10 April)", then it will be just three." " Owen has scored nine league goals", one behind Real's top scorer Ronald o. Real had lost their previous two league games.

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"sport 152.txt Ferguson fears Milan cutting edge Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson said his side's task against AC Milan would not be made any easier by the absence of Andriy Shevchenko. Milan's talismanic European footballer of the year misses Wednesday's Champions League first-leg tie after fracturing his cheekbone. ""It's a loss (to Milan)", but it could be worse if they didn't have such quality to bring in," Ferguson said. How much they miss him I think they'll know tomorrow night." " Ferguson said Milan's front line would still represent a formidable challenge for his defenders. ""They can play Rui Costa and play Kaka forward. They can bring Serginho in and they can play (Jon Dahl) Tomasson", he said. Ferguson's own goalscoring talisman Ruud van Nistelrooy is fit again, but the Scot admitted he was unsure whether to start the Dutchman, who has not played for three months. Ruud is the best striker in Europe. What I have to judge is whether he will struggle with the early pace after being out for so long", he said. His ability puts him in with a big shout but it is a major decision." " Ferguson", though, is confident his young players, particularly Wayne Rooney and Cristiano Ronaldo," are up to the task. ""We have an opportunity to win this cup this year", no question about that, he declared. With the maturity we see every week in Ronaldo and Rooney, the return of V

an Nistelrooy and the form of Roy Keane, Paul Scholes and Ryan Giggs," we must have a fantastic chance."" It is a view shared by Rooney"," who believes ""if we can get past Milan", " we have a great chance"" . ""As soon as I knew we were playing Milan", I got excited. Looking at the draw," it is anyone's trophy but we have every chance. ""Hopefully", " we can get to that final in Turkey and bringing the cup back to Manchester." " Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti said his team were looking forward to returning to the venue where they lifted Europe's most prestigious club title two seasons ago. Milan beat Juventus in a penalty shootout after a 0-0 tie at Old Trafford and Ancelotti said: ""We are all very happy to return (to Old Trafford) to play in the Champions League and this will give us great motivation." " Ancelotti said he was aware of the threat United posed to his hopes of Champions League glory. ""It's fundamental that we don't allow them to take control of the game. Our intention is not to adapt to their play but to play our game", he said. They have great quality in attack," they use the wings a lot and we will have to make sure we stop them." "

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"sport 153.txt Rush future at Chester uncertain Ian Rush  
h's future as Chester manager is uncertain after he and assistant Mark Aizlewood refused a severance package. Chester have won only two of their last 10 League games but Chairman Steve Vaughan claims he cannot afford to sack the 43-year-old Liverpool legend. Vaughan said: ""I offered a financial settlement so they could resign with dignity but an obvious action is to dismiss them. ""I haven't because of the finances", " so technically they're still employees." " Vaughan claimed that Aizlewood had ""verbally agreed"" to the offer. But the Chester chairman added: ""After they discussed the offer with their solicitor", who also acts as their agent, they decided to withdraw the verbal agreement," which was disappointing." " Rush was appointed at the end of August following the departure of former Liverpool team-mate Mark Wright", who guided Chester to the Conference title last season. Chester were bottom of League Two when Rush took over but the former Liverpool striker enjoyed an impressive start to managerial life, taking the club into the third round of the FA cup and winning the manager-of-the-month award for October. Chester's downturn in form culminated in a 5-0 defeat at Shrewsbury that leaves them hovering just above the League Two relegation zone.

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"sport 154.txt Reyes tricked into Real admission Jose Antonio Reyes has added to speculation linking him with a move from Arsenal to Real Madrid after falling victim to a radio prank. The Spaniard believed he was talking to Real Madrid sporting director Emilio Butragueno when he allegedly berated his team-mates as ""bad people"". ""I wish I was playing for Real Madrid", " the 21-year-old told Cadena Cope. Hopefully it could happen. I love the way Madrid play. I'm not happy with the way things are." " The striker joined the Gunners from Seville for £17m at the start of 2004", " but it has frequently been reported that he is homesick. He began the season in superb form but has struggled to maintain his high standards as Arsenal have gradually lost the Premiership initiative to Manchester United and Chelsea. ""If I'm not (playing for Real) I'm going to have to carry on playing with some bad people", " he added. I'm sure there are none in the Real dressing room. ""I'm happy Madrid is interested in me because it has always been my dream since I was little to play there." " Before the story surfaced", Reyes had moved to play down reports linking him with the Spanish giants," issuing a statement through Arsenal describing the speculation as ""flattering"" . ""I have seen the stories in the media linking me with

h Real Madrid", he had said on Thursday lunchtime. But not only am I under contract at Arsenal," I am happy here and committed to helping the team win more trophies." "Butragueno", meanwhile," was angry at being impersonated by the radio disc jockey. " "It is a disgrace", there is no foundation to this," he said. He is an Arsenal player and we have to be respectful. We have to be careful because of the rumours that appear in the news."

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"sport 155.txt Benitez joy as Reds take control Liverpool  
boss Rafael Benitez was satisfied after his team's 3-1 win over Bayer Leverkusen despite conceding a goal in the last minute. " "Before the game if you had said the score will be 3-1 I would have happily accepted that", " said Benitez. But you must realise that you have to concentrate right to the very last seconds of a game at this level. " "I have confidence that we can complete the task in Germany. I am always confident and we must be positive." " Benitez defended goal keeper Jerzy Dudek", " whose failure to hold on to Dimitar Berbatov's weak drive allowed Franca to score with the last kick of the game - and give the German team a lifeline for the second leg. " "For me it was not Jerzy Dudek's fault", added Benitez. He had played a very good game - and had we scored our other chances, " nobody would be talking about about their goal. It would not have mattered. " "If we had scored our other chances it would not have been worth remembering that last goal. " "In my opinion Jerzy played well", " made two very fine saves - and I am happy with him. " "If we lose 2-0 we are out but I think we can score in Germany - certainly one", " and that will make all the difference." " And the Liverpool boss is looking forward to having skipper Steven Gerrard", who was suspended for the Anfield leg, " back for the return in Germany. " "Steven Gerrard is a key player for us", " said Benitez. When he is on the pitch he makes everyone else play better - and the opposition pay special attention to him - which gives space for others. " "Steven is one of the best players in the world", " but I need a team that is not about just one player. There must be 11 players on the pitch all doing well."

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"sport 156.txt Souness eyes summer move for Owen Newcastle  
boss Graeme Souness is lining up a summer move for England and Real Madrid striker Michael Owen. He sees Owen as the ideal replacement for Alan Shearer", who is due to retire in the summer," although he hopes to persuade Shearer to carry on. " "Michael is in the category of players who would excite the fans and we're monitoring him", " he told BBC Newcastle. He is a great centre-forward and only 25 but I don't think we're the only ones monitoring the situation at Real." " Souness has also hinted he thinks Shearer may carry on despite his stated intent to retire at the end of the season. He believes the prospect of breaking Jackie Milburn's club scoring record may influence the striker's decision. Milburn scored 200 league and cup goals between 1946 and 1957", " while Shearer currently has 187 goals to his name. " "Without giving too much away", I am confident he will be here next season," said Souness. I can't imagine him leaving without breaking Jackie Milburn's scoring record." " Souness also revealed he tried to bring back Nolberto Solano during the January transfer window. The Peruvian international was sold to Aston Villa a year ago but in the phone-in for BBC Newcastle", Souness said tried to re-sign him," but Villa were not interested in selling. The former Rangers and Liverpool boss is also looking to bring in a number of new acquisitions once the current campaign has been completed. " "I'm after three", four or five new players in the summer - we have got lots of targets," he said. Don't think we will wait to the last day of the season to say: 'W

ho are we going to target now?""

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"sport 157.txt Wenger dejected as Arsenal slump Arsenal m anager Arsene Wenger claimed their display in the 3-1 defeat against Bayern Munich was ""our worst performance in the Champions League"". Kolo Toure's late goal gives the Gunners hope for the second leg," but Wenger said: ""The only positive is that we are still in the tie. ""The players are really down in the dressing-room. I feel we really turned in a bad performance. ""At 3-0 we faced a real struggle," but 3-1 at least gives us a chance."" Goalscorer Toure was also at fault for two goals"," and Wenger said: ""We need to help Toure rebuild his confidence as he is low at the moment."" Wenger also tried to stay upbeat himself," adding: ""But there is enough time for crying. I could cry - maybe it would be easier - but life goes on. ""In this job", you have good and bad nights. This was a bad night - but I still have confidence in the quality of my players," as well as their spirit and desire."" But Wenger's Bayern counterpart Felix Magath was in no mood to celebrate either. He said: ""I am far from happy despite the win. My players failed to try and score a fourth to kill the tie and then conceded the late goal. ""Arsenal are fully capable of scoring several goals against us on their own turf."" Arsenal keeper Jens Lehmann", whose personal rivalry with Bayern goalkeeper Oliver Kahn was not helped by the result," said: ""Do I blame myself for the third goal? As a goalkeeper", I always blame myself. ""I just know the goals were very easy against us. In my time here", we have never conceded three easy goals like that - but sometimes it happens. ""It would have been impossible to go through at 3-0 - but with the goal we have chances. Everything is now possible.""  
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"sport 158.txt Stam spices up Man Utd encounter AC Milan defender Jaap Stam says Manchester United ""know they made a mistake"" by selling him in 2001. The sides meet at Old Trafford in the Champions League game on Wednesday and the 32-year-old's Dutchman's presence is sure to add spice to the fixture. ""United made a mistake in selling me", Stam told Uefa's Champions magazine. I was settled at Manchester United, but they wanted to sell me. If a club want to sell you," there is nothing you can do. You can be sold like cattle." Sir Alex Ferguson surprised the football world - and Stam - by selling the Dutchman to Lazio for £16.5m in August 2001. The decision came shortly after Stam claimed in his autobiography that Ferguson had tapped him up when he was at PSV Eindhoven. But Ferguson insisted he sold the defender because the transfer fee was too good to refuse for a player past his prime. The affair still rankles with the Dutchman. ""I was settled at Manchester United", I had even just ordered a new kitchen, but they wanted to sell me," he said. In what other industry can a good employee be ushered out the door against their wishes? ""Of course", you can refuse to go," but then the club have the power to put you on the bench. I don't agree that players control the game. ""There have been opportunities to confront them in the newspapers", but I have turned them down. What's the point?"" Wednesday's game at Old Trafford will provide an intriguing confrontation between United's young attackers Wayne Rooney and Cristiano Ronaldo and Milan's veteran defence of Stam", Paolo Maldini," Cafu and Alessandro Costacurta. Stam says Rooney's teenage stardom is in stark contrast to his own start in the game. ""We can't all be Wayne Rooneys - at his age I was training to be an electrician and thought my chance of becoming a professional footballer had gone", he said. Starting late can be a good thing. Some kids who start early get bored. ""I had my youth - having fun", drinking beers," blowing up milk cans

ers. It sounds strange but it's a tradition where I grew up in Kampen - and I had done all the things I wanted to do."

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"sport 159.txt Mourinho defiant on Chelsea form Chelsea b  
oss Jose Mourinho has insisted that Sir Alex Ferguson and Arsene Wenger would swap places with him. Mourinho's side were knocked out of the FA Cup by Newcastle last Sunday before seeing Barcelona secure a 2-1 Champions League first-leg lead in the Nou Camp. But he denied his club was suffering a dip in form which league rivals Arsenal and Manchester United could exploit. ""They cannot speak to us about blips because they're not in a better position than us", "Mourinho said. Do they want to change positions with us? We are top of the league by nine points and in the Carling Cup final. ""The only thing they can say they are in a better position than us is in the FA Cup. ""In the Champions League all three teams can either go through or go out but the one team that is in the best position is still Chelsea." "Mourinho said it was important to keep his team's results in perspective. ""Don't try to put pressure on me because I am never under pressure", "he warned. We have lost one important game this week - at Newcastle - and we're out of the FA Cup but I don't think a defeat in a first-leg tie is a real defeat. We are just 2-1 down at half-time." "Asked if his Chelsea honeymoon was now over", "Mourinho replied: ""I have had 20 years of honeymoons with my wife. ""The day that this club is not happy with me is the day that I go."  
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"sport 160.txt Hodgson relishes European clashes Former B  
lackburn boss Roy Hodgson says the Premiership should follow the rest of Europe and have a winter break - but insists that a gruelling domestic schedule will not damage the English elite's bid for Champions League glory. Hodgson - now in charge at Viking Stavanger - was at Liverpool's clash with Bayer Leverkusen at Anfield on Tuesday as a member of Uefa's technical committee. Hodgson is a fierce advocate of the winter break employed throughout Europe", although not in England - where the Champions League contenders have ploughed through a heavy fixture list. But Hodgson told BBC Sport that while he believes the Premiership should embrace the idea," he does not expect it to cost the English representatives in the last 16 of the Champions League. ""I just feel it is very difficult to say with certainty that teams who have had the break will have a definite edge. ""I am a fervent supporter of the break. It gives players the chance to recharge their batteries midway through the season", "which some suggest will give teams an advantage in the Champions League. ""The other school of thought suggests having a break then coming back to it puts you at a disadvantage. ""The bigger discussions around the winter break should be to do with the nature of football today", the needs of football players and the way the Premiership has developed," rather than one or two matches in the Champions League in February." "Hodgson believes a winter break carries many advantages", "explaining: ""As I said", "it is the perfect chance to recharge batteries. ""And certainly if I was still a manager in England I would be supporting any calls for its introduction. ""In pre-season you get a lot of enthusiasm and energy but by the time you get towards Christmas many players", having also played plenty of international matches for club and country and travelled a lot," find themselves getting very jaded. ""The break gives them a chance to recover that energy and enthusiasm and", perhaps more importantly," recover their mental strength during the break and get ready for the games ahead. ""The mental side is by far the most important

t thing." Hodgson added: ""The length of breaks can vary. In Italy the break was very short. You just took Christmas and New Year. ""It was so short you didn't do anything. You gave the players a week or 10 days off," then you were training for a week or 10 days and then went into a game. ""If it is longer," it is important those responsible for physical fitness give the players a programme to follow to ensure the physical strength they have accumulated stays with them." And Hodgson believes a winter break would be a positive step in the Premiership. He said: ""If we talk about football at elite level", which the Premiership is," then I would support a winter break. ""If you examine the demands of the Premier League and", in particular on players who play international football for their club and country," then a break would do them the world of good - physically and mentally."

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sport 161.txt Coach Ranieri sacked by Valencia Claudio Ranieri has been sacked as Valencia coach just eight months after taking charge at the Primera Liga club for the second time in his career. The decision was taken at a board meeting following the side's surprise elimination from the Uefa Cup. ""We understand", and he understands, that the results in the last few weeks have not been the most appropriate," said club president Juan Bautista. Former assistant Antonio Lopez will take over as the new coach. Italian Ranieri took over the Valencia job in June 2004 having been replaced at Chelsea by Jose Mourinho. Things began well but the Spanish champions extended their winless streak to six after losing to Racing Santander last weekend. That defeat was then followed by a Uefa Cup exit at the hands of Steaua Bucharest. Ranieri first took charge of Valencia in 1997, guiding them to the King's Cup and helping them to qualify for the Champions League. The 54-year-old then moved to Atletico Madrid in 1999, before joining Chelsea the following year.

sport 162.txt Cole faces lengthy injury lay-off Aston Villa's Carlton Cole could be out for six weeks with a knee injury. The striker, who is on a season-long loan from Chelsea, picked up the knock in an England Under-21 match against Holland earlier this month. Carlton will be out of action for four to six weeks after a bad challenge", said Villa boss David O'Leary. I won't be able to tell you whether he will need an operation until maybe next week. Whether he has an operation has got to be left to Chelsea." Cole", who also struggled with an ankle problem earlier in the season, was unable to rest because O'Leary had a shortage of strikers. The return to fitness of Darius Vassell after four months out with a broken ankle and the emergence of Luke Moore has alleviated some of the Villa's manager's problems in that department.

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sport 163.txt Arsenal through on penalties Arsenal win 4-2 on penalties The Spanish goalkeeper saved from Alan Quinn and Jon Harley as Arsenal sealed a quarter-final trip to Bolton with a 4-2 victory on penalties. Lauren", Patrick Vieira, Freddie Ljungberg and Ashley Cole scored for Arsenal, while Andy Gray and Phil Jagielka were on target for the Blades. Michael Tonge and Harley wasted chances for the underdogs, but Paddy Kenny was inspired to keep Arsenal at bay. Arsenal, stripped of attacking talent such as Thierry Henry and Dennis Bergkamp, partnered 17-year-old Italian striker Arturo Lupoli with Ljungberg up front. It was a revamped Arsenal line-up, and they were almost a goal behind within seconds as Tonge wasted a glorious chance. Gray ran free down the right flank, and his cross left Tonge with the simplest of chances, but he blazed over the top from six yards. Arsenal were barely seen as an attacking force in the opening 45 minutes, although Ljungberg turned a half-chance wide af

ter good work by Cesc Fabregas. Arsene Wenger introduced Quincy Owusu-Abeyie for the ineffective Lupoli at half-time, and the pacy Dutch youngster had an immediate impact. He ran clear after good work by Mathieu Flamini, but his finish was tame and Kenny saved easily. Owusu-Abeyie then fired in a testing cross, which was met by Fabregas, and it needed a desperate clearance by Kenny's legs to save the Blades. Arsenal were now totally dominant, and were desperately unlucky not to take the lead after 62 minutes when Fabregas crashed a rising drive against the bar from 20 yards. It then took a brilliant tackle by Jagielka to deny Ljungberg as he was poised to strike. Arsenal continued to press, and once again Kenny was called into action with eight minutes left, diving low to clutch another close-range effort from Fabregas. Neil Warnock's side almost snatched victory in the dying seconds when Derek Geary's cross found Harley at the far post, but his diving header was brilliantly turned over by Almunia. Owusu-Abeyie's pace was causing all sorts of problems for the Blades, and as extra-time began, another surging run into the penalty area almost set up a chance for Ljungberg. Pascal Cygan missed Arsenal's best chance after 106 minutes, blazing across the face of goal when he was unmarked at the far post. Arsenal sent on Jeremy Aliadiere with seven minutes of extra-time left, and he almost broke the deadlock with his first touch. Kolo Toure's misplaced free-kick landed at his feet, but Kenny once again blocked from a tight angle. Arsenal laid siege to Sheffield United's goal in the dying minutes, but they somehow held on to force penalties. Almunia was then Arsenal's hero as another brave Blades cup campaign came to a losing end. Kenny, Geary, Morgan, Bromby, Harley, Liddell, Montgomery, Jagielka, Thirlwell, Tonge (Quinn 97), Gray. Subs Not Used: Francis, Kabba, Shaw, Haystead. Morgan. Almunia, Lauren, Cygan, Senderos, Cole, Fabregas (Toure 90), Vieira, Flamini (Aliadiere 113), Clichy, Lupoli (Owusu-Abeyie 45), Ljungberg. Subs Not Used: Eboue, Taylor. Clichy, Lauren, Senderos. 27,595 P Dowd (Staffordshire).

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"sport 164.txt Ajax refuse to rule out Jol move Ajax have refused to reveal whether Tottenham's boss Martin Jol is on the Dutch champion's shortlist to become the Amsterdam club's new coach. Jol", who has coached in his native Holland," has guided Spurs to the Premiership's top eight. An Ajax spokesman told BBC Sport: ""The coach must fit our profile - a coach who understands the Dutch league and offensive and distinctive football. ""We need to find a solution soon", so someone is in place for next season." Ronald Koeman quit as Ajax boss last week after their exit from the Uefa Cup. Jol has been linked with the vacant post at Ajax", with reports saying he has fallen out with Spurs' sporting director Frank Arnesen. But in a statement on Spurs' website," Jol said: ""I'm happy here", I'm not in discussion with anyone else," I don't want to go elsewhere." Ajax have enlisted the help of Dutch legend Johann Cruyff", currently a consultant at Barcelona, to help find a new head coach. Cruyff has admitted he has been impressed by the way former RFC Waalwijk coach Jol has turned round Spurs' fortunes since taking over from Jacques Santini. Tonny Bruins Slot and Ruud Krol are currently in charge of Ajax, who are third in the Dutch league.

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"sport 165.txt Unclear future for striker Baros Liverpool forward Milan Baros is uncertain whether he remains part of boss Rafa Benitez's plans after being dropped for the Carling Cup final. Baros", who is Liverpool's leading scorer this season," denied reports of a row with Benitez but claims he is mystified at being left on the bench. He told Czech newspaper Daily Spo

rt: ""I don't know why I didn't play on Sunday. I didn't argue with anybody. ""I was disappointed but I am not thinking of leaving right now." The Czech international came on as a substitute after 74 minutes but could not prevent his side losing 3-2 to Chelsea after extra-time. Baros denied suggestions he wanted to leave the Millennium Stadium before the match upon learning of his omission from the starting line-up. But his admission that he ""guessed something like this was going to happen on Saturday""," will do little to quell claims of a falling-out with Benitez. And although Baros insisted thoughts of quitting Anfield are ""not in my mind right now""," he admitted ""everything is possible"".

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"sport 166.txt Prutton poised for lengthy FA ban Southampton's David Prutton faces a possible seven-match ban when he goes before the Football Association. The 23-year-old has admitted two charges of improper conduct following his dismissal against Arsenal. The first charge relates to his failure to leave the field promptly", pushing referee Alan Wiley and remonstrating with assistant referee Paul Norman. And the second charge is for using threatening words and/or behaviour to a match official during the 1-1 draw. Paolo di Canio was given a seven-match suspension when he pushed referee Paul Alcock over in a Premiership game between Sheffield Wednesday and Arsenal in 1998. Prutton will be joined at Wednesday's hearing by Saints boss Harry Redknapp," who believes that the FA will throw the book at his player. Redknapp himself sprinted along the touchline to help physio Jim Joyce and coach Denis Rofe shepherd the enraged Prutton away from referee's assistant Norman. ""David has made a big mistake and he knows it. I can't condone what he's done. He was out of order but he knows that", said Redknapp. He's a decent lad. He over-reacted badly for some reason - he had a rush of blood from somewhere. Off the pitch you couldn't meet a nicer lad." Prutton has apologised publicly for his actions and to Arsenal's Robert Pires", who was injured in a wild tackle by the Saints' midfield man. He said: ""It's an horrendous situation. I apologise to the ref and linesman", who were only doing their job. ""I've also seen what happened to Pires' leg and I'm sorry for that as well." "I apologise for the people who saw it. I know you get lots of kids going to the match now and they don't pay money to see that sort of thing. ""It's not a cop-out", but it was all a bit of a blur. Sometimes you react and it's beyond your control," added Prutton.

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"sport 167.txt Robben plays down European return Injured Chelsea winger Arjen Robben has insisted that he only has a 10% chance of making a return against Barcelona in the Champions League. The 21-year-old has been sidelined since breaking a foot against Blackburn last month. Chelsea face Barcelona at home on 8 March having lost 2-1 in the first leg. And Robben told the Daily Star: ""It is not impossible that I will play against Barcelona but it is just a very", very small chance - about 10%." Robben has been an inspirational player for Chelsea this season following a switch from PSV Eindhoven last summer. He added: ""My recovery is going better than we expected a few weeks ago but I think the Barcelona game will come too soon. ""I won't take any risks and come back too soon.""

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"sport 168.txt Adriano's Chelsea link rejected Adriano's agent Gilmar Rinaldi has insisted that he has had no contact with Chelsea over

the striker. Chelsea were reported to have made inquiries about Inter Milan's 22-year-old Brazilian star. Rinaldi told BBC Sport from Rio de Janeiro: ""I can assure you that Chelsea have had no dealings whatsoever with either me or Adriano. ""Parma and Real Madrid are interested but there's nothing new there. Their interest has been known for some time." Adrano has scored 14 goals in 20 Serie A appearances this season. And Chelsea boss Jose Mourinho had claimed that he was in Milan talking to Adriano on the day he is alleged to have held a clandestine meeting with Arsenal defender Ashley Cole. Mourinho said he was ""just practising my Portuguese with him because I don't need strikers"". Rinaldi told BBC Sport: ""I have to say that nobody from Chelsea or any other London club has contacted me. ""If they want to", that's fine. I can tell them what the situation is. ""If Chelsea are interested then they must make an offer." Inter are reported to have slapped a price tag in the region of £40m on the head of Adriano", who joined them just over a year ago from Parma. Real Madrid view him as a natural replacement for compatriot Ronaldo. But Rinaldi said: ""I cannot give you a price that Inter would accept for Adriano. That's something that would have to be negotiated between the interested clubs.""

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"sport 169.txt FA decides not to punish Mourinho The Football Association will take no action against Chelsea boss Jose Mourinho following his sending-off in Sunday's Carling Cup final. Mourinho", who was sent from the touchline for appearing to taunt Liverpool fans," has been ""reminded of his responsibilities to the game"". But the FA confirmed: ""There will be no further action taken in this matter." Mourinho claimed his 'silence' gesture was aimed at the media", although they were on the other side of the ground. The former Porto coach was forced to watch the climax of his side's 3-2 victory over Liverpool on television after being ushered away from the touchline by fourth official Phil Crossley. His gesture came after Chelsea's equaliser on 79 minutes courtesy of a Steven Gerrard own goal. Mourinho still faces an FA investigation into his allegation that Manchester United's players 'cheated' during January's Carling Cup semi-final at Stamford Bridge. And Uefa could also launch disciplinary action following Mourinho's failure to attend a compulsory post-match press conference after Chelsea's Champions League defeat at Barcelona last week. In addition, some time this month, Chelsea must also answer a charge of failing to control their players during the Premiership win at Blackburn in February. And a charge of failing to control their supporters following a Carling Cup meeting with West Ham earlier this season is still to be heard. The Premier League is also continuing investigations into allegations Chelsea officials tapped up Arsenal defender Ashley Cole in January.

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"sport 170.txt Aragones angered by racism fine Spain coach Luis Aragones is furious after being fined by The Spanish Football Federation for his comments about Thierry Henry. The 66-year-old criticised his 3000 euros (£2,060) punishment even though it was far below the maximum penalty. ""I am not guilty", nor do I accept being judged for actions against the image of the sport," he said. I'm not a racist and I've never lacked sporting decorum. I've never done that and I have medals for sporting merit." Aragones was handed the fine on Tuesday after making racist remarks about Henry to Arsenal team-mate and Spanish international Jose Reyes last October. The Spanish Football Federation at first declined to take action against Aragones", but was then requested to do so by Spain's anti-violence commission. The fine was far less than the ex

pected amount of about £22,000 or even the suspension of his coaching licence. Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger, who was fined £15,000 in December for accusing Manchester United striker Ruud van Nistelrooy of cheating," believes that Aragones' punishment was too lenient. ""You compare his fine and my fine", and if you consider his was for racist abuse, then you seem to get away with it more in Spain than you should, Wenger said. He shouldn't have said what he said, and how much money is enough," I don't know but it doesn't look a big punishment." "However," Aragones insists the fine is unjustified and unfair. ""I have been treated like Islero (the bull that killed famous bullfighter Manolete)", said Aragones on hearing he had been fined for his actions. I have not liked one thing about this whole affair and I do not agree with the sanction. They have looked for a scapegoat." "Spain's anti-violence commission must now ratify the Spanish FA's decision and has until next week to announce its verdict. Aragones has 10 days to appeal", and the commission can also appeal. Alberto Flores, president of the Spanish FA's disciplinary committee," said no-one in the committee felt Aragones was a racist nor had ""acted in a racist way." " "A fine", the highest we could apply, is sufficient punishment. Suspension would have been a bit exaggerated," Flores told sports daily Marca.

sport 171.txt Boro suffer Morrison injury blow Middlesbrough midfielder James Morrison has been ruled out for up to eight weeks after an operation on Tuesday. The 18-year-old, who has played in 13 of the club's last 14 games, had surgery to repair a double hernia. A club spokesman confirmed: It is a bilateral sportsman's hernia", which was operated on yesterday." "Morrison was sent for scans after being substituted at half-time during Boro's 2-1 UEFA Cup win over Graz AK in which he scored the equaliser. His injury is the latest blow for the Teessiders", who have been without Gaizka Mendieta, George Boateng and Mark Viduka for extended periods. Meanwhile, the kick-off time for Boro's Uefa Cup match at Sporting Lisbon on 17 March has been brought forward from 2115 GMT to 1945 GMT.

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"sport 172.txt Mourinho receives Robson warning Sir Bobby Robson has offered Chelsea boss Jose Mourinho some advice on coping under pressure. The pair worked together at Barcelona and Porto and Robson had a word of warning for his protege. ""It has all gone for him just lately and that is marvellous", but sometimes you have to have a bit of humility and learn how to lose, said Robson. It is when it goes against you and you get a bit of bad luck that you learn," and he'll get it straight." "Robson was speaking after being formally granted the freedom of the city of Newcastle. ""Jose is doing very well at the moment", Robson added of the man who worked for him for six years. He has got one pot - possibly two to follow - a big game against Barcelona to come and I cannot see them losing their lead in the Premiership. ""They are in a good position and I would expect them to go on and win it", which is a wonderful achievement. ""What has occurred over the last couple of weeks will stand him in very good stead for the future. If he is intelligent", he will take it on board - and he is very intelligent. ""He will have learned more in the last fortnight than the last eight months. Before that", it was all about winning." "Robson also admitted he would relish the chance to get back into management and test his skills against Mourinho. ""I am not in a hurry to take the wrong job", but I am ready to take the right job and I feel there is another job in me," he added. I know the area I am capable of working in and of course I would like a job in the Premiership if one was available. ""It would not worry me if I had to pit my wits against Jose. ""But it is not just a case of him and me against one another. It would be his team against my team - but I would not be afraid of tha

t."  
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"sport 173.txt QPR keeper Day heads for Preston Queens Park Rangers keeper Chris Day is set to join Preston on a month's loan. Day has been displaced by the arrival of Simon Royce", who is in his second month on loan from Charlton. QPR have also signed Italian Generoso Rossi. R's manager Ian Holloway said: ""Some might say it's a risk as he can't be recalled during that month and Simon Royce can now be recalled by Charlton. ""But I have other irons in the fire. I have had a 'yes' from a couple of others should I need them.""  
Day's Rangers contract expires in the summer. Meanwhile", Holloway is hoping to complete the signing of Middlesbrough defender Andy Davies - either permanently or again on loan - before Saturday's match at Ipswich. Davies impressed during a recent loan spell at Loftus Road. Holloway is also chasing Bristol City midfi elder Tom Doherty.  
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"sport 174.txt Cudicini misses Carling Cup final Chelsea goalkeeper Carlo Cudicini will miss Sunday's Carling Cup final after the club dropped their appeal against his red card against Newcastle. The Italian was sent off for bringing down Shola Ameobi in the final minute of Sunday's match. Blues boss Jose Mourinho had promised to pick Cudicini for the final instead of first-choice keeper Petr Cech. The 31-year-old will now serve a one-match suspension commencing with immediate effect. Cudicini kept a club record 24 clean sheets last season for Chelsea", but Petr Cech has established himself as first choice for Mourinho since moving to Stamford Bridge in summer 2004. The 22-year-old Czech Republic international has set a new Premiership record of 961 consecutive minutes without conceding a goal, a mark which is still running. But Mourinho has used Cudicini regularly in the Carling Cup, and the Italian has only let in one goal in his four appearances during Chelsea's run to the final.  
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"sport 175.txt Beattie return calms attack fears Everton striker James Beattie has been declared fit for training on Tuesday", despite suffering an alleged assault last Saturday. Beattie,27," is not believed to be as seriously hurt as some reports have suggested after being ""the victim of an unprovoked assault"" in Birmingham. He was on a night out with his girlfriend and two friends following Everton's 3-1 win over Aston Villa. ""He was shaken but not badly injured", said Everton spokesman Ian Ross. He added: He did speak to the police but will not be pressing charges. ""He has spoken to manager David Moyes about what happened."" Beattie was suspended for the win at Aston Villa after his red card against Chelsea and he will be available again for the Merseyside derby at Liverpool on 20 March.  
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"sport 176.txt Keegan hails comeback king Fowler Manchester City boss Kevin Keegan has praised striker Robbie Fowler for his landmark return to form. The 29-year-old", out of favour at City earlier this season," to ok his Premiership goal tally past 150 with a brace in Monday's 3-2 win at Norwich. ""He is still a quality player and knows where the net is - we have just got to supply him with ammunition and", in the end, we did," Keegan said. He has

worked hard to get back to where he is now. "The former Liverpool striker", who moved to City in 2003 after a poor stint at Leeds, has battled back into first-team contention after struggling with fitness at the start of the season. Fowler overtook Les Ferdinand on Tuesday evening to become the third highest scorer of all time in the Premiership, with 151 goals," and he only trails Alan Shearer (250) and Andy Cole (173). And Keegan believes there is still more to come from the former England forward. "He can get better if we can supply him better," added Keegan. People want to write him off but if he has kept the articles of those people who have written him off he could throw them back at them and they would be left with a bit of egg on their face." Fowler's double strike helped City come back from two goals down to clinch a dramatic win at Carrow Road and Keegan sympathised with Norwich boss Nigel Worthington afterwards. "I feel a bit for Nigel Worthington", he said. His team have got great character," they have a lot of drive and enthusiasm. "I know it is a killer blow for Norwich but I really think they have brought something to the Premiership. "The stadium and the atmosphere is great"," it is just a tough league to stay in - as they are finding out and as we know."

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"sport 177.txt Thompson says Gerrard should stay Liverpool legend Phil Thompson has pleaded with Steve Gerrard to reject any overtures from Chelsea. The ex-Reds assistant boss also warned that any honours won at Chelsea would be cheapened by the bid to buy success. He told BBC Radio Five Live: "Liverpool would think about any bid made but it will all be down to Steve in the end. "But it wouldn't have that same sweet feeling at Chelsea"," where it's all money-orientated and about simply buying the best." Thompson reacted sharply to some Liverpool supporters", who criticised Gerrard's performance in the Carling Cup final against Chelsea. A number of fans questioned Gerrard's commitment and sarcastically branded his own goal in Liverpool's 3-2 defeat as his first goal for Chelsea. Thompson added: "I heard those comments from so-called supporters and they were diabolical", absolutely outrageous. "Stevie carried the club last year and this year. He's always put Liverpool first." Thompson, who savoured seven title-winning seasons and two European Cup triumphs during his Anfield playing career," is confident that the lure of Champions League football will keep Gerrard at Anfield. "I hope Champions League football will beckon for Liverpool - either as winners or as finishing fourth in the Premiership - and he will commit himself. "There has been a lot of soul-searching the way things have gone lately. "I hope he's hardened to the fact he will have big decisions to make but I hope it is to the benefit of Steven Gerrard and I hope it is worthwhile for Liverpool."

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"sport 178.txt Cole refuses to blame van Persie Ashley Cole has refused to blame Robin van Persie for leaving Arsenal with no fully-fit strikers for the FA Cup fifth round replay at Sheffield United. Van Persie is suspended alongside Dennis Bergkamp and Jose Antonio Reyes after being sent off at Southampton when Arsenal had a numerical advantage. Thierry Henry is ruled out with an Achilles tendon injury but Cole said: "No-one is putting the blame on Robin. "It's just something that happens on the spur of the moment." Cole added: ""I've done it before and I hope they didn't blame me for anything. ""Of course he'll learn. I've been sent off a couple of times now and it's just one of those things when you go a bit crazy for one or two seconds. Freddie Ljungberg is likely to be used in an emergency striking role and will be partnered by

either Arturo Lupoli", "Quincy Owusu-Abeyie or Jeremie Aliadiere. Gunners boss Arsene Wenger said: ""Freddie is an option but we need a second striker. ""I have to decide whether it will be Aliadiere", "Quincy or Lupoli who will start with him up front. Those three will be involved." "Arsenal are also without wing-man Robert Pires", "who sustained an ankle injury at St Mary's. Wenger added: ""It doesn't look like anything is fractured", "but it is a good ankle sprain. ""It does not look like Pires will be ready for two to three weeks." "

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," sport 179.txt Blackburn v Burnley Ewood Park Tuesday", "1 March 2000 GMT Howard Webb (South Yorkshire) home to Leicester in the quarter-finals But defender Andy Todd is suspended and could be replaced by Dominic Matteo - if he recovers from a hamstring injury. Burnley have major injury concerns over Frank Sinclair and John McGreal. Michael Duff looks set to continue at right-back with John Oster in midfield and Micah Hyde is expected to recover from a knee injury. - Blackburn boss Mark Hughes: ""Burnley are resolute and have individual talent but I fully expect us to progress. ""I thought we were comfortable in the first game and never thought we were under pressure. ""It's a competition we want to progress in and we are doing okay. If we beat Burnley", "we have a home tie against another lower league club (Leicester)." " - Burnley boss Steve Cotterill: ""They will be fresh and we'll be tired. That is an honest opinion but our lads just might be able to get themselves up for one more big game. ""The atmosphere at the last game was very hot - a good verbal contest. ""Our fans will not need whipping up for this game. I just want them to help us as much as they can in a positive way." " KEY MATCH STATS - BLACKBURN ROVERS against Bolton is part two of an East Lancashire hotspot that didn't turn out to be that spicy when first staged on a Sunday lunchtime the weekend before last", and resulted in a scrappy goalless draw. - Rovers, who are aiming to win the Cup for a seventh time in their history and first time in 77 years, face another replay against Championship opposition after eventually disposing of Cardiff at Ewood Park in the third round. But they've not been beaten in the competition by a club outside the Premiership for nine years, since Ipswich - then in the second tier - defeated them 0-1 after extra time in a third round replay at Ewood Park on 16 January 1996. History is on Rovers side. When they last met their near neighbours in the FA Cup 45 years ago, it also required an Ewood Park replay, which the home side won 2-0, and when they last met in the League, Rovers did the double. They first won their Nationwide Division One trip to Turf Moor 0-2 four seasons ago, and then thrashed the Clarets on home soil 5-0. - Manager Mark Hughes, who won the Cup four times as a player, is aiming to steer Rovers into the quarter-finals for the second time in 12 years, and first time since the 2000/2001 season. Success here, and victory home to Leicester in the next round, could see Rovers in the semi-finals without having played Premiership opposition. - BURNLEY make the eight mile journey to their fierce rivals, determined to send Blackburn the same way as Liverpool in the third round. But having failed to pull off another shock at Turf Moor, it could be that the Championship outfit - 17 places inferior on the League ladder - have missed their best opportunity. Having said that, Burnley are yet to concede a goal in this Cup run. - Steve Cotterill's Clarets have been knocked out in the fifth round four times in the last seven years, and have made only one appearance in the sixth round in 21 years. That was in the season before last, when they disposed of Premiership Fulham at this fifth round stage. - While Blackburn have not played since the fifth round tie, Burnley have had two League outings away from home, drawing 1-1 at Derby and losing 1-0 at Preston. That takes their winless run to

four games. The combatants from one-time prosperous mill towns, are both founder members of the Football League. HEAD TO HEAD 16th PREM WINNERS (six times) 13th Championship WINNERS (once)

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"sport 180.txt Brentford v Southampton Griffin Park Tues day", 1 March 1945 GMT Barry Knight (Kent) home to Manchester United in the quarter-finals Midfielder Andrew Frampton and striker Deon Burton are both slight doubts with hamstring injuries, but should be fit Saints are missing their entire first-choice midfield of Jamie Redknapp, Graeme Le Saux, Nigel Quashie and David Prutton. Anders Svensson and Matt Oakley are likely replacements with Kevin Phillips also scheduled to start," with Henri Camara rested. - Brentford boss Martin Allen: ""After conceding eight goals in our last three matches," I have to admit I'm not very confident. ""There's no doubt we're the underdogs and after defending so poorly recently it's not looking good. ""Southampton have just drawn with the Premiership champions and that makes our task harder than it was already." - Southampton boss Harry Redknapp: ""We know they can give us problems. ""Brentford have done well but we are the Premiership side and should have the better players. ""Staying in the Premiership is our priority. We want to win," of course we do. We'll battle but if it comes to a football match I think we'll win." KEY MATCH STATS - BRENTFORD are the lowest ranked club left in the FA Cup. They're on their best run in the competition since reaching the quarter-finals for the fourth time in their history 16 years ago. Now they have the carrot of the plum draw in the last eight dangling before them. Victory over Premiership strugglers Southampton", would bring the mighty Manchester United to Griffin Park and a gigantic pay day for the sole League One survivors. - Martin Allen's brave side came back from two goals down at St Mary's to earn a deserved replay. Southampton striker Henri Camara scored twice from close range to put the Saints in command, but Isaiah Rankin hit back just before half time, and Sam Sodje headed past a creaky defence on 58 minutes. - The Londoners have conceded six goals in their two subsequent League outings - three each in losing away to Hartlepool and drawing at home to Sheffield Wednesday. But they haven't lost in six League and Cup games on home turf - winning three and drawing three since the reverse to Torquay on Boxing Day. - SOUTHAMPTON go into this tie on the back of an eventful Premiership match with Arsenal on Saturday. An angry David Prutton pushed referee Alan Wiley after being shown the red card, but his side still came back to draw 1-1. It was Saints' fourth stalemate in succession in all competitions, but didn't lift them out of the relegation zone. The retention of their ever present Premier League status must be the number one priority, irrespective of the rewards that success against Brentford would bring. - Victory here would set up a repeat of the 1976 final, when Saints astounded the football world by defeating Tommy Docherty's Manchester United courtesy of Bobby Stokes' famous winner. They also knocked out the Red Devils in 1991 on penalties in the fourth round. But to write another chapter in their FA Cup history, the Solent side must avoid succumbing to lower division opposition for the first time since Rotherham, from the second level, beat them 2-1 in a third round tie at Millmoor on 16 January 2002. Southampton were last humbled by a club from the third tier six years ago. Fulham were then in the Second Division, when they won a third round replay at Craven Cottage 1-0 on 13 January 1999. - To get to within two matches of a second visit to the Millennium Stadium in three years for the final, Harry Redknapp must guide his side past a club 36 places inferior on the League ladder, and a manager 19 years his junior, who played under him at West Ham. HEAD TO HEAD 10th League One QUARTER-FINALS (four times) 18th PREM WINNERS (once)

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"sport 181.txt Desailly backs Blues revenge trip Marcel D  
esailly insists there is no chance of history repeating itself when Chelsea tak  
e on Barcelona on Wednesday. The French star was part of the Chelsea side crus  
hed 5-1 at the Nou Camp in the Champions League quarter-final second leg in 200  
0. ""Things will be totally different this time", he told BBC Sport. Now every  
one knows about Chelsea and is a little bit afraid of them. They are one of the  
major clubs in Europe and the pressure will be on Barcelona." Chelsea have not  
played Barcelona since that quarter-final tie five years ago. The Blues had loo  
ked destined to progress after winning the first leg at Stamford Bridge 3-1", c  
ourtesy of two goals from Tore Andre Flo and one by Gianfranco Zola. But they c  
ollapsed in the second leg, going down to strikes from Rivaldo (2), Luis Figo,  
Dani and Patrick Kluivert. Former Chelsea captain Desailly, who is now playing  
for Al-Gharafa in Qatar, says there is no comparison between that side and the  
current Blues team," who are top of the Premiership. ""Mentally they are much s  
tronger", even though a lot of their players are young," the 36-year-old said.  
We made some mistakes at the Nou Camp in 2000 - a lot of them were individual m  
istakes. ""It would not happen now. This team has a new motivation and a differ  
ent mentality." World Cup winner Desailly saw huge changes during his time at  
Stamford Bridge. He was signed for £4.6m from AC Milan in 1998 by Ruud Gullit a  
nd went on to play under Gianluca Vialli and Claudio Ranieri. But the biggest c  
hange occurred when billionaire Roman Abramovich bought the club in 2003. Desai  
lly says the Russian's arrival helped to instil a winning mentality at the club  
as well as a demand for success. ""The whole of Chelsea is different now - the  
chairman", the manager and all the players," he said. Everything is new and th  
ere is a huge determination to win. ""Since that game in 2000", Chelsea have g  
ained more experience in Europe and were very close to reaching the Champions L  
eague final last season." Desailly is one of the most decorated players in the  
history of football. He won the 1998 World Cup and 2000 European Championship w  
ith France", the Champions League in 1993 with Marseilles and 1994 with AC Mila  
n, two Serie A titles and the FA Cup in 2000 with Chelsea. He is now winding do  
wn his career in Qatar, alongside the likes of Frank Lebeouf, Josep Guardiola,  
Titi Camara," Gabriel Batistuta and Christophe Dugarry. So he is full of admira  
tion for two of his colleagues from the great Milan side of the mid-90s who are  
likely to line up against Manchester United on Wednesday - Paolo Maldini and Al  
essandro Costacurta. ""I'm happy that they have managed to play so long at a hi  
gh level", he said. I made a vow to Costacurta that as long as he plays," I wil  
l continue to play. ""And it's amazing that Paolo has managed to play at such a  
high level for such a long time."

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"sport 182.txt Desailly backs Blues revenge trip Marcel D  
esailly insists there is no chance of history repeating itself when Chelsea tak  
e on Barcelona on Wednesday. The French star was part of the Chelsea side crus  
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one knows about Chelsea and is a little bit afraid of them. They are one of the  
major clubs in Europe and the pressure will be on Barcelona." Chelsea have not  
played Barcelona since that quarter-final tie five years ago. The Blues had loo  
ked destined to progress after winning the first leg at Stamford Bridge 3-1", c  
ourtesy of two goals from Tore Andre Flo and one by Gianfranco Zola. But they c  
ollapsed in the second leg, going down to strikes from Rivaldo (2), Luis Figo,  
Dani and Patrick Kluivert. Former Chelsea captain Desailly, who is now playing

for Al-Gharafa in Qatar, says there is no comparison between that side and the current Blues team," who are top of the Premiership. ""Mentally they are much stronger", even though a lot of their players are young," the 36-year-old said. We made some mistakes at the Nou Camp in 2000 - a lot of them were individual mistakes. ""It would not happen now. This team has a new motivation and a different mentality." World Cup winner Desailly saw huge changes during his time at Stamford Bridge. He was signed for £4.6m from AC Milan in 1998 by Ruud Gullit and went on to play under Gianluca Vialli and Claudio Ranieri. But the biggest change occurred when billionaire Roman Abramovich bought the club in 2003. Desailly says the Russian's arrival helped to instil a winning mentality at the club as well as a demand for success. ""The whole of Chelsea is different now - the chairman", the manager and all the players," he said. Everything is new and there is a huge determination to win. ""Since that game in 2000", Chelsea have gained more experience in Europe and were very close to reaching the Champions League final last season." Desailly is one of the most decorated players in the history of football. He won the 1998 World Cup and 2000 European Championship with France", the Champions League in 1993 with Marseilles and 1994 with AC Milan, two Serie A titles and the FA Cup in 2000 with Chelsea. He is now winding down his career in Qatar, alongside the likes of Frank Lebeouf, Josep Guardiola, Titi Camara," Gabriel Batistuta and Christophe Dugarry. So he is full of admiration for two of his colleagues from the great Milan side of the mid-90s who are likely to line up against Manchester United on Wednesday - Paolo Maldini and Alessandro Costacurta. ""I'm happy that they have managed to play so long at a high level", he said. I made a vow to Costacurta that as long as he plays," I will continue to play. ""And it's amazing that Paolo has managed to play at such a high level for such a long time.""

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"sport 183.txt Mourinho expects fight to finish Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho expects the Champions League clash with Barcelona to be a fight to the finish. Mourinho is relishing the first leg of the tie against his former club in the last 16 in the Nou Camp. He said: ""I wouldn't be surprised if nothing had been decided by the last minute of the return leg and the match had to go into extra time. ""I have to defend what is mine and the Champions League is mine at the moment. I'm the last manager to have won it." Mourinho never coached Barcelona", assisting both Sir Bobby Robson and Louis van Gaal. But he is not envious," insisting: ""I don't have to be jealous about Barcelona because they have 100 years of history and have won the European Cup once. ""I have been managing for five years and I have the same amount of Champions League trophies to my name." Barcelona star Ronaldinho admitted: ""I think that it is going to be a difficult match for us because Chelsea have a good team full of big stars. ""I have seen Chelsea a few times on television", tactically they are very good and they are very strong on the counter-attack. ""They pressure very well and keep possession of the ball so it will be important that we play our own game. ""I believe they are the two strongest teams in Europe. Nevertheless", Barcelona are accustomed to playing big games at the Nou Camp," where they have to face the likes of Real Madrid each season. ""It is a special game", the atmosphere in the city changes, there are lots of journalists but inside the dressing room there is not a lot of difference," Ronaldinho added. We are only thinking of winning the match with all respect to the opposition.""

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"sport 184.txt Cup holders Man Utd visit Everton Holders Manchester United and Premiership leaders Chelsea both face difficult away ties

against Premiership opposition in the FA Cup fifth round. United were drawn against Everton", while Chelsea face a trip to Newcastle. Brentford and Hartlepoo l - the only sides left from outside the top two divisions - will replay for the right to travel to Southampton. Burnley's reward for a place in the last 16 was a home tie against Lancashire rivals Blackburn. The tie between Manchester United and Everton could see the return of teenage striker Wayne Rooney to his former club for the first time since his acrimonious £27m move. Nottingham Forest boss Gary Megson could face a trip back to old club West Brom if they come through their fourth-round replay against Tottenham. Arsenal were handed a potential home tie against fellow Londoners West Ham, providing the Hammers come through their replay against Sheffield United. Charlton will play Leicester and Bolton await the winners of the Derby-Fulham replay. : Bolton v Derby or Fulham West Bromwich Albion or Tottenham v Nottingham Forest Everton v Manchester United Charlton Athletic v Leicester City Burnley v Blackburn Southampton v Brentford or Hartlepool Newcastle v Chelsea Arsenal v West Ham or Sheffield United Ties to be played on 19/20 February.

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''' "sport 185.txt Candela completes Bolton switch Bolton boss Sam Allardyce has signed Roma defender Vincent Candela on a five-month deal. The 31-year-old former France international gave his last press conference as a Roma player on Monday", "announcing his move to Bolton. ""I have signed a five-month contract with Bolton", " said Candela, who will travel to England on Tuesday. In June I will decide whether to continue to play for Bolton or retire from professional football." "Allardyce hopes Candela's arrival will relieve Bolton's injury crisis after defender Nicky Hunt limped out injured during Oldham's 1-0 win against Oldham in the FA Cup on Sunday. ""In light of what has happened to Nicky Hunt", with his injury, it might be a blessing in disguise that we can bring in a highly-experienced full-back to help with our injuries at the back," Allardyce said. He has an outstanding pedigree in the game and has won honours at the highest level including the World Cup in 1998. ""He has not played regular football this year but is eager to impress in the Premiership. ""He can play in any position at the back and despite him being predominately right-footed he has played the majority of his career at left-back." "Candela", who was a member of the Roma side that won the title in 2001, has made only seven league appearances this season for Luigi del Neri's side.

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''' "sport 186.txt Stuart joins Norwich from Addicks Norwich have signed Charlton midfielder Graham Stuart until the end of the season for an undisclosed fee. ""It was a very easy decision to make", " the 34-year-old told Norwich's website. The attraction for me was to continue to play in the Premiership." "Canaries boss Nigel Worthington added: ""I'm delighted that Graham will be joining us until the end of the season. ""He's gives us a wealth of experience. Hopefully", " he can be part of keeping us in the Premier League." "Stuart has extensive top-flight experience with Everton", Chelsea and Charlton and can play across the midfield positions. He joins Norwich with the Norfolk club second-from-bottom in the Premiership," but Stuart is confident that the Carrow Road outfit have a bright future. ""I've been very impressed with the facilities here. It's obviously a very well run football club with excellent facilities and I've always enjoyed playing at Carrow Road", " he added. It's a nice compact ground with a good atmosphere and hopefully I can help give the fans something else to cheer." "Stuart", a former England Under-21 international, made 110 ap

pearances for Chelsea, scoring 18 goals, before joining Everton. He won the FA Cup with the Toffees in 1995 and remains a hero at Goodison Park after his 81st-minute winner against Wimbledon saved Everton from relegation in 1994. Stuart spent just over four years at Goodison Park, making 125 senior appearances and scoring 25 goals, before signing for Sheffield United - where he scored 12 goals in 68 appearances. After signing for Charlton he made 164 appearances, scoring 23 times, but recently he has been battling a back problem and had not played for the Londoners for three months before heading to Norwich.

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"sport 187.txt Celtic make late bid for Bellamy Newcastle striker Craig Bellamy is discussing a possible short-term loan move to Celtic", BBC Sport understands. The Welsh striker has rejected a move to Birmingham after falling out with Magpies manager Graeme Souness. The Toon boss vowed Bellamy would not play again after a bitter row over his exclusion for the game against Arsenal. Celtic are in no position to match Birmingham's £6m offer but a stay until the end of the season could suit Bellamy while he considers his future. According to Bellamy's agent, the player dismissed a permanent move to Birmingham. And it is unlikely that Newcastle would allow the player to go on loan to another Premiership club. Bellamy was fined two weeks' wages after a live TV interview in which he accused Souness of lying," following a very public dispute about what position Bellamy should play in the side. Souness said: ""He can't play for me ever again. He has been a disruptive influence from the minute I walked into this football club. ""He can't go on television and accuse me of telling lies." Chairman Freddy Shepherd described Bellamy's behaviour as ""totally unacceptable and totally unprofessional"".

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/// "sport 188.txt Campbell lifts lid on United feud Arsenal's Sol Campbell has called the rivalry between Manchester United and the Gunners ""bitter and personal"". Past encounters have stirred up plenty of ill-feeling between the sides and they meet again at Highbury on Tuesday. ""It is just more bitter and personal against United", the defender told The Guardian newspaper. There's an edge. ""After all that has happened", if we beat them it will be one of our sweetest ever wins," especially because of how we lost to them up there." Last October", Arsenal lost 2-0 at Old Trafford, which ended a record 49-match unbeaten league run and sparked a mini-crisis," with the Gunners winning only three of their next 10 games. ""It had a psychological impact on us", but again because of the way we were defeated," added the 30-year-old, referring to a controversial penalty award for United's first goal. That was far more upsetting", losing like that," because they just seem to get away with it. You try and balance out over the course of a season but I've had so many rough decisions against them you begin to wonder." With tensions spilling over afterwards - United boss Sir Alex Ferguson was allegedly pelted with pizza in the players' tunnel - there is little surprise that so much is riding on the return encounter. ""Everyone at Arsenal has been waiting for this game", said Campbell. We are up for this one." Speaking on his long-term plans", Campbell signalled his intent to move abroad before he turns 35. ""I'm 30 now and in five years' time I won't be in this country - that's definite. ""Italy looks good to me because it would suit my kind of football. Spain is an option but the idea of tasting a new culture and learning another language excites me the most. I'm starting a little with French", of course.""

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"sport 189.txt Rovers reject third Ferguson bid Blackburn have rejected a third bid from Rangers for Scotland captain Barry Ferguson", " B BC Sport has learnt. It is thought Blackburn want £6m for the midfielder but chief executive John Williams has confirmed the club are still ""in dialogue"" with Rangers. The 26-year-old has already handed in a transfer request at Ewood Park as he seeks a return to Ibrox. But the clubs have been unable to reach agreement over a fee for Ferguson", " who moved to Lancashire in 2003 for £6.5m. On Thursday Rangers said they would not be increasing their offer of £4m. Blackburn have said all along that they want £6m for the midfielder and Williams has rejected proposals from Rangers over a player-swap deal. Williams said: ""We are in dialogue with Glasgow Rangers but we have no agreement." The negotiations will have to be concluded by midnight on Monday", " when the winter transfer window shuts. Williams conceded any deal for Ferguson was looking ""unlikely"" before the close of the transfer window but Rangers still had a chance to seal the deal. ""We have no comment to make other than we have not got an agreement with Glasgow Rangers", he added. The way things are looking," I think it is unlikely we are going to. ""The ball is in their court but we have not got an offer that is acceptable at this moment." It is understood that Blackburn accepted a £5m offer for Ferguson from Everton at the weekend. But the player is determined to return to Scotland and rejected a move to Goodison Park. Ferguson did not play in the FA Cup win over Colchester on Saturday despite recovering from a groin injury with Rovers boss Mark Hughes claiming it had been an ""emotional and difficult time"" for the player.

"sport 190.txt SA return to Mauritius Top seeds South Afr  
ica return to the scene of one of their most embarrassing failures when they face the Seychelles in the Cosafa Cup next month. Last year Bafana Bafana were humbled in the first by minnows Mauritius who beat them 2-0 in Curepipe. Coach Stuart Baxter and his squad will return to Curepipe face the Seychelles in their first game of the new-look regional competition. The format of the event has been changed this year after the entry of the Seychelles", who have taken the number of participants to 13. The teams are now divided into three group of four and play knock-out matches on successive days to determine the group champions. Mauritius host the first group, and their opponents are Madagascar, the Seychelles and South Africa. Bafana Bafana play the Seychelles before Mauritius take on Madagascar in a double-header on 26 February. The two winners return to the New George V stadium the next day and the victor of the group decider advances to August's final mini-tournament. The second group will be hosted in Namibia in April. It comprises Zimbabwe, Botswana, Mozambique and the hosts. In June, former champions Zambia will host Lesotho, Malawi and Swaziland in the third group in Lusaka. The three group winners will then join title holders Angola for the last of the mini-tournaments in August, where the winners will be crowned. Seychelles v South Africa Mauritius v Madagascar Winners meet in final match Mozambique v Zimbabwe Namibia v Botswana Winners meet in final match Lesotho v Malawi Zambia v Swaziland Winners meet in final match

"sport 191.txt Tottenham bid £8m for Forest duo Nott  
ingham Forest have confirmed they have received an £8m bid from Tottenham for Andy Reid and Michael Dawson. Reid rejected a move to Southampton after Forest accepted a cash-plus-players offer while Spurs had made previous bids for the 2

2-year-old. Spurs had also made an undisclosed offer for 21-year-old defender Dawson. Forest chief executive Mark Arthur said: ""We've received an £8m bid from Spurs for the two players and we're considering the offer." Southampton's offer for Republic of Ireland international Reid comprised £3m-plus and two players - Brett Ormerod and Darren Kenton. Spurs had seen previous bids of £3m", £4m and £5m for Reid rejected by the Championship club.

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"" sport 192.txt Redknapp's Saints face Pompey tie New South hampton manager Harry Redknapp faces an immediate reunion with his old club Portsmouth after they were drawn together in the FA Cup fourth round. Exeter City face a home tie against Middlesbrough if they can see off holders Manchester United in a replay. Oldham's reward for beating Manchester City is a home tie with Bolton", while Yeovil will be away to Charlton. Chelsea host Birmingham," Tottenham travel to West Brom and Arsenal will entertain Championship side Wolves. Saints boss Redknapp was upbeat about the draw despite having to face the club he walked out on just six weeks ago. ""I've said before", I can walk away from Portsmouth with my head held high, I'm proud of what I did there and no one can take that away from me, said Redknapp. Maybe I'll be in for some stick," there's always some of that but we'll get on with it and it's only a game of football."" Birmingham manager Steve Bruce admitted their trip to Stamford Bridge to face Premiership leaders Chelsea was the toughest draw possible. Bruce said: ""I'm still in shock. We've given good accounts of ourselves against Chelsea in the past and played well when we lost 1-0 at home at the start of the season - but that's the past. ""But it's the best competition in the world as far as I am concerned and we will give it our best shot."" Brentford boss Martin Allen remained cautious despite his side's favourable draw - a home tie with either Hartlepool or Boston. ""The best thing is", it's a home game. However, we know that whoever we play it is going to be a really tough game, said Allen. But it's not about the opposition, it's about us. We all want to get through to the next round and face a massive team," that's the way it is."" Meanwhile", the BBC has confirmed it will be televising Exeter's replay with Man Utd live on Wednesday 19 January, from 1930 on BBC One. Derby v Watford or Fulham Man Utd or Exeter v Middlesbrough Cardiff or Blackburn v Colchester Chelsea v Birmingham West Ham v Sheff Utd Oldham v Bolton Arsenal v Wolverhampton Everton v Sunderland Nottm Forest v Peterborough Brentford v Hartlepool or Boston Reading or Swansea v Leicester or Blackpool Burnley or Liverpool v Bournemouth Southampton v Portsmouth West Brom v Tottenham Newcastle v Coventry Charlton v Yeovil

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"" sport 193.txt Real in talks over Gravesen move Real Madrid are closing in on a £2m deal for Everton's Thomas Gravesen after the Dane's agent travelled to Spain to hold talks about a move. John Sivabaek told BBC Sport: ""I'm here to listen to what Real have to say. Nothing has been agreed," but this is a big opportunity for any player."" The 28-year-old's contract expires in the summer", " but Real want a quick deal. Sivabaek added: ""I will be meeting Real on Wednesday. There is serious interest", " but it is Everton's hands." " Everton must decide whether to cash in now on the Denmark midfield man", " or risk losing him for nothing in the summer. Manager David Moyes has defiantly claimed that he expects Gravesen to still be at Everton when the transfer window closes at the end of January. Moyes said: ""I speak to Tommy regularly and we know where we are at. ""There's been no contact. We don't want to lose him." " Real Madrid general manager Arrigo Sacchi is the driving force behind the mov

e", convincing vice-president Emilio Butragueno and new coach Wanderley Luxemburgo that Gravesen is the right man for the Bernabeu. Everton must weigh up whether it is worth taking the money on offer for Real and risk their own ambitions for European football. Gravesen has been outstanding as Everton have established themselves in the Premiership's top four this season.

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"sport 194.txt Klinsmann issues Lehmann warning Germany coach Jurgen Klinsmann has warned goalkeeper Jens Lehmann he may have to quit Arsenal to keep his World Cup dreams alive. Lehmann is understudy to Oliver Kahn in the German squad", "but has lost his place to Manuel Almunia at Highbury. Klinsmann said: ""It will be difficult for any of our players if he is not a first-choice at his club. ""If Jens is not Arsenal's number one keeper", "that is a problem for me. He must be playing regularly." Lehmann is desperate to keep his place in the Germany squad when the country hosts the World Cup in 2006. Klinsmann added: ""If he is not playing regularly he cannot be Germany's number one keeper", "or even number two keeper. ""The situation for Jens is that he is currently the number two keeper at Arsenal. This could be critical if it remains the same during next season.""

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"sport 195.txt Juninho demand for O'Neill talks Juninho's agent has confirmed that the player is hoping for talks with Martin O'Neill as the Brazilian midfielder comes closer to departing Celtic. Brian Hassell says no official approach has been received from Manchester City but that the English club had been earmarked as a possible destination. But it was being stressed to BBC Sport that Juninho would prefer to remain with the Scottish champions. Juninho wants assurances that he will return to O'Neill's first-team plans. He has become frustrated with his lack of first-team action since his move from Middlesbrough in the summer. Hassell says Juninho", who has just bought a new home," would ""desperately like to stay at Celtic"" but will seek a move if it is made clear that he is not wanted. The agent also stressed that nothing should be read into the 30-year-old's father being in Scotland and talk of a move back to Botafogo in Brazil. Juninho's father was simply in the country to see his son and grandchildren. ""I know there is interest from a Brazilian club", but I know Juninho doesn't want to go there, said Hassell. He wants to stay in Britain. In fact," he wants to stay at Celtic." Hassell made it clear that a move to Manchester City", who are badly in need of a midfield play-maker, was more of a possibility than Botafogo, or Mexican outfit Red Sharks Veracruz," who also expressed an interest. ""It was a thought at one stage", he said. If you are not going to get a game under one manager," you look for another whose style of play suits you. ""He is a fan of Kevin Keegan's style of play. It would not be a bad move for him." Juninho had earlier told the Daily Record: ""The manager has had a lot of chances to put me in his team but it hasn't happened. ""If that is the case then this is the opportunity for me to go. That would be good for the club and good for me. ""If I have no part in his plans", "there is no point in remaining here waiting for a chance that never comes." The attacking midfielder also claims he has not had the backing of boss Martin O'Neill since his move to Celtic Park. ""I can't understand why I am in this situation", he continued. When a manager brings a new player to the club," he gives that player support.""

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"sport 196.txt Wenger signs new deal Arsenal manager Arse

ne Wenger has signed a new contract to stay at the club until May 2008. Wenger has ended speculation about his future by agreeing a long-term contract that takes him beyond the opening of Arsenal's new stadium in two years. He said: ""Signing a new contract just rubber-stamps my desire to take this club forward and fulfil my ambitions. ""I still have so much to achieve and my target is to drive this club on. These are exciting times for Arsenal." The 55-year-old French man told Arsenal's website [www.arsenal.com](http://www.arsenal.com): ""My intention has always been clear. I love this club and am very happy here." Wenger has won the title and the FA Cup three times each during his reign. Chairman Peter Hill-Wood said: ""We are absolutely delighted that Arsene has signed an extension to his contract. ""Since his arrival in 1996," he has revolutionised the club both on and off the pitch. ""As well as the six major honours he's won during his time here," Arsene has been a leading influence behind all the major initiatives at the club including the construction of our new training centre and also our new stadium. ""The club has continued to reap the benefits of Arsene's natural eye for unearthing footballing talent. ""We currently have a fantastic crop of young players coming through the ranks together with a number of world-class players who are playing a wonderful brand of football." Meanwhile, Arsenal director Danny Fiszman is looking for Wenger to stay beyond 2008. ""When we come towards the end of his contract we will both review the situation. I'm sure we will want him to stay on and I hope he will too," said Fiszman.

sport 197.txt FA probes crowd trouble The FA is to take action after trouble marred Wednesday's Carling Cup tie between Chelsea and West Ham. Police in riot gear were confronted by a section of the West Ham support after the match which the Blues won 1-0. Mateja Kezman, the scorer of Chelsea's goal, needed treatment on a head injury during the match after being hit by a missile, believed to be a coin. A spokeswoman for Chelsea said the club would await the referee's report before deciding on its course of action. Kezman was forced off the field to receive treatment on a cut above his eye but was able to continue. Chelsea assistant boss Steve Clarke said: I would rather talk about the football but we think it was something thrown from the crowd. He did not require stitches." West Ham boss Alan Pardew said: ""It's a shame because I thought there was good English banter in the crowd. ""There's big rivalry between the two clubs and it is a shame if that's happened. From where I was standing I didn't see any trouble." Former Hammers star Joe Cole also had a plastic bottle thrown at him", while Frank Lampard was pelted with coins as he was preparing to take a penalty. Lampard's spot-kick was saved to the delight of the Hammers' fans, who have still not forgiven him for leaving Upton Park. The FA will seek reports from the clubs and the police, and will review video evidence and the referee's report. Police in riot gear battled with West Ham fans in the Matthew Harding stand and at least one supporter required treatment. Fans are also thought to have clashed outside the ground after the game. Scotland Yard said there had been 11 arrests for alleged public order, drugs and offensive weapon offences. The FA is already looking into the trouble at Tuesday's heated Carling Cup tie between Millwall and Liverpool.

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"sport 198.txt Edu describes tunnel fracas Arsenal's Edu has lifted the lid on the scenes that followed Manchester United's win over the Gunners. The Brazilian confirmed tempers had flared but could shed no light on reports that food was thrown at United boss Sir Alex Ferguson. ""I saw people being pulled apart", people pushing, pointing and shouting," he told Uefa's official website. The United players were trying to wind us up about the result but I didn't see any soup being thrown at anyone." However", Edu tried to play down

n the incidents," adding: ""There was nothing that I haven't seen in Brazilian derbies. ""Derby matches in Brazil are worse. I like to play in games like this with this intense rivalry." But Edu was highly critical of the ferocity of some of United's challenges during the game", particularly on Jose Antonio Reyes. ""I think we were a lot fairer in the tackles than United", he said. Reyes was being kicked all over the park - they were beating up the boy and Gary Neville was tackling in such a way that he should have been sent off." Following the game", the Football Association said it would look into events in the tunnel. It also charged Ruud van Nistelrooy with serious foul play while Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger has been asked to explain comments he made about the referee.

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"sport 199.txt Chelsea sack Mutu Chelsea have sacked Adrián Mutu after he failed a drugs test. The 25-year-old tested positive for a banned substance - which he later denied was cocaine - in October. Chelsea have decided to write off a possible transfer fee for Mutu", a £15.8m signing from Parma last season," who may face a two-year suspension. A statement from Chelsea explaining the decision read: ""We want to make clear that Chelsea has a zero tolerance policy towards drugs." Mutu scored six goals in his first five games after arriving at Stamford Bridge but his form went into decline and he was frozen out by coach Jose Mourinho. Chelsea's statement added: ""This applies to both performance-enhancing drugs or so-called 'recreational' drugs. They have no place at our club or in sport. ""In coming to a decision on this case", Chelsea believed the club's social responsibility to its fans, players," employees and other stakeholders in football regarding drugs was more important than the major financial considerations to the company. ""Any player who takes drugs breaches his contract with the club as well as Football Association rules. ""The club totally supports the FA in strong action on all drugs cases." Fifa's disciplinary code stipulates that a first doping offence should be followed by a six-month ban. And the sport's world governing body has re-iterated their stance over Mutu's failed drugs test", maintaining it is a matter for the domestic sporting authorities. ""Fifa is not in a position to make any comment on the matter until the English FA have informed us of their disciplinary decision and the relevant information associated with it", said a Fifa spokesman. Chelsea's move won backing from drug-testing expert Michelle Verroken. Verroken, a former director of drug-free sport for UK Sport, insists the Blues were right to sack Mutu and have enhanced their reputation by doing so. Chelsea are saying quite clearly to the rest of their players and their fans that this is a situation they are not prepared to tolerate. ""It was a very difficult decision for them and an expensive decision for them but the terms of his contract were breached and it was the only decision they could make. ""It is a very clear stance by Chelsea and it has given a strong boost to the reputation of the club." It emerged that Mutu had failed a drugs test on October 18 and", although it was initially reported that the banned substance in question was cocaine. The Romanian international later suggested it was a substance designed to enhance sexual performance. The Football Association has yet to act on Mutu's failed drugs test and refuses to discuss his case.

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"sport 200.txt Ferguson urges Henry punishment Sir Alex Ferguson has called on the Football Association to punish Arsenal's Thierry Henry for an incident involving Gabriel Heinze. Ferguson believes Henry deliberately caught Heinze on the head with his knee during United's controversial win. The United boss said it was worse than Ruud van Nistelrooy's foul on Ashley Cole

for which he got a three-game ban. ""We shall present it to the FA and see what they do. The tackle on Heinze was terrible", he said. Clubs are permitted to ask the FA to examine specific incidents but information is expected to be provided within 48 hours of the game. The clash occurred moments before half-time when a Freddie Ljungberg challenge left Heinze on the ground on the left touchline. Henry, following the ball, attempted to hurdle the Argentine but his knee collided with the back of Heinze's head. The striker protested his innocence - and referee Mike Riley deemed the collision accidental. Ferguson was also upset by Arsenal's overall discipline during the heated encounter between the two arch-rivals and praised his own side's behaviour. Edu produced a terrible tackle on Scholes that was a potential leg-breaker", he said. There were 24 fouls in the game by Arsenal, seven on Heinze, five on Ronaldo," six by Vieira - and it was only his sixth foul that got him booked. Phil Neville got booked for his first challenge. ""I am proud of my players for the way they handled that pressure. ""We have always been good at being gracious in defeat. What happened on Sunday overshadowed our achievement", but then they do it all the time," don't they?""

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"sport 201.txt Wenger offers Mutu hope Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger would consider signing Adrian Mutu once the striker has served his drugs ban. Mutu was sacked by Chelsea on Friday after testing positive for cocaine - a move Wenger has backed. But he said: ""I don't even wonder if that could happen because I think he will be suspended for a long period. ""But once he has served his suspension", he has the right again to start from zero. I would then meet the player and see what he tells me." Mutu faces a ban of between six months and two years when the Football Association decides on his punishment. Chelsea decided to act before his case was heard and sacked the striker on grounds of gross misconduct after it was revealed that he had failed a drug test. But Mutu has hit out at the club's decision", saying: ""Chelsea have destroyed me." He told the Sunday Mirror: ""I don't know what I'm going to do. I am shocked and surprised by their decision. ""I didn't expect them to pay me while I was suspended but I never thought they would sack me either. ""Why didn't they wait to do this? Now my career is in ruins. ""I might as well walk away from football. What is there left for me?"" Chelsea have been criticised for their stance", with the Professional Footballers' Association accusing the club of failing in their duty of care to the player. And Mutu agreed," adding: ""It is unfair. If they were going to sack me they should have done it afterwards. ""Why did they go public? To make an example of me? It makes it very difficult for me now.""

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"sport 202.txt Santini resigns as Spurs manager Tottenham manager Jacques Santini has resigned for ""personal reasons"". The former France manager moved to White Hart Lane this summer but now wants to return to France. Santini said: ""My time at Tottenham has been memorable and it is with deep regret that I take my leave. I wish the club and the supporters all the best. ""Private issues in my personal life have arisen which caused my decision. I very much hope that the wonderful fans will respect my decision." He added: ""I should like to thank (sporting director) Frank Arnesen and (chairman) Daniel Levy for their understanding." Assistant coach Martin Jol has been put in temporary charge and will take care of team affairs for Saturday's Premiership match against Charlton. Arnesen said the club were sad to see Santini go: ""We are obviously disappointed that Jacques is leaving us. We fully respect his decisio

n. ""I can assure you that the club will act swiftly to minimise the impact of Jacques' departure. ""Our priority is to ensure that this season's performance remains unaffected by this move. ""I shall make a further statement on Monday", clarifying our position. We wish Jacques well.""

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"" sport 203.txt Mutu to hold talks with Juventus Disgraced former Chelsea striker Adrian Mutu is to begin talks with Juventus as he looks for a new club. ""Mutu will be in our club's main stand to watch the match between Juventus and Fiorentina", said a Juventus official, who declined to be named. Then he will meet some important people of the club", he added. Mutu, 25, sacked by Chelsea and banned for seven months for taking cocaine, is now represented by Alessandro Moggi, son of Juve manager Luciano Moggi. Mutu, banned by the English FA, can resume playing next May. He is to undergo a drug education and rehabilitation programme. Mutu wants to train with Romanian side Dinamo Bucharest whilst serving his ban, say the Bucharest side.

sport 204.txt Uefa approves fake grass Uefa says it will allow European matches to be played on artificial pitches from the start of next season. European football's governing body made the decision at a meeting of its Executive Committee on Wednesday. Uefa explained that the move follows comprehensive studies into the sporting and medical aspects of using artificial playing surfaces." They can be used subject to complying with Uefa quality criteria but their use will not be made obligatory. Luton", Preston, Queens Park Rangers and other clubs used to have plastic pitches during the 1980s but, after a two-year study, Uefa insists the surfaces have moved on. International matches can also be played on such pitches," although games at major tournaments have to be contested on grass. Uefa spokesman Rob Faulkner said: ""People in England have bad memories of the artificial pitches of Luton and QPR in the 1980s", but the latest generation are completely different and are much more like grass. ""We have sanctioned its use from the start of next season but only as long as it is the latest generation of artificial turf and meets a whole series of standards." Several leading clubs from Scandinavia", Russia and eastern Europe - especially those who only play Champions League or Uefa Cup matches in winter - are now expected to install artificial pitches.

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"" sport 205.txt Yeading face Newcastle in FA Cup Premiership side Newcastle United face a trip to Ryman Premier League leaders Yeading in the FA Cup third round. The game - arguably the highlight of the draw - is a potential money-spinner for non-League Yeading", who beat Slough in the second round. Conference side Exeter City, who knocked out Doncaster on Saturday, will travel to Old Trafford to meet holders Manchester United in January. Arsenal were drawn at home to Stoke and Chelsea will play host to Scunthorpe. The only other non-League side in the draw are Hinckley United, who held Brentford to a goalless draw on Sunday. They will meet League One leaders Luton if they win their replay against Martin Allen's team at Griffin Park. A number of Premiership teams face difficult away games against Championship sides on the weekend of 8/9 January. Third-placed Everton visit Plymouth, Liverpool travel to Burnley, Crystal Palace go to Sunderland, Fulham face Carling Cup semi-finalists Watford, Bolton meet Ipswich, while Aston Villa were drawn against Sheffield United. Premiership strugglers Norwich, Blackburn, West Brom are away at West Ham, Cardiff and Preston North End respectively. Southampton visit Northampton, having already beaten the League Two side in the Carling Cup earlier this season. Middl

esbrough were drawn away against either Swindon or Notts County, while Spurs entertain Brighton at White Hart Lane. Arsenal v Stoke Swindon/Notts Co v Middlesbrough Man Utd v Exeter Plymouth v Everton Leicester v Blackpool Derby v Wigan Sunderland v Crystal Palace Wolves v Millwall Yeading v Newcastle Hull v Colchester Tottenham v Brighton Reading v Stockport/Swansea Birmingham v Leeds Hartlepool v Boston Milton Keynes Dons v Peterborough Oldham v Man City Chelsea v Scunthorpe Cardiff v Blackburn Charlton v Rochdale West Ham v Norwich Sheff Utd v Aston Villa Preston v West Brom Rotherham v Yeovil Burnley v Liverpool Bournemouth v Chester Coventry v Crewe Watford v Fulham Ipswich v Bolton Portsmouth v Gillingham Northampton v Southampton QPR v Nottm Forest Luton v Hinckley/Brentford Matches to be played on weekend of 8/9 January.

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"sport 206.txt Anelka 'eyes Man City departure' Striker Nicolas Anelka reportedly wants to leave Manchester City in search of Champions League football. Anelka",25," is in talks over a contract extension beyond 2007 with City but is believed to fear his career will go stale if he stays at the club. The News of the World reports that Anelka told a French magazine: ""I either decide to win titles or to have an easy life. ""I think I will always choose football," if a great club makes me an offer."" He added: ""To win titles you need players who have the capability of doing so. If we stagnate between eighth and 15th place it's impossible to progress. ""If I am going to score goals and not win", there is a risk it is going to create a feeling of being fed up." Anelka has earned a reputation for being a difficult character to handle after spells at Arsenal"," Real Madrid and Paris St Germain and he feels that is now coming back to haunt him. ""I am in talks to sign an extension to my contract", he said. I am well here but the sporting aspect also comes into account. ""Playing for eighth place is good but I miss the Champions League. ""I won it with Real Madrid in 2000 and I need to be playing in it - and I should be playing in it. ""I'm not in it because of things that have happened in the past and had nothing to do with football. ""But I don't blame anyone. It's a bit my fault.""

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"sport 207.txt Arnesen denies rift with Santini Tottenham sporting director Frank Arnesen has denied that coach Jacques Santini resigned because of a clash of personalities at White Hart Lane. There had been newspaper speculation that Santini had felt undermined by Arnesen's role at the club. ""It is absolutely not true", Arnesen told BBC Radio Five Live. There is only one thing that made him resign and that is his own personal problems. ""He has talked to me recently and said this matter is absolutely for himself." Arnesen said he was unable to throw any light onto the problems that caused Santini to quit after just 13 games in charge. He added: ""Jacques has never gone into exactly what it was. But I trust him in that; you have to accept it. I think we should respect it. ""The plan is now that over the weekend we will have talks with the board and then on Monday we will clarify the situation." Arnesen countered criticism at the timing of the announcement", coming less than 24 hours before Tottenham's Premiership fixture with Charlton. ""When it comes down to personal problems", I don't think we should talk about timing," he said. And he also denied reports that Santini had been given a £3m pay-off. That is absolute nonsense. He is the one who said 'I will go' and so he went""", said the Spurs sporting director. Tottenham's structure of having a sporting director working alongside a coach is based on a continental model and Arnesen sees no reason wh

y they should change it. ""I have confidence in this structure. I am confident that we have started something here in July and I still have a lot of confidence in Tottenham and what we are doing", he said. However, former Spurs and England defender Gary Stevens said he would not be surprised if the system had caused a rift. I think the problems go a lot deeper", between the director of football at White Hart Lane and Santini, Stevens told Five Live. On paper they could have worked together. But Frank Arnesen was a very creative, forward-thinking and expansive player - whereas I think Santini was very much the opposite, more a case of being organised," disciplined and happy not conceding goals. ""That sort of arrangement can work if the two people have the same principles and ideals and work very closely. But it seems that has not happened.""

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"sport 208.txt Souness backs Smith for Scotland Graeme Souness believes Walter Smith would be the perfect choice to succeed Berti Vogts as Scotland manager. Souness's former assistant at Rangers is hot favourite to take over from Vogts", who resigned on Monday. ""Walter is most definitely the ideal candidate for that job. He'd be perfect for it", Souness told BBC Sport. The Scottish Football Association has appointed Tommy Burns as provisional caretaker-boss for the friendly against Sweden on 17 November. He fits the bill because of his knowledge and understanding of the Scotland team and football. He is experienced and has been successful." Souness added: ""Walter is a real football person", as I know from working with him at Ibrox. ""On top of all that he is a proper human being who would command the instant respect of the players and everyone involved in Scottish football." Souness joined Sir Alex Ferguson in backing Smith's claims. The Scottish Football Association is about to embark on the search for Vogts successor after appointing Tommy Burns in a caretaker capacity. Ferguson said: ""He (Smith) would be the outstanding candidate as far as I'm concerned. ""You need somebody who knows what they're doing and Walter would bring a wealth of experience to the job." The Man Utd boss continued: ""I don't know what credentials are needed to do the job but it's a job that needs a lot of experience. ""He was my assistant with Scotland and here at Manchester United and he has also managed Glasgow Rangers. ""He would need to change the whole shape of Scottish football and radical changes are needed." Smith was assistant to Ferguson at the World Cup in Mexico in 1986. The former Everton and Rangers boss has been out of the game since a spell as Manchester United assistant last term. BBC Sport understands that Smith would be willing to discuss taking over if he was approached by the Scottish FA. If he is tempted to take over, it seems almost certain Smith's long-time right-hand man Archie Knox would also play a part in the national team set-up. Smith already has the backing of many pundits and fans," including former Scotland manager Craig Brown. Brown said: ""Walter is an outstanding candidate without doubt. ""He would be admirable choice. I spoke to him on Sunday and I got the impression he would take it. He was asking me about it and I was positive." Other candidates for the job include former Scotland midfielders Gordon Strachan and Gary McAllister and Vogts' assistant Tommy Burns.

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"sport 209.txt Gallas sees two-horse race Chelsea's William Gallas believes they will battle it out with Arsenal for the Premiership in the coming months. ""It'll be a two-horse race all the way to the end of the season because we are both going to give it everything", he told BBC Sport. You need to be good and you need a lot of luck. You need a bit of both but it will

be as hard for the Arsenal players as it is for the Chelsea boys." "We know that we have got the power in our hands just now",," added Gallas. But you never know what is going to happen in football - two seasons ago Manchester United picked up so many points towards the end of the season when they won the title. ""Obviously",," nobody at Chelsea wants to come second but you never know what happens in football. ""We will be challenging to come first as much as every Arsenal player will be challenging to come first." "Gallas has been given extra confidence by the impact manager Jose Mourinho has had since taking over as manager during the summer. And the French international defender believes Mourinho is perfectly suited to boss the squad of Chelsea stars and says his managerial expertise will prevent any player revolt. ""It's only normal when you have got a team put together of such big names that you put the finishing touch to it and the finishing touch at Chelsea is a fantastic manager like Mourinho",," he said. He is the icing on the cake at the club. He has this fantastic knack of thinking of everything. ""Another incredible quality that Mourinho has is that every player", even though the fans may consider them to be a stars," within the dressing-room they are absolutely equal. ""Mourinho reminds everyone but he doesn't have to because he has created a wonderful atmosphere where everybody is playing and laughing every day. ""It is a changed dressing-room from the atmosphere there was last year." "

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"sport 210.txt Tevez - an Argentine in Brazil Some 65 years ago Bernardo Gandulla left Boca Juniors in his native Argentina and headed for Brazil. He arrived at the Vasco da Gama club with considerable prestige - which he failed to live up to. He left an impression", but not for reasons he would have wanted. The only thing of note he did was to throw the ball back when it went out of play. Even today, 'gandula' is the term used in Brazil for ballboy. Brazilians delighted in the failure of Gandulla then, and many will delight now if history is repeated. Another Boca Juniors player is coming to Brazil. 'The new Maradona' - Carlos Tevez - is joining Corinthians for nearly \$20m in a strong candidate for the strangest move of the year. Corinthians - or the London-based company who have just entered into partnership with them - appear to have paid well above the odds for Tevez. It is particularly strange as - until last week - Tevez was not even an especially big name in Brazil, where the Argentine Championship is not shown. Presumably there is some financial logic behind the move. What is harder to work out is why Tevez should be interested in heading north, rather than across the Atlantic. Argentina's brightest new star hit top form in August as he spearheaded the charge towards the Olympic gold medal. But the subsequent months have not been easy for Tevez. Boca re-signed Martin Palermo, forcing Tevez to vacate his favoured centre forward role. And off the pitch he gave the press plenty to report - Atletico Madrid gave up on him after declaring his private life to be 'disorganized.' Hounded by the press, Tevez grew tired of his life in Buenos Aires. So now he says that he is heading for Corinthians in search of 'tranquillity.' Anyone acquainted with the city of São Paulo will relish the nonsense of this declaration. Brazil's biggest city is a sprawling, ugly, restless metropolis. Once it shared with Buenos Aires the same melancholy air of a city of Italian immigrants. But that world now lies buried under skyscrapers. The most turbulent place in this frenetic city is Sport Club Corinthians. It is the most passionately supported club in Brazil. People scored reams of goals against them, reasoning that unless he did something special the Corinthians fans were capable of winning the game on their own. That passion can also be turned against the team - especially nowadays, when the level of urban violence gives a hysterical edge to life in Brazil's big cities

s. Corinthians fans have invaded the dressing room or ambushed the team coach to attack the players. Tevez, then, can kiss tranquillity goodbye. He can also say farewell to the Copa Libertadores, South America's Champions League. Corinthians have not qualified. Indeed, he will have a long wait for a worthwhile match. Next year's Brazilian Championship only gets underway at the end of April. Until then he will have to make do with the foolish São Paulo State Championship, an appalling waste of his talent. There will be matches in small towns on poor pitches with plenty of defenders keen to kick him all the way back to Argentina. Like so many of the top South American players, Tevez has the gift of being able to surprise - to feint right and go left, to pass when he was expected to dribble, to shoot and catch the goalkeeper unawares. But his choice of destination is the biggest surprise of all.

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"sport 211.txt Edu blasts Arsenal Arsenal's Brazilian midfielder Edu has hit out at the club for stalling over offering him a new contract. Edu's deal expires next summer and he has been linked with Spanish trio Real Madrid, Barcelona and Valencia. He told BBC Sport: ""I'm not sure if I want to stay or not because the club have let the situation go on this far. ""If they had really wanted to sign me they should have come up with an offer six months before indicating they wanted to sign me and that's made me think.""" Edu's brother and representative Amadeo Fensao has previously said that Arsenal's current offer to the midfielder was well short of what he was seeking. And Edu", 26, added: ""My brother is due to come to London on Thursday. ""There is a meeting planned for 6 or 7 January to sort it out with Arsenal. ""Now I have a choice to stay or go. I want to sort it out as soon as possible," that's in the best interests of both the club and myself. ""I'm going to make my decision after the meeting later this week.""" Edu is now able to begin negotiations with other clubs because Fifa regulations allow players to start talks six months before their contracts expire. The midfielder", who broke in to the Brazilian national side in 2004," admitted he had been flattered to have been linked with the three Spanish giants. Edu said: ""I've just heard stories from the news that the Madrid president Florentino Perez", the Valencia people," as well as Barcelona are interested. ""That's nice", but I've never talked to them," so I can't say they want me sign 100%.""" Last month Wenger said he was hopeful Edu would sign a new deal and played down suggestions that the lure of a club like Real Madrid would be too strong for Edu. Edu added that he had been encouraged by Wenger's support for him. ""I still have a good relationship with Arsene Wenger - he's always said he wants me to sign."""

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"sport 212.txt Can Smith work Scottish wonders? The worst kept secret in Scottish football was revealed on Thursday when Walter Smith was named as the new national manager. From the moment Berti Vogts' miserable tenure in charge of Scotland ended", the former Rangers and Everton boss has been the overwhelming favourite for the post. But is Smith the man for what must be one of the hardest jobs in football? The 56-year-old takes over at a time when the national side is in the doldrums. Scotland have not reached a major finals since the World Cup in 1998 and reaching Germany 2006 looks near impossible, having picked up just two points from the opening three games in the qualifying race. And the Fifa rankings see Scotland listed at an all time low of 77th, below the likes of Estonia, Ghana, Angola and Thailand. Scotland are not blessed with quality players with experience at the top level, so Smith will have to get the best out of meagre resources. Smith's track record make impressive reading and

he is widely respected within the game. The man who was Alex Ferguson's assistant when Scotland played at the 1986 World Cup won seven league titles with Rangers. And his appointment has been widely endorsed by many of the games' top names, including Ferguson and Graeme Souness, who took him to Ibrox as his assistant in 1986. Characters like Souness, Ferguson and current Ibrox manager Alex Mc Leish all cite Smith's experience and his expansive knowledge of the Scottish game. Much was made of Vogts' inability to express himself to the players and media. That will certainly not be the case with Smith. The former Dundee United and Dumbarton full-back is from the managerial old school - straight talking and never slow to let players know when he expects better (often with the use of some colourful invective). But it should be remembered Vogts came to Scotland with an impressive curriculum vitae - a World Cup winner as a player and a European Championships winner as a manager. Smith will inherit the same problems Vogts had - a callow squad of players with no exceptional talents. And it remains to be seen if Smith will experience the rash of call-offs that blighted so much of Vogts' preparation work. A fresh start for the Scottish national team was imperative and Smith is widely regarded as a safe pair of hands. But will a safe pair of hands be enough when the adroit hands of a magician might be required...

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"sport 213.txt Jansen suffers a further setback Blackburn striker Matt Jansen faces three weeks out after surgery to treat a cartilage problem. But central defender Lorenzo Amoruso is moving closer to fitness following a knee operation. Rovers' assistant manager Mark Bowen said: ""Matt had a small operation to trim knee cartilage. ""It's a tiny piece of work", which should be a fairly quick recovery. Lorenzo is also jogging for the first time," along with kicking a ball." Jansen's career has been dogged by injury since a freak scooter accident two years ago. He returned to first-team action soon after Mark Hughes' appointment as Blackburn boss and marked it with a goal against Portsmouth in his first appearance of the season. Bowen added: ""I'm guessing", "but I reckon maybe two to three weeks before he is back in action completely." The Rovers assistant boss forecast a longer time spell for Amoruso's availability for first-team duties. Bowen said: ""There's still some scar tissue present so it will be some weeks. ""It's a case of see how he goes. You can't put a real time on a comeback", "we'll see how he progresses.""

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"sport 214.txt Mansfield 0-1 Leyton Orient An second-half goal from Andy Scott condemned Mansfield to a ninth successive game without a win. Early in the second half Wayne Carlisle's cross was met by Scott and he blasted the ball home from just outside the penalty area. As Orient chased a second", Mansfield had to clear Alan White's header off the line and Kevin Pilkington saved well from Michael Simpson. By the end Mansfield fans were chanting for the head of chairman Keith Haslam. Pilkington, Talbot, Buxton, Dimech, Artell, Corden, Murray, Curtis, Neil, Warne, Barker. Subs Not Used: White, McIntosh, Wood, Lloyd, Herron. Harrison, Lockwood, Donny Barnard, White, Mackie, Scott, Saa h, Simpson, Carlisle, Lee Barnard, Ibehre. Subs Not Used: Morris, Wardley, Newey, Zakuani, McMahon. Scott 51. 3,803 S Mathieson (Cheshire).

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"sport 215.txt Zambia confident and cautious Zambia's technical director", Kalusha Bwalya is confident and cautious ahead of the Cosafa

Cup final against Angola on Saturday in Lusaka. Bwalya said: ""Nothing short of victory will do." " However Bwalya warned his side not to be too complacent. ""I don't want my team to be too comfortable or too sure of victory as it is going to be a difficult game. ""For me the main aim of the game is to enjoy and to win." " Zambia have shown their determination to win this final by recalling nine of their foreign-based players. However the 41 year-old Bwalya", who became the oldest player to appear in the competition when he played and scored against Mauritius, is uncertain whether he will take to the field or not. The Chipolopolo fans however are not being so cautious with a 'victory' concert already scheduled for after the match featuring some of the country's top musicians. Both sides are hoping to win the competition for a record third time, and so keep the trophy for good. The Chipolopolo won the first two editions of the regional tournament for Southern African nations in 1997 and 1998. They were prevented from a third straight win by Angola who knocked out the Zambians at the semi-final stage in 1999. That victory for Angola also marked a first defeat in 14 years for Zambia at Lusaka's Independence stadium, where Saturday's game is being played. Angola named just four overseas-based players in their preliminary squad. The Palancas Negras have been unable to secure the release of many of their Portugal-based players.

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"sport 216.txt Reaction from Spanish press England's 1-0 defeat to Spain on Wednesday dominated the back and front pages of the country's press on Thursday. Controversy was in no short supply", with racist abuse of England's black players, Wayne Rooney's petulance and England's inept performance. But what did the Spanish press make of the affair? BBC Sport looks at the reaction. There is little coverage of the racist chanting on Wednesday night's game. But AS does cover the English reaction to the pre-match comments from Spain coach Luis Aragones," who highlighted Britain's colonial past when probed about his own remarks regarding Thierry Henry in October. Journalist Guill em Balague writes: ""In our country", where multi-culturalism is a new thing, we are in nappies dealing with these things," and have a naivety which makes the English nervous." Marca refers in passing to the booing of England's black players - but only after referring to the cheers of ""ole"" which greeted the long periods of Spanish possession. Aragones' ""no comment"" to questions about racism after the match is also highlighted", as Marca focuses on the Spanish coach's praise for his players. Serbia & Montenegro's 2-0 World Cup qualifying win in Belgium - which could make qualification tougher for Spain - seems to be of greater importance. Elsewhere," the Spanish media criticises its English counterparts for stoking up the racism issue. ""Were there racist chants against some players? This hasn't happened in the Spanish league and Spain for many years," said Spanish Federation press officer Fernando Garrido. So you (English reporters) should ask yourselves what you have done to contribute to all this." And Spanish daily ABC accuses English reporters of launching a witch-hunt against Aragones. ""Perhaps it was because their team had played so poorly and they wanted to divert attention towards this muddled issue", the paper says. What the boy in the Bernabeu did was odd... Rooney seemed intent to kick any Spanish player who approached him." Yet Rooney is seen only as the worst example of many England miscreants", with Gary Neville criticised for continuing the feud between Manchester United and Arsenal for his tackles on Jose Reyes. Ashley Cole's treatment of Joaquin," and a Frank Lampard foul on Reyes are also lambasted for their ""ugliness"". Marca's headline says it all: ""Wayne Rooney se volvió loco en el Bernabéu (Wayne Rooney became crazy in the Bernabeu)" Rooney's display alarms the writer", in particular three ""chilling"" fou

ls on Joaquin", Casillas and Marchena," which ""could well have left them in the infirmary."" And like AS", Marca criticises Gary Neville for ""leaving a message on Reyes' ankle"" to remind him of the Manchester United-Arsenal clash this month. Spain's first-half performance is showered with praise", with Xavi singled out as the biggest star. ""Xavi did things on Wednesday which were worthy of Maradona", the paper beams, adding, What a work-rate", what dynamism, what vision, what leadership," what a midfield player!"" On a controversial evening", AS offers one seemingly undeniable viewpoint: ""Spanish football players played better football than the English."" More plaudits are given to the home team", with Jaime Vargas lauding the manner in which ""Spain dominated England with order and quality""". The paper adds: ""The bad thing about Spain v England was that it lasted only 65 minutes after which a succession of changes prevented any real competition."" Vargas does not mention England's two Galacticos", simply adding in a PS: ""I have not forgotten to speak of Beckham and Owen. They forgot to play."""

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"sport 217.txt Kerr frustrated at victory margin Republic of Ireland manager Brian Kerr admitted he was frustrated his side did not score more than one goal in their friendly win over Croatia. Robbie Keane took his Republic record to 24 with a first-half goal which proved enough for victory. ""We had more good chances. It is just a shame we did not take them against such a technically gifted team", said Kerr. But, given the conditions and the standard of the Croatian team," we should be very happy with the win." The Republic side kept a clean sheet for the eighth time in 11 matches and are unbeaten in 14 home games since Kerr succeeded Mick McCarthy. Kerr applauded the decisive move which earned the victory. ""It was a brilliant goal", fantastic skill by Damien Duff. Robbie might have scuffed it a little but it was a good goal." Matchwinner Keane was another full of praise for Duff's role in the goal. ""It was great play from Damien", said the Tottenham striker. I always try to be sniffing around because you know nine times out of 10 Duffer is going to get it in the box. ""Playing three up was something different. Brian Kerr wanted to try it out and it was good to see young Stephen Elliott getting a run-out. ""The conditions were difficult but he did well and is definitely one for the future. It is nice to see young players coming through." Man-of-the-match Duff explained what went wrong when he fluffed a chance to make it 2-0 midway through the second half. He opted to bring Steve Finnans cross down and shoot against the bar when a close-range header looked the best option. ""I would have headed that every time but I completely lost it in the lights", said the Chelsea star. I was desperate to get on the scoresheet myself but the result is the important thing. ""We have had a good year and are going nicely in the qualifiers. Hopefully that can continue in 2005.""

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"sport 218.txt Mourinho plots impressive course Chelsea's win at Fulham - confirming their position at the Premiership summit - proves that they now have everything in place to mount serious challenges on all fronts this season. They have got strength in depth", great players, an outstanding manager in Jose Mourinho and finances no other club in the world can match. All they need to add now is the big prizes which, as we all know, is the most difficult part of all. One thing is certain - they have put themselves in a position to make that leap to success very impressively indeed. They beat a very tough Everton at Stamford Bridge, won at Newcastle in the Carling Cup, and then won 4-1 at Fulham, which was a great result given that they had been showing good f

orm. As I said, winning the major honours is the hardest task of all, but in Mourinho they have a manager who will make it a whole lot easier to handle the anticipation and expectation that will come their way now. Mourinho has won the biggest club prize of all, the Champions League, and that track record and confidence transmits itself to top players. It is a priceless commodity. No-one can be anything other than highly-impressed by Mourinho. He is regarded as a touch arrogant by some people, and maybe he can appear that way, but he has the silverware to back up the talk. Mourinho doesn't simply talk a good game - he's won some very big games such as the Champions League final with Porto. Some may criticise his talk, but the words are backed up with actions. I've also found him to be very realistic whenever I've heard him. He's spent a lot of money and it seems to be working, and we should remember lots of managers have spent money and it has not worked. The buys are now integrating, and in Arjen Robben he has the player who is giving them that extra dimension. In the early games he was slaughtered for defensive tactics, and yet he was winning games. You cannot win titles early on in the season, but you can certainly lose them and those points on the board were vital. I also thought the criticism was very harsh, because even though they were not scoring goals they were creating chances by the handful. Now they are taking those chances, have the double threat of Robben and Dami en Duff, and things are looking good. I just wonder if they lack a predator, particularly with Didier Drogba injured. He was starting to look the part before he was sidelined, but you have to feel if Chelsea had a Ruud van Nistelrooy they would be even more of a safe bet for the title. Chelsea also have all the tools to go far in the Champions League. I felt they would never have a better chance than last season, but they have swept all before them in Europe so far this season. It will now be very interesting to see how Mourinho prioritises things, but his life will be made easier by the size of Chelsea's squad. I have said I believed Chelsea would win the league this season, even when Arsenal were flying at the start, and I have seen nothing to make me change my mind. If anything, what I have seen has confirmed my early impressions. And Chelsea would have taken encouragement from Arsenal's rocky defensive display at Spurs, even though they ran out 5-4 winners. Mourinho had his say on that game," complaining: ""Five-four is a hockey score," not a football score. ""In a three-against-three training match," if the score reaches 5-4 I send the players back to the dressing rooms as they are not defending properly. ""So to get a result like that in a game of 11 against 11 is disgraceful." On a more serious note", it was a game that merely confirmed the importance of Sol Campbell to Arsenal. Much criticism has been aimed at Pascal Cygan, but I believe the problem lies with the absence of Campbell and its overall effect on Arsenal's defence. Confidence is a crucial factor in defending. When you start conceding goals," you suddenly get a chill in the bones every time the ball comes into the penalty area. You think ""oh no"" - then find your worst fears confirmed. Arsenal need to reverse the process", with or without Campbell, and get some clean sheets on the board. But the return of Campbell is key. He solidifies the unit, has pace and is powerful in the air and on the deck. He is vastly experienced and has a calming influence on all around him. Campbell pulls it all together at the back and gets the defence playing as a unit. Chelsea have no such problems at present, which is why I would still place my money on them to edge out Arsenal as champions this season.

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"sport 219.txt Hearts of Oak 3-2 CotonSport Hearts of Oak  
set up an all Ghanaian Confederation Cup final with a 3-2 win over Cameroon's CotonSport Garoua in Accra on Sunday. The win for Hearts means they will play A

sante Kotoko in the two-leg final", after the Kumasi team qualified from Group A on Saturday. In the other Group B game Cameroon's beat of South Africa 3-2 in Douala, neither side could have qualified for the final. Hearts of Oak started the game needing a win to qualify for the final while CotonSport only needed to avoid defeat to go through. Louis Agyemang scored the first two goals for Hearts either side of half time before Ben Don Bortey scored the third. Hearts looked set for a comfortable win but CotonSport staged a late fight back scoring twice late on. First of all Boukar Makaji scored in the 89th minute and then 3 minutes into injury time at the end of the game Andre Nzame III was on target. But it was too little too late for the Cameroonian and Hearts held on to win the game and a place in the final. The first leg of the final will be played in Accra on the weekend of 27-28 November and the second leg two weeks later on the 11 December in Kumasi. In the other Group B game Cameroon's Sable Batie took the lead in the 35th minute through Kemadjou before Santos equalised on the hour mark thanks to Thokozani Xaba . Bernard Ngom put Sable ahead just five minutes later and then Ernest Nfor settled the game on 68 minutes. Ruben Cloete scored the South African sides consolation with just three minutes left on the clock.

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"sport 220.txt Curbishley delight for Johansson Charlton manager Alan Curbishley paid tribute to two-goal striker Jonatan Johansson after beating Norwich. Curbishley said after the 4-0 win: ""There was talk about Norwich being interested in the summer but I have a lot of faith in Jonatan. ""When there was talk of other clubs I just told him he was going nowhere. ""He's part of our squad and he got us a couple of important goals early on. I'm sure he's happy here", but I was delighted with all the players." Curbishley was subjected to criticism from Charlton fans recently", and he said: ""The thing about this club is that we have got where we are by all pulling in the same direction. ""That's happened for however long I've been here and we don't want people taking sides.""

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"sport 221.txt Lennon brands Rangers favourites Celtic's Neil Lennon admits Rangers could be considered ""slight favourites"" for the Old Firm CIS Cup clash", but insists his side can still win. Lennon concedes Rangers are in good form at the moment," but they have failed to beat Celtic in their last seven meetings. ""Rangers are on the up and have been on a good run in recent weeks", he said. But it's a game we believe we're capable of winning if we play our best," he told the Evening Times. All the boys are looking forward to it because they are brilliant games to be involved in. ""Without playing at the top of our game", we have still been winning matches. ""At the minute", we are at the top of the league and still in with a chance of staying in Europe," so I don't think it is the crisis people have been trying to make out. ""Of course", it is a concern when you are losing goals, because we have been notorious for being a team that is hard to beat and keeping clean sheets," but hopefully we are over that wee run. ""Considering we lost Henrik Larsson at the end of last season", we have still been scoring a lot of goals," which is pleasing.""

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"sport 222.txt McClaren hails Boro's Uefa spirit Middlesbrough boss Steve McClaren has praised the way his side have got to grips with E

uropean football after the 2-0 Uefa Cup win against Lazio. Boro", who are playing in Europe for the first time in their 128-year history," are top of Group E with maximum points. ""I think we have taken to Europe really well", said McLaren. We got about Lazio, didn't let them settle or play. And in possession," we controlled it and looked threatening every time we went forward." Before the match", McLaren had said that a win over the Italian giants would put Boro firmly on the European footballing map. And after they did just that he said: ""It was a perfect European night. For the team to give the fans a performance like that was the icing on the cake. ""There have been many good performances but this was something special. ""You can see that the experience we have in the squad is showing. To win in Europe you need to defend well", and we have done that because we have conceded only one goal in four games. ""We can also score goals", and again that is something you can see from the performances we have had," so we have good balance. McLaren's only criticism of his side was that their dominance should have been resulted in more goals. ""It should have been more convincing", said McLaren. But I had watched Lazio in recent weeks and I saw them score a late equaliser against Inter Milan on Saturday so I knew we needed a second goal. ""No matter what anybody says", Lazio are favourites to win this competition." Middlesbrough forward Boudewijn Zenden said he did not expect such a comfortable match after he scored both goals. ""We didn't expect it to be that one-sided", said Zenden. We did quite well in the first half," we pressured them and they didn't cope with that. ""I think we played quite well and it was a very good game", especially in the first half." The Holland international said Boro are confident of progressing in the competition after winning their first two group games. ""We've got a very good feeling", there is a good spirit, all the lads work hard for each other and it's a squad of friendly players, which I think you can see on the pitch," he added.

sport 223.txt Benitez delight after crucial win Liverpool manager Rafael Benitez admitted victory against Deportivo La Coruna was vital in their tight Champions League group. Jorge Andrade's early own goal gave Liverpool a 1-0 win. And Benitez said: We started at a very high tempo and had many chances. It is a very important win for us and we could have scored more goals. ""We were very good defensively and also good on the counter attack. We are pleased but move on to the next game." Igor Biscan was outstanding in midfield after replacing injured Xabi Alonso", and Benitez said: ""He played very well. ""It is important to have all the players ready and a good squad so you can play more games at a high level." Benitez added: ""It is all back in our own hands now", it was a great win for us and I was delighted with what I feel was the best Liverpool I have seen. ""As far as my feelings about winning in Spain", that is really not important. ""I want to see us win away matches in the Champions League", that it was in Spain was not my first consideration. ""As far as I am concerned it is important for Liverpool to win", it is not important in what country it is in." Benitez added: Benitez said: ""We had a problem before the start", it was decided that Xabi could not play more than 45 minutes. ""But in the end because of the way that (Dietmar) Hamann and (Igor) Biscan performed", we did not need to change things until right at the end of the match. ""Deportivo are a good team and if you allow them to keep possession they can be very dangerous indeed. ""But we knew that if we hit them on the counter-attack it would make them nervous", and that is how it worked out." Deportivo coach Javier Irureta said: ""Liverpool played very well and we just could not break them down. ""I know we have now gone six games at home in Europe without scoring", but that does not reflect our overall performances. ""But this time we did not play well and we lacked imagination. ""The goal was a bad mistake and a big blow to our confidence. Players who usually want the ball at that stage did not want it

t. ""I know we are bottom of the group", but as long as there is hope of qualifying," we will hang on to that.""

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"sport 224.txt Bristol City 2-1 Milton Keynes Leroy Lita took his goal tally to 13 for the season as his double earned City an LDV Vans Trophy win. The striker finished off Scott Murray cross from close range just seconds before half-time. Lita then made it 2-0 on 52 minutes", but Dons' substitute Serge Makofa then netted a great volley to make it 2-1. The visitors almost took the tie to extra time with a late 30-yard bullet from Richard Johnson which was well held by Steve Phillips. Phillips, Amankwaah, Coles, Hill, Fortune, Murray (Anyinsah 59), Doherty (Harley 45), Dinning, Bell, Lita (Cotterill 72), Gillespie. Subs Not Used: Orr, Brown. Hill. Lita 45, 52. Bevan, Oyedele, Ntimban-Zeh, Crooks, Puncheon, Kamara (Makofa 64), Chorley, Herve (McKoy 45), Tapp (Johnson 45), Mackie, Pacquette. Subs Not Used: Martin, Palmer. Pacquette, Chorley, Johnson, McKoy. Makofa 66. 3,367 J Ross (Essex).  
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"sport 225.txt Hereford 1-1 Doncaster Hereford win 3-1 on penalties. Rovers took the lead on 59 minutes as Michael McIndoe's corner found Adriano Rigoglioso", whose stunning volley soared into the top right of the net. Danny Williams equalised for the hosts after 72 minutes with a crisp finish from just inside the penalty box. McIndoe saw an extra-time penalty saved, giving Mills the chance to net the winning penalty. Mawson, Travis, Mkandawire, James, Robinson, Daniel Williams, Stanley, Hyde (Pitman 105), Purdie (Mills 83), Brown, Stansfield (Green 102). Subs Not Used: Smith, Scott. James. Daniel Williams 72. Ingham, Mulligan, Fenton, Morley, Priet (Ryan 79), McIndoe, Ravenhill (Price 90), Rigoglioso, Tierney (Jackson 79), Beardsley, Copinger. Subs Not Used: Warrington, Maloney. Rigoglioso 59. 1,375 T Parkes (W Midlands).  
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"sport 226.txt Wolves appoint Hoddle as manager Glenn Hoddle will be unveiled as the new Wolves manager on Tuesday. The club have confirmed that the former England coach will be unveiled as the successor to Dave Jones at a news conference at Molineux at 1100 GMT. Hoddle has been linked with a return to former club Southampton but Wolves have won the race for his services. He has been out of the game since being sacked at Spurs in September 2003 and worked alongside Wolves caretaker boss Stuart Gray at Southampton. Hoddle began his managerial career as player-boss with Swindon before moving on to Chelsea and then taking up the England job. His spell in charge of the national side came to an end after the 1998 World Cup when he made controversial remarks about the disabled in a newspaper interview. The 47-year-old later returned to management with Southampton", where he again succeeded Jones - as he has now done at Wolves. He engineered an upturn in Saints' fortunes before being lured to White Hart Lane by Tottenham - the club where he made his name as a player. That relationship turned sour at the start of the last campaign and he left the London club early last season. Since then he has applied unsuccessfully for the post of France manager and had also been linked with a return to Southampton. Wolves are currently 17th in the Championship and have a home game against Millwall on Tuesday.  
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"sport 227.txt Wenger keeping faith with Almunia Arsene W

enger has pledged to keep faith with stand-in keeper Manuel Almunia for the crunch week which could define Arsenal's season. Almunia will start Tuesday's Champions League group tie against Rosenborg and is likely to face Chelsea on Sunday. Wenger said: ""You don't think I would take out one goalkeeper for just one game", do you? I don't do that. ""I have to give him a run for a few games. It's just that I don't want to make this story bigger than it is." Wenger insists he has complete faith in the 27-year-old Spaniard", who was signed last summer from Celta Vigo as back-up to Jens Lehmann. ""If you look at my career", you will see that I have left many big players out for a long time. I've done it with Dennis Bergkamp, Kanu," everybody. ""It's because it's a goalkeeper", that's all. It's a usual situation for me. You put your best team out," no matter who it is. ""For me", it was not a big mistake at Old Trafford and I wasn't alarmed by what happened against Birmingham either. ""It's nothing against Lehmann. I think he's a great keeper", as is Almunia. You can only play one of them. ""These people are not robots - they have good periods and less good periods. Just because Lehmann doesn't play for two or three weeks", or longer or shorter, it doesn't mean I've lost faith in him." But former Arsenal keeper David Seaman believes Lehmann has been harshly treated. Seaman told the Daily Mail: ""Jens is a fantastic keeper. He deserves another chance. ""He has made a few mistakes but on form he deserves to be the first-team choice." With Arsenal hit by injuries and suspension", inexperienced midfield pair of Mathieu Flamini and Cesc Fabregas will line up against Rosenborg but Wenger is confident they will prove more than capable. ""It puts a lot of pressure on them but it's a good learning process", said Wenger. I'm not worried as they are both mentally strong and will put in the needed workrate." The Gunners go into the game boosted by the news that defender Sol Campbell is on the verge of signing a new deal with the club. And the 30-year-old", whose current contract runs out in the summer, has made it clear he is determined to achieve Champions League success with Arsenal. Campbell said: ""It means a lot to me to go through", it's everything. We want to carry on in this competition. ""That's where the best teams in Europe are. To be in there", playing against these guys and trying to win the trophy," is the first thing in my mind." Meanwhile", Thierry Henry believes he will be blamed if Arsenal fail to qualify for the next stage of the Champions League. Henry will captain the side in place of the suspended Patrick Vieira as the Gunners seek the required victory over Rosenborg. And the striker said: ""If we don't win and we go out of the competition", like it or not, it's going to be my fault. That's the way it is. ""If the team don't win I know I will be criticised", no matter how I play."

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sport 228.txt Houllier praises Benitez regime Former Liverpool manager Gerard Houllier has praised the work of his Anfield successor Rafael Benitez. Houllier was angry at reports that he has been critical of Benitez since the Spaniard took over at Liverpool. But Houllier told BBC Sport: ""In private and in public", I have stressed I believe Rafa is doing a good job. He is the right man at the right place. ""Rafa is a good coach and a good man. I've spoken to him since he has been at Liverpool and never criticised him." Houllier also revealed he is now ready to return to the game after leaving Liverpool in May following six years at Anfield. The former France boss has been linked with a host of jobs and pulled out of the race to succeed Mark Hughes as Wales national coach. He has been working for Uefa", covering the Premiership for French television and also coaching in Brazil with national coach Carlos Alberto Perreira. Houllier said: ""If a good club comes up at the right time then yes", I am ready to come back. ""It has been interesting to watch games from a d

ifferent perspective and I have learned things. ""I have been involved in football since leaving Liverpool and my batteries are recharged."" Houllier has been impressed with the quality in the Premiership after watching as a pundit - particularly with Jose Mourinho's work at leaders Chelsea. He said: ""Chelsea are doing very well. They have some very good creative players in Damien Duff and Arjen Robben and Didier Drogba showed he can change the face of a game when he came on against Newcastle. ""They have got a good team spirit and are strong mentally. They have shown they can cope with all the pressure put on them because of the expectations and cope well with Jose's principles. ""Jose had results before he came to Chelsea and I think he will have an impact in the Premiership because he manages his team very cleverly."" And Houllier", away from his brief at Liverpool," has been hugely impressed with the Premiership. He said: ""It is a very exciting league. It is entertaining", goals are scored and teams are always trying to win. ""It has been very interesting to watch the game from a different perspective. ""Games switch from end-to-end and there is more pace to the Premiership than other leagues. It is a very good product.""

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"sport 229.txt McLaren targets Champions League Middlesbrough boss Steve McLaren believes his side can clinch a top-four spot in the Premiership and secure qualification for the Champions League. After their 3-2 win over Manchester City", McLaren said: ""We are playing exciting football", it's a magnificent result to keep us in the top five. ""But how well we do depends how often we can get our best team out. ""Once we got the third goal it should have been four or five but we nearly paid for it in the end."" McLaren also praised winger Stewart Downing and strikers Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink and Mark Viduka", who both ended barren runs in front of goal. He added: ""If Stewart keeps playing like this Sven-Goran Eriksson has got to pick him. ""And the strikers scored great goals", the combination play between them shows they want to play with each other and they are trying.""

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"sport 230.txt Hitzlsperger waiting on O'Leary Aston Villa's Thomas Hitzlsperger is waiting to learn the future of manager David O'Leary before committing himself to a new contract with the club. O'Leary has been in talks over a new deal and he said: ""I had a message from Thomas' agent asking me what the news was on myself. ""He wants to find out before he goes into discussions over Thomas. ""The reason Thomas is not speaking to the club is because the agent wants to see the outcome of what happens to me."" Hitzlsperger's current deal expires in the summer and he has been offered a new deal by the Midlands club. The German international is understood to be keen to remain at Villa", despite interest in his native country from Hamburg. But he wants assurances that O'Leary will also be committing himself long-term because negotiations over a new three-and-a-half-year contract appear to have stalled. O'Leary wants his backroom staff - assistant manager Roy Aitken and fitness coach Steve McGregor - to also be given satisfactory deals, which will tie them to Villa until the summer of 2008.

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"sport 231.txt Mourinho to escape FA charge Chelsea boss Jose Mourinho will not face any Football Association action over the comments he made after their Carling Cup tie with Manchester United. Mourinho intimated

that United boss Sir Alex Ferguson influenced referee Neale Barry after the duo walked down the tunnel together at half-time. But an FA spokesman told BBC Sport: ""We are not taking action over Mourinho. ""We have looked at the comments and we have decided that no further action is required. That is the end of it." "Mourinho was concerned that Ferguson's conversation with Barry was followed by an inconsistent display by the official. ""I see one referee in the first half and another in the second", said Mourinho. If the FA ask me what happened," I will tell them. What I saw and felt made it easier to understand a few things. ""Maybe when I turn 60 and have been managing in the same league for 20 years and have the respect of everybody I will have the power to speak to people and make them tremble a little bit. ""The referee controlled the game in one way during the first half but in the second they had dozens of free-kicks. It was fault after fault", dive after dive. ""But I know the referee did not walk to the dressing rooms alone at half-time. He should only have had his two assistants and the fourth official with him", but there was also someone else." "Referees chief Keith Hackett believes Mourinho should retract his comments about Ferguson and Barry as he believes the Blues boss has questioned their integrity. ""I'm hoping he might reconsider his comments", unfortunately this is the nature of the game, said Hackett. I don't want referees or myself getting in the psychological warfare between two managers. For the second leg we have an experienced referee," and we should be talking about the quality of that game rather than the refereeing. ""Sometimes managers have grounds for comments", and I note that, but a referees integrity has been questioned," that is offensive and should be avoided. Mr Mourinho should look at the facts." "Mourinho added that the match was entertaining for a goalless draw and insisted his team could still reach the final. ""It's 0-0", so if we win we go through and if we get a draw we go to extra time," he said. We have exactly the same chance we had before this game. ""We are confident of getting a result but we know what Manchester United is", a footballing power. It'll be difficult for us," but also for them." "

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"sport 232.txt Wolves appoint Hoddle as manager Glenn Hoddle has been unveiled as the new Wolves manager. The ex-England coach has been given a six-month contract to succeed Dave Jones", who was sacked after the club's poor start to the season. Wolves chairman Rick Hayward said: ""We're delighted Glenn is here. He has a six-month contract so we can test each other out and see if it works." "Hoddle", who will work alongside Stuart Gray, has been out of the game since he was sacked by Spurs in 2003. Gray, who has been caretaker manager, was assistant boss when Hoddle was manager at Southampton. ""I'm delighted to be here", said Hoddle. I saw the massive potential that Wolves have got and their desire and ambition to get back into the Premiership parallels my ambitions. ""Stuart Gray has done a fantastic job as caretaker manager. We've worked together at Southampton and I'm delighted to be back with him." "Wolves chief executive Jez Moxey defended the decision to give Hoddle a short-term contract. ""We hope it will work out for both parties and we extend it for the long term", he said. Most managers want a four-year contract and then expect it to be paid off if it doesn't work out. ""For somebody of Glenn's calibre to come in on a short-term contract and put his reputation on the line", it demonstrates his commitment and self-belief and the potential he thinks is here." "Hayward revealed that Hoddle was one of the first to be approached after Jones' departure. ""He was not available at the time because he was looking at various other things", he explained. Five weeks later we're back on track and this a tremendous opportunity for Wolves." "Hoddle began his managerial career as player-boss with Swindon before moving on to Chelsea and then taking up the England

job. His spell in charge of the national side came to an end after the 1998 World Cup when he made controversial remarks about the disabled in a newspaper interview. The 47-year-old later returned to management with Southampton", where he again succeeded Jones - as he has now done at Wolves. He engineered an upturn in Saints' fortunes before being lured to White Hart Lane by Tottenham - the club where he made his name as a player. That relationship turned sour at the start of the last campaign and he left the London club early last season. Since then he has applied unsuccessfully for the post of France manager and had also been linked with a return to Southampton. Wolves are currently 17th in the Championship and have a home game against Millwall on Tuesday.

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"sport 233.txt Redknapp poised for Saints Southampton are set to unveil Harry Redknapp as their new manager at a news conference at 1500 GMT on Wednesday. The former Portsmouth boss replaces Steve Wigley", who has been relieved of first-team duties after just one win in 14 league games in charge. Redknapp, 57, quit his Fratton Park position on 24 November and vowed: ""I will not go down the road - no chance." Pompey coach Kevin Bond is poised to join Redknapp", who will be Saints' third boss of the season. Redknapp's first game in charge will be at home to Middlesbrough on Saturday. Portsmouth chairman Milan Mandaric said he was ""disappointed"" by the news and claimed Redknapp had been in talks with Southampton for ""some time"". ""It would appear that negotiations over this have been going on for some time,"" Mandaric said on Portsmouth's official website. I am surprised and a little shocked that the chairman of Southampton has not picked up the phone and kept me informed." According to Mandaric", Redknapp vowed he would not join their South coast rivals when he left Portsmouth. ""I said to Harry 'I hope you don't go to Southampton'", and he told me 'absolutely not', he said. I'm wouldn't say I'm bitter, disgusted or angry, just disappointed," but it's Harry's life and it's his decision." Redknapp became a cult hero after leading Portsmouth into the Premiership for the first time", and then masterminding their survival in their debut season. But he left the club claiming he needed a break from football, though many believed he was upset with Mandaric's decision to bring in Velimir Zajec as executive director. Southampton chairman Rupert Lowe was desperate to give former academy director Wigley, who replaced Paul Sturrock just two games into the season, every chance to succeed at St Mary's. But results under Wigley have been poor and Southampton are deep in trouble near the foot of the table. When Redknapp's appointment is confirmed, he will be Saints' ninth manager in eight years.

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"sport 234.txt FA charges Liverpool and Millwall Liverpool and Millwall have been charged by the Football Association over crowd trouble during their Carling Cup match on 26 October. Millwall", who lost the match 3-0, have also been charged over alleged racist behaviour by their supporters. During the match at Millwall's new Den Stadium, seats were ripped up and four people were ejected from the ground. A disabled fan was injured at the perimeter of the pitch and riot police were needed to control the situation. Liverpool fans claimed the trouble was sparked by chants about the Hillsborough disaster, where 96 supporters were crushed to death in April 1989. But Lions chairman Theo Paphitis has denied the claims. He has said CCTV footage showed the catalyst for the trouble was a Liverpool fan attacking a Millwall fan in the west stand. However, Millwall have been charged with two breaches of FA rules. They have been charged with failing to ensure that fans refrained from racist and/or abusive behaviour and for failing to prevent spectators throwing missiles onto the pitc

h. Liverpool have been charged with one breach for failing to prevent their fans conducting themselves in threatening and/or violent and/or provocative behaviour. Both clubs have until 23 December to respond.

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"sport 235.txt Wenger steps up row Arsene Wenger has stepped up his feud with Sir Alex Ferguson by claiming the Manchester United manager is guilty of bringing football into disrepute. The pair's long-running row was put back in the headlines on Saturday when Ferguson said his Arsenal counterpart was ""a disgrace"". Wenger initially refused to bite back", " saying only: ""I will never answer any questions any more about this man."" But now he claims Ferguson should be punished by the Football Association. The latest twist in the Ferguson-Wenger saga came on Saturday when the United boss", in an interview with The Independent newspaper, discussed the events after the game between the two sides in October. United won 2-0 that day, at Old Trafford," but the game was followed by a now notorious food fight which saw Ferguson's clothes covered in soup and pizza. The sides meet again at Highbury on 1 February. ""In the tunnel Wenger was criticising my players", calling them cheats, so I told him to leave them alone and behave himself," Ferguson said on Saturday. He ran at me with hands raised saying 'what do you want to do about it?' ""To not apologise for the behaviour of the players to another manager is unthinkable. It's a disgrace", but I don't expect Wenger to ever apologise," he's that type of person." Those allegations were put to Wenger after Saturday's game at Bolton", which Arsenal lost to slip 10 points behind Chelsea in the title race. At first he said only: ""I've always been consistent with that story and told you nothing happened. ""If he has to talk", he talks. If he wants to make a newspaper article," he makes a newspaper article. ""He doesn't interest me and doesn't matter to me at all. I will never answer to any provocation from him any more. ""He does what he likes in England anyway. He can go abroad one day and see how it is." But later on Saturday", according to The Independent," Wenger spoke to a smaller group of reporters and expanded on his reaction. ""I have no diplomatic relations with him", the Arsenal boss is quoted as saying. What I don't understand is that he does what he wants and you (the press) are all at his feet. ""The situation (concerning the food fight) has been judged and there is a game going on in a month. ""The managers have a responsibility to protect the game before the game. But in England you are only punished for what you say after the game. ""Now the whole story starts again. I don't go into that game. We play football. I am a football manager and I love football above all ... no matter what people say." Reminded that Ferguson called him ""a disgrace""," Wenger added: ""I don't respond to anything. In England you have a good phrase. It is 'bringing the game into disrepute'. ""But that is not only after a game", " it is as well before a game." Ferguson had also claimed that United chief executive David Gill and Arsenal vice-chairman David Dein had agreed at boardroom level not to discuss the incident in public. But Ferguson added: ""In the ensuing weeks all you got was a diatribe from Arsenal about being kicked off the pitch and all that nonsense. Gill phoned Dein three times to complain but nothing was done. ""The return is on 1 February and they will come out with another diatribe. ""David Gill and I feel we should set the record straight because Arsenal have not written to us to apologise and we would not let that happen here." Meanwhile", the League Managers Association have offered to act as peacemakers in the hope of resolving the on-going row. During that stormy game in October," United striker Ruud van Nistelrooy caught Arsenal's Ashley Cole with one particularly strong tackle. Wenger later accused Van Nistelrooy of ""cheating"" and was fined £15", "000 and ""severely reprimanded"" by the Football Association. Ferguson admi

tted on Saturday that Van Nistelrooy's tackle", which earned the Dutchman a ban, " ""could have given (Cole) a serious injury""", " but he believes Arsenal were the main aggressors. " "Wenger is always complaining the match was not played in the right spirit", he added. They are the worst losers of all time, they don't know how to lose. Maybe it is just Manchester United," they don't lose many games to other teams. " "We tend to forget the worst disciplinary record of all time was Arsenal's up until last season. In fairness it has improved and now they are seen as paragons of virtue. " "But to Wenger it never happens", " it is all some dream or nightmare." "

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"sport 236.txt Liverpool revel in night of glory Liverpool manager Rafael Benitez said their qualification for the next stage of the Champions League was " "one of the proudest nights of my career." " The Reds beat Olympiakos 3-1 with a late Steven Gerrard strike and Benitez said: " "It was a really great night. " "The players ran hard all the time and you see how much it means to the fans. " "We knew before the game that it was very important for the club to gain these extra finances. For Liverpool", this result is very, " very important." " Benitez hailed Gerrard for his match-winning strike four minutes from time and also the Anfield crowd for sticking by their side after they had fallen a goal behind at the interval. The Reds scored three second-half goals in a sensational comeback capped by Gerrard's 20-yard drive. He added: " "Steven can play all over the pitch and he influences every part of the game. " "I have said to him many times that he has the freedom because he has talent and is very important to us. " "I felt that the difference between the sides was really our supporters", " I cannot thank them enough. " "I want to say thank-you to the supporters", " they were magnificent to help us achieve this result." " Gerrard admitted he thought they were going out of the Champions League after trailing 1-0 at half-time. He said: " "I'd be lying if I thought we were going through when we were losing at half-time. " "We had a mountain to climb", " but we have climbed it and credit to everyone. " "That was one of the best goals I have scored", I caught it sweet," I haven't caught one like that for ages. It was a massive night for me and the team." " Liverpool's win means all four of England's Champions League representatives have reached the knockout stages for the first time.

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"sport 237.txt English clubs make Euro history All four of England's Champions League representatives have reached the knockout stages for the first time. Arsenal and Chelsea are seeded as group winners", while runners-up Manchester United and Liverpool are not. Rules stipulate that teams from the same country or group will be kept apart in the draw on 17 December. The favourites are Chelsea and Barcelona, and Real Madrid, the two Milan sides, Juventus and Bayern Munich are among the 16 still in the hat. Steven Gerrard's last-gasp wonder-strike secured qualification for against Olympiakos on Wednesday evening. AC Milan, Bayer Leverkusen, Internazionale, Juventus, Lyon, who had already qualified, fielded a second-string side and went down 3-0 to Fenerbahce. AC Milan, Bayer Leverkusen, Internazionale, Juventus, Monaco. On Tuesday, finished top of their group with a 5-1 win over the Rosenborg after drawing four of their first five matches. Barcelona, Bayern Munich, Porto, Real Madrid, Werder Bremen , who had already qualified lost 2-1 to Porto as Jose Mourinho made an unhappy return to his former club. Barcelona, Bayern Munich, PSV Eindhoven, Real Madrid, Werder Bremen.

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"sport 238.txt Ferguson puts faith in youngsters Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson said he has no regrets after his second-string side lost 3-0 away at Fenerbahce in the Champions League. Ferguson said: ""The good thing about being manager is that you are in control of which team to pick. ""I care about United", that's important," so while I am disappointed at the result I am not at the team I selected. ""This game was important for the young lads. They will remember it and next time they come they will be better." Ferguson admitted his side were well-beaten by the Turks", a result which meant they finished second in Group D behind Lyon. He added: ""They'll know not to play like that again. We showed a lack of strength. But I have no complaints about the scoreline. ""In the second half we had some good moments in attack. And in that situation", you have to take one chance. ""But we didn't do that", so the game just petered out for us. ""I didn't think it made much difference whether we won the group or finished second and I still don't. ""We could get Inter", AC Milan and Juventus but Bayern," Barcelona and Real Madrid were among the runners-up. All we can do is let fate decide how it works out.""

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"sport 239.txt Beckham relief as Real go through David Beckham expressed his relief at Real Madrid's passage to the Champions League knockout phase. After Real's 3-0 win at Roma", the England skipper admitted another season of under-achievement would not be tolerated at the Bernabeu stadium. Beckham said: ""It's expected of Madrid to get through", but it's a relief for the club and players to have won. ""We lost momentum last season but we cannot afford to go another season without winning anything." Real's finish as runners-up in their Champions League group means they cannot face his old club Manchester United in the next round. But Real could be drawn against other Premiership hopefulets", Arsenal or Chelsea," who won their respective groups. ""It's going to be great whoever we play", even if we don't get either of the two English teams." "

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"sport 240.txt Man Utd through after Exeter test Manchester United avoided an FA Cup upset by edging past Exeter City in their third round replay. Cristiano Ronaldo scored the opener", slipping the ball between Paul Jones' legs after just nine minutes. United wasted a host of chances to make it safe as Jones made some great saves, but Wayne Rooney put the tie beyond doubt late on with a cool finish. Exeter had chances of their own, Sean Devine twice volleying wide and Andrew Taylor forcing Tim Howard to save. United boss Sir Alex Ferguson was taking few chances after their 0-0 draw in the first game and he handed starts to Paul Scholes and Ryan as well as Ronaldo and Rooney. Exeter began brightly with Devine and Steve Flack seeing plenty of the ball, but it did not take United long to assert their authority and the hosts soon found themselves a goal down. Scholes played a lovely pass in to Ronaldo on the left-hand side of the six-yard box and the Portuguese winger slid the ball between the legs of Jones to open the scoring. United sensed a chance to finish the tie as a contest early on and Ronaldo blazed over before Jones saved well from Scholes and then Rooney. The visitors' pressure by now was incessant and Rooney had another shot blocked while Ronaldo slammed well over the bar again from a good position. Just before the break Giggs had a golden chance to double the advantage, but the Welshman dragged a left-foot effort badly wide from 10 yards. In stoppage time Exeter created their best chance as Alex Jeannin swung in a cross from the left that Devine managed to flick goalwards, but the ball flew wide of Howa

rd's goal. The Grecians came out after the break in determined fashion and Howard had to show safe hands to collect two searching crosses into the United box. Rooney looked like he might have sealed the result with a turn and shot but the ball stuck in the St James Park mud and Jones raced back to gather on the goalline. Moments later Devine had the chance to make himself a hero, but he could only volley Jeannin's brilliant cross wide of Howard's goal after being left unmarked six yards out. After Rooney had completely messed up a free-kick 20 yards out Taylor showed him how it should be done, his stunning drive from distance forcing a flying stop from Howard. The home crowd were baying for a goal and they did get the ball into the net only for Devine's low effort to be ruled out for an obvious offside. The persistent Rooney eventually rounded Jones with three minutes to go and slotted into an empty net to book a home tie with Middlesbrough in the fourth round. Jones, Hiley, Sawyer, Gaia, Jeannin, Moxey, Taylor (Martin 89), Ampadu (Afful 69), Clay, Flack (Edwards 74), Devine. Subs Not Used: Rice, Todd. Ampadu, Clay. Howard, Phil Neville, Gary Neville, O'Shea, Fortune, Giggs (Saha 70), Miller (Fletcher 66), Scholes, Djemba-Djemba (Silvestre 80), Ronaldo, Rooney. Subs Not Used: Ricardo, Bellion. Ronaldo 9, Rooney 87. 9,033. P Dowd (Staffordshire).

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"sport 241.txt Hamm bows out for US Women's football legend Mia Hamm has played her final game. Hamm, 32, who officially retired after this year's Athens Olympics, took to the field for the last time to help the US claim a 5-0 win over Mexico. Hamm ends her career as the most prolific scorer - male or female - in international football, with 158 goals in 276 games for the US. She was twice Fifa women's player of the year and won the World Cup in 1991 and 1999 and two Olympic golds. On her retirement," Hamm said: ""There are mixed emotions. There are things in your life that you have had to put on the back-burner and you can focus more time and energy on that now. ""I have to see what is out there and not commit to everything at the beginning." The friendly also saw the end of Julie Foudy and Joy Fawcett's US careers. Hamm will now embark on a new life with husband", Chicago Cubs shortstop Nomar Garciaparra, who was in the stands to watch her final game. He has just agreed a new deal with the Cubs after joining them in July.

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"sport 242.txt Wenger rules out new keeper Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger says he has no plans to sign a new goalkeeper during the January transfer window. Wenger has brought in Manuel Almunia for the last three games for the out-of-form Jens Lehmann - but the Spaniard himself has been prone to mistakes. There have been suggestions that Wenger will swoop for a high-quality shot-stopper in the New Year. But he told the Evening Standard: ""I don't feel it will be necessary to bring in a new goalkeeper in January." The Gunners manager refused to comment on the difficult start that 27-year-old Almunia has made to his career at Highbury. And he would not be drawn on whether Lehmann would return for the top-of-the-table clash with Chelsea on Sunday. Almunia was at fault for Rosenborg's goal in Arsenal's 5-1 Champions League win on Tuesday and had some hairy moments in last week's win over Birmingham. But Wenger said earlier this week that his indifferent form was down to pressure caused by being under scrutiny from the media. ""The debate has gone on too long. Everyone has an opinion and I do not have to add to it," Wenger added. Arsenal have been linked with Middlesbrough keeper Mark Schwarzer, Fulham's Edwin van der Sar and Parma's Sebastien Frey. And Wenger has no immediate plans to recall former England Under-21 international Stuart Taylor from his loan spell at Leicester.

sport 243.txt Liverpool pledge to keep Gerrard Liverpool chief executive Rick Parry insists the club will never sell Steven Gerrard amid reports Chelsea will renew their bid to lure him from Anfield. Gerrard reiterated his desire to win trophies with the Reds after his superb Champions League winner on Wednesday. And Parry has moved to scotch claims that Chelsea could launch a £35m bid. There is no chance of Stevie going in January", " said Parry. That just won't happen. Our intention is that we will never let him go." " Gerrard scored a spectacular late goal to give Liverpool a 3-1 win over Olympiakos and book their place in the knockout stages. " "Of course he is ambitious but so are we", " Parry added. We firmly believe that if we can satisfy his ambition he will remain a Liverpool player. " "We have an open and straightforward relationship. We both know where we stand and that played a big part in his decision to stay last summer. If he was not so committed to Liverpool he would have gone by now." " Gerrard had said before Wednesday's game he would consider leaving if the club was knocked out of Europe", " with Real Madrid also believed to be monitoring his situation. " "The main point I have made is I want to be in a Liverpool side which challenges for the Champions League and the title all the time", he said afterwards. I want to be winning things with Liverpool," not somewhere else. " "I am a fan as well and I think what I have said the supporters will agree with. " "We have to build on wins like that", " not just settle for a great win and then not progress any further. " "My goal was one of the most important I have ever scored and I hope it turns out to be one of the most important for the club for a long time. " "I know I put a lot of pressure on myself because of what I said", and I felt I needed a big performance, " but I am not going to go around telling lies about how I feel." " Reds manager Rafael Benitez believes Gerrard can win everything he wants to without moving clubs. " "Steven can win all he wants with us and we need him. He has seen that we have a good team and we can do more things in the future", said Benitez. But if we want to win more games, important games, " we need Steven in the team. " "We need his strength", " the strong mentality he has and his quality. I think he likes and wants the responsibility of leading this team." "

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"sport 244.txt Pearce keen on succeeding Keegan Joint assistant boss Stuart Pearce has admitted he would like to succeed Kevin Keegan as manager at Manchester City. Keegan has decided to step down as City manager when his contract comes to an end in 18 months. " "You don't have to be Einstein to realise there will be a manager's job available at a really good club", Pearce told BBC GMR. I will certainly be applying for it, although whether the board deem me good enough to take it, " I do not know." " Pearce initially joined City as a player under Keegan in 2001 before becoming part of the coaching staff. He was promoted to joint assistant-manager following the departure of Arthur Cox last summer. The former England defender had a year as player-boss with Nottingham Forest eight seasons ago but has made no secret of his desire to have another crack at the job. He was linked with the manager's job at Oldham and Keegan has stated he would not get in the way if Pearce wanted to leave. But it now appears Pearce is keen to wait for his chance at City. He added: " "By that time", " I will have been here for five years so at least they will have had a good look at me and they are aware of my feelings with regard to being Kevin's successor. " "Obviously", " the issue is out of my hands but it is a fantastic job for anybody - I just hope it will be me." "

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"sport 245.txt Bomb threat at Bernabeu stadium Spectators were evacuated from Real Madrid's Bernabeu stadium on Sunday following a bomb scare during the game between the hosts and Real Sociedad. More than 70,000 people abandoned the ground with the score at 1-1 and only three minutes left to play. The Basque newspaper Gara apparently received a telephone call saying a bomb was due to explode at 2100 local time. But after searching the stadium with sniffer dogs," the police said that no explosive device had been found. ""The police have said they have completed their search and have not found anything," said Real Madrid president Florentino Perez. The best thing we can all do now is to put this nightmare behind us."" Madrid midfielder Guti told private Spanish radio station Cadena Ser: ""I have never seen this before and sport should be above it all."" Real took the lead just before the break when Brazilian striker Ronaldo cracked home with his left foot. Sociedad levelled the match midway through the second half when Turkish striker Nihat Kahveci smashed home with an acrobatic finish. It is not yet clear if the remaining three minutes of the game will be played at a later date or if the result will be allowed to stand. If the result remains at 1-1", Real will drop to third place in the standings, 11 points behind leaders Barcelona, who snatched a late 2-1 win at Albacete on Saturday. Initial reports suggested the Basque separatist group ETA may be responsible for the bomb threat after issuing similar warnings before a series of small explosions in recent days. The Bernabeu was targeted by ETA on 1 May, 2002, when Madrid were about to play FC Barcelona in a Champions League semi-final. A car bomb exploded in a street outside the stadium and 17 people were slightly injured.

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"sport 246.txt Chelsea hold Arsenal A gripping game between Arsenal and Chelsea ended with the honours finishing even at Highbury. Thierry Henry produced a sublime strike to put Arsenal ahead but John Terry levelled with a powerful header. Henry's quickly-taken free-kick put Arsenal back in front but Eidur Gudjohnsen equalised with a header from William Gallas' knockback. Henry missed a golden chance when he blazed a shot high late on and Arsenal also had a penalty appeal rejected. Henry's opener had given Arsenal the perfect start and set up an enthralling affair. The French striker headed a long Cesc Fàregas ball back to Jose Antonio Reyes from the edge of the Chelsea area and immediately saw it headed back into his path from the Spaniard. And", with his back to goal, Henry finished with aplomb when he took one touch, turned and struck an angled strike past the despairing dive of keeper Petr Cech. Henry epitomised a determination about the Arsenal side but Chelsea appeared unruffled and equalised after 16 minutes. Gunners keeper Manuel Almunia, who got the nod ahead of Jens Lehmann, did well to save a well-struck Frank Lampard shot. But he could not keep out Terry's powered header from the resultant corner as Arsenal's weakness at set-pieces was again exposed. Almost immediately, Henry went close and Chelsea gathered the loose ball before going straight up the other end where Gudjohnsen fluffed an effort. Gudjohnsen did not make the same error minutes later when he struck a sweet shot only for Almunia to be equal to the task and save. The homes side regained the lead in controversial fashion when Robert Pirès won a dubious free-kick. And, given the option to take the 25-yard set-piece quickly, Henry curled in a shot with Cech still organising his wall. This time Arsenal did not allow Chelsea to level so soon as they went into the break ahead. Chelsea brought striker Didier Drogba on to partner Gudjohnsen up front after the interval and the move reaped immediate reward. Lampard swung in a cross which Gallas knocked back across goal and a deft header from Gudjohnsen levelled matters again. Chelsea's main threat was coming from crosses and Lampard missed

a great opportunity as he headed wide when left unmarked at the far post. The second half failed to live up to the thrilling pace of the opening period but there were flashes of brilliance. One of them came from the enigmatic Robben when he jinked his way through two Arsenal defenders only to see his poked shot saved by Almunia. Arsenal ended the match the stronger and worked a excellent chance for Henry who put a left-foot shot high from eight yards. Substitute Robin van Persie could also have nicked a win for the Highbury outfit but frustratingly sidefooted just wide. Matthieu Flamini had a late penal appeal waved away before the final whistle which maintained Chelsea five-point Premiership lead over Arsenal. Almunia, Lauren, Toure, Campbell, Cole, Pires, Flamini, Fabregas, Reyes (Clichy 82), Bergkamp (Van Persie 82), Henry. Subs Not Used: Senderos, Hoyte, Lehmann. Cole. Henry 2, 29. Cech, Paulo Ferreira, Ricardo Carvalho (Drogba 45), Terry, Gallas, Duff, Tiago (Bridge 45), Makelele, Lampard, Robben, Gudjohnsen (Parker 77). Subs Not Used: Kezman, Cudicini. Robben, Drogba, Lampard. Terry 17, Gudjohnsen 46. 38,153 G Poll (Hertfordshire).

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"sport 247.txt Real will finish abandoned match Real Madrid and Real Sociedad will play the final six minutes of their match", which was abandoned on Sunday because of a bomb scare. The Bernabeu was evacuated with the score at 1-1 and two minutes of normal time remaining in the game. The teams will now play the final two minutes, plus four minutes of injury time," on 5 January. Brazilian Ronaldo and England captain David Beckham had to wait in the street in their kit after the abandonment. Real Sociedad president Jose Luis Astiazaran said: ""We thought the best thing was to play the time remaining." Hundreds of fans streamed across the pitch on their way to the exits after the game was called off. Tourists and fans took advantage of the opportunity for a photograph between the famous stadium's goalposts. The two clubs met the Spanish FA on Monday and Astiazaran added: ""We thought about giving the game as concluded but after talking with the FA we decided there was no precedent for that and the best thing was to play the time that was remaining." Real Madrid director of sport Emilio Butragueno praised the spectators inside the ground for their conduct. ""I'd like to highlight the behaviour of the fans", who showed great maturity and it was an example of good citizenship," he said. Butragueno confirmed, before confirming that Tuesday's charity match - which has been billed as Ronaldo's friends against Zidane's friends"" - will go ahead as planned. ""I'd also like to take the chance to say that tomorrow's game will take place," Butragueno declared of the Partido contra la Pobreza"" (Game Against Poverty). He added: ""Football is important for society and we want to show that. ""We also think that football should be a fiesta," we had programmed and people deserve to enjoy the game."

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"sport 248.txt Poll explains free-kick decision Referee Graham Poll said he applied the laws of the game in allowing Arsenal striker Thierry Henry's free-kick in Sunday's 2-2 draw with Chelsea. Keeper Petr Cech was organising his defensive wall when Henry's quick free-kick flew in," which angered Chelsea. ""The whistle doesn't need to be blown. I asked Henry 'do you want a wall?'. He said 'can I take it please?' He was very polite. I said 'yes'"," said Poll. I deal with the laws of the game. I deal with fact." Poll added: ""I gave the signal for him to take it. That's what he did. ""The same thing happened when I refereed Chelsea against West Ham in an FA Cup replay two years ago - when Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink scored - and I don't remember them complaining about that." Henry explained why he paused before striking the ball for the

goal"," which put Arsenal 2-1 ahead. Henry told BBC Radio Five Live: ""The ref asked me if I wanted 10 yards or if I wanted to take it straight away and I said that I wanted to take it straight away. He said to me", " 'go'. ""It looks a bit strange because I took my time. I was waiting for Eidur Gudjohnsen to move and give me some space. ""At one point", he turned and that's when I tried it." Former referees' chief Philip Don backed Poll's decision to allow the strike. ""The advantage should go to the non-offending team. On this occasion it was Arsenal", Don told BBC Radio Five Live. Referees have been told to ask the player 'do you want to take the quick free-kick?' or 'do you want me to get the wall back 9.15 metres?' ""If they say 'quick'", the referee tends to move away and allow the kick." Don was head of the referees for the Premier League and revealed all clubs were informed of free-kick options. ""We spoke to all the Premier League clubs as well as all the Football League clubs in the summer of 2003 explaining what the situation was", he added We gave them the option of either the quick free-kick or the 'ceremonial' free-kick. Players and clubs were aware of what referees were doing."

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"sport 249.txt Solskjaer raises hopes of return Manchester United striker Ole Gunnar Solskjaer said he hoped to return next season following a career-threatening injury to his right knee. The 31-year-old Norway international had surgery in Sweden in August to transplant cartilage into the joint. ""I'm in no doubt that I'll play again", Solskjaer told Aftenposten Daily. The problem will be the speed but we're talking about eight months' time. It's going as it should with the knee. I'm slavishly following a programme." Solskjaer last played for United as a late substitute in May's FA Cup final win over Millwall. His contract with United runs out in 2006", by which time he will have been at the Premier League club for 10 years.

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"sport 250.txt Dunne keen to commit to Man City Richard Dunne is ready to commit his long-term future to Manchester City after turning his career around. He was once threatened with the sack by City boss Kevin Keegan but has since responded with impressive performances", prompting interest from other clubs. Early talks have taken place and the defender said: ""Hopefully something will be sorted out as soon as possible. ""I definitely want to stay at City because I have really improved as a player here." Newcastle boss Graeme Souness is said to have been impressed enough by Dunne's turnaround in form to be ready to make a bid for the big stopper in the January transfer window. But the 25-year-old Dubliner underlined his intention to stay at Eastlands. He added: ""It's nice to be linked with top clubs but the important thing is this one and what we do. ""I really enjoy it at City and I want to keep that going." Keegan is expected to be told there will be no funds to bring in fresh faces in January. Dunne's professionalism was famously questioned by Keegan", who ordered the defender home after he allegedly turned up for training in a dishevelled state. But Dunne is keen to put that period of his life behind him and said: ""I've grown up a lot and the manager sees me as one of the most experienced players in the squad. ""I've played more games than any other outfield players this season so I can't be regarded as being a kid any more. ""I have to use that as added pressure to perform and apart from the games at Newcastle and Middlesbrough", defensively we've done quite well." Keegan is set for another boost when goalkeeper Nicky Weaver makes his long-awaited return in a reserve game at Blackburn on Tuesday. Former England Under-21 keeper Weaver has missed nearly t

hree full seasons with a succession of knee injuries", which eventually needed pioneering transplant surgery earlier this year.

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"sport 251.txt Bates seals takeover Ken Bates has completed his takeover of Leeds United. The 73-year-old former Chelsea chairman sealed the deal at 0227 GMT on Friday", "and has bought a 50% stake in the club. He said: ""I'm delighted to be stepping up to the mantel at such a fantastic club. I recognise Leeds as a great club that has fallen on hard times. ""We have a lot of hard work ahead to get the club back where it belongs in the Premiership", "and with the help of our fans we will do everything we can." "Bates bought his stake under the guise of a Geneva-based company known as The Forward Sports Fund. He revealed that part of his plan is to buy back Leeds' Elland Road stadium and Thorp Arch training ground in due course. ""It's going to be a tough job and the first task is to stabilise the cash flow and sort out the remaining creditors", "Bates added. But there is light at the end of a very long tunnel. For the past year it has been a matter of firefighting - now we can start running the club again." "Outgoing Leeds chairman Gerald Krasner said: ""This deal ensures the medium to long term survival of the club and I believe Mr Bates' proposals are totally for the benefit of the club. ""We are content that under Mr Bates", "Leeds United will continue to consolidate and move forward. ""When we took over Leeds United in March 2004", the club had a debt of £103m, since that date," my board has succeeded in reducing the debt to under £25m. ""We worked tirelessly to solve all of the problems at Leeds United. ""Eighty percent of the problems have already been overcome and we came to this agreement with Mr Bates to secure its ongoing success." "Krasner revealed that his consortium has been asked to remain in the background at the club for an undisclosed period to help ensure a smooth hand-over. He will stay on in an unpaid capacity while Peter Lorimer will continue in his role as director and point of contact for the fans and Peter McCormick will serve as a consultant to the incoming board. The other outgoing directors have agreed to leave their loans of £4.5m in the company for the next four years. On Leeds' new-look board it is understood that Lorimer will be joined by former Chelsea finance director Yvonne Todd and Bates' lawyer Mark Taylor. Krasner refused to give any details of the finances involved in the takeover. He told BBC Five Live: ""I am not going into the figures. If Ken wants to give them up that is up to him. I can not tell you what the money will be used for. ""This deal is not about money for the current board. In the last four months I never saw any cheques until this week from one person. I am not stretching figures", "we don't discuss internal arrangements." "Bates stepped down as Chelsea chairman in March last year following Roman Abramovich's £140m takeover at Stamford Bridge. In May", he made a proposal to invest £10m in Sheffield Wednesday, but this was rejected by the club. Sebastien Sainsbury had been close to a takeover of Leeds but withdrew his £25m offer last week. His efforts failed after he revealed it would take £40m to stage a takeover, and that the club will also lose £10m over the next six months. The club was on the brink of administration - and the deduction of 10 points by the Football League - before Bates' arrival but his investment has spared them that prospect.

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"sport 252.txt Ferguson rues failure to cut gap Boss Sir Alex Ferguson was left ruining Manchester United's failure to close the gap on Chelsea", Everton and Arsenal after his side's 1-1 draw with Fulham. Premiership leaders Chelsea and the Gunners endured a 2-2 stalemate on Sunday," giving Unit

ed the chance to make up some ground in the league. But Ferguson said: ""I think what makes it so bad is that both our rivals dropped points at the weekend. ""It was a great opportunity - and we haven't delivered." United went ahead through Alan Smith in the 33rd minute before Bouba Diop's superb 25-yard strike cancelled out the visitors' lead in the 87th minute. Ferguson described the result as an ""absolute giveaway"" after United had earlier missed a host of opportunities to finish off the encounter. He said: ""It was a good performance - some of the football was fantastic - but we just didn't finish them off. ""In fairness," it's a fantastic strike from the Fulham player." The result leaves Ferguson's side fourth in the league on 31 points - four points behind Arsenal and a further five back from Chelsea.

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''' sport 253.txt Old Firm pair handed suspensions Celtic's Henri Camara and Nacho Novo of Rangers have both been suspended for offences missed by the referee in a recent Old Firm game. Both were given automatic one-match bans and 12 additional disciplinary points for their actions. That means Novo will miss a further two games because of his prior record. Camara will miss one additional game. Novo was found guilty of stamping on Celtic's Stephen Pearson. Camara was punished for kicking Gregory Vignal. ""I'm extremely disappointed. I don't know if there's a lot to add to that,"" said Rangers manager Alex McLeish of Novo's punishment. But what I will say is that I'm at a loss as to why that incident should be picked up and highlighted when there were so many other incidents during the game." Both players will miss this weekend's games when Celtic host Dundee United and Rangers visit Kilmarnock unless they decide to appeal. The additional bans come into effect from 28 December meaning Camara will also be unavailable for the home game against Livingston while Novo will miss the meetings with Dundee United and Dunfermline. An SFA spokesman said: ""They have seven days to appeal but with matches coming along at the weekend they would need to do so before Friday. ""But if they do appeal it won't be heard before this weekend because it takes a bit of time to seat up an appeals tribunal." Meanwhile", Bob Malcolm and Rangers have been informed by letter as to the outcome of the hearing regarding his reaction to Rangers being awarded a penalty in the same game. Malcolm, a substitute on the day, was taken from the Rangers dug-out and spoken to by police about an alleged gesture he made. But the SFA would not detail what, if any, punishment Malcolm would receive. ""Once Rangers receive our letter we will be in a position to make a comment on the findings," added the spokesman.

sport 254.txt Anelka apologises for criticism Manchester City striker Nicolas Anelka has issued an apology for criticising the ambitions of the club. Anelka was quoted in a French newspaper as saying he would like to play in the Champions League for a bigger club. But chairman John Wardle said: I've spoken to Nicolas and he's apologised for anything that might have been mistakenly taken from the French press. ""We are a big club. Nicolas told me that he agrees with me that we are a big club." Wardle was speaking at the club's annual general meeting", where he also confirmed the club had not received any bids for the former Arsenal and Real Madrid striker. The club still owe French club PSG £5m from the purchase of Anelka in May 2002. He has been linked with a move to Barcelona and Liverpool," and Reds skipper Steven Gerrard also revealed he is an admirer from his time on loan at Anfield. But Wardle added: ""There's been no bids for Nicolas Anelka. No-one has come to me and said I would like to buy Nicolas Anelka. ""If a bid comes in for Nicolas Anelka I will speak to the board and then speak to Kevin Keegan. ""If there was a bid and it was a

bid of substance and worth taking then between us we'd decide. ""We still owe some money on Nicolas which we have clear out", so it would have to be above that." Wardle did stress that the club was not inviting any offers for England winger Shaun Wright-Phillips. He added: ""I've no intention of selling Shaun Wright-Phillips. ""If someone comes with a silly bid I'll have to discuss it. ""But we're not putting him on the shelf to sell. He is the heart and soul of this club and has his heart and sole in this club", and he would be very upset if I put him in the shop window. ""He was an academy kid here", he's just signed a new four-year deal," I don't think he'd do that unless he wanted to play for Manchester City Football Club." City recently announced debts of £62m", but Wardle confirmed they would try and find funds to bring in players in the January transfer window. He said: ""Like Kevin I'd like to see some players come in. We've got to see what we can do - whether it's a on a Bosman or not. ""We will try to be creative to generate some funds. But maybe we have to start looking at clubs like Everton and Bolton to see how they have been dealing in the transfer market and do a similar type of thing.""

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"sport 255.txt Ferguson rues failure to cut gap Boss Sir Alex Ferguson was left ruing Manchester United's failure to close the gap on Chelsea", Everton and Arsenal after his side's 1-1 draw with Fulham. Premiership leaders Chelsea and the Gunners endured a 2-2 stalemate on Sunday," giving United the chance to make up some ground in the league. But Ferguson said: ""I think what makes it so bad is that both our rivals dropped points at the weekend. ""It was a great opportunity - and we haven't delivered." United went ahead through Alan Smith in the 33rd minute before Bouba Diop's superb 25-yard strike cancelled out the visitors' lead in the 87th minute. Ferguson described the result as an ""absolute giveaway"" after United had earlier missed a host of opportunities to finish off the encounter. He said: ""It was a good performance - some of the football was fantastic - but we just didn't finish them off. ""In fairness", it's a fantastic strike from the Fulham player." The result leaves Ferguson's side fourth in the league on 31 points - four points behind Arsenal and a further five back from Chelsea.

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"sport 256.txt Everton's Weir cools Euro hopes Everton defender David Weir has played down talk of European football", despite his team lying in second place in the Premiership after beating Liverpool. Weir told BBC Radio Five Live: ""We don't want to rest on our laurels and say we have achieved anything yet. ""I think you start taking your eye off the ball if you make statements and look too far into the future. ""If you start making predictions you soon fall back into trouble. The only thing that matters is the next game." He said: ""We are looking after each other and hard work goes a long way in this league. We have definitely shown that. ""Also injuries and suspensions haven't cost us too badly and we have a lot of self-belief around the place.""

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"sport 257.txt Spain coach faces racism inquiry Spain's Football Federation has initiated disciplinary action against national coach Luis Aragones over racist comments about Thierry Henry. If found guilty Aragones could lose his job or face a fine of about £22",000. The federation had initially declined to take action against Aragones after comments he made during a nat

ional team training session in October. But its president Angel Maria Villar changed his mind after a request by Spain's anti-violence commission. Aragones insisted the comments, made to Henry's Arsenal club-mate Jose Antonio Reyes, were meant to motivate the player," and were not intended to be offensive. ""I never intended to offend anyone", and for that reason I have a very easy conscience," he said at the time. I'm obliged to motivate my players to get the best results. ""As part of that job", I use colloquial language," with which we can all understand each other within the framework of the football world. "" England's players made a point of wearing anti-racism t-shirts when training before their friendly against Spain in Madrid last month. But the storm increased following racist chanting by Spanish fans at England's black players during the game", w hich Spain won 1-0. Spain's minister of sport Jaime Lissavetzky was quick to give his backing to the Federation's decision. ""Everyone who has a public function has to consider their declarations", and make sure they do not give a negative image," he said. We are going to have zero tolerance in questions of racism." "

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"sport 258.txt Spain coach faces racism inquiry Spain's Football Federation has initiated disciplinary action against national coach Luis Aragones over racist comments about Thierry Henry. If found guilty Aragones could lose his job or face a fine of about £22",000. The federation had initially declined to take action against Aragones after comments he made during a national team training session in October. But its president Angel Maria Villar changed his mind after a request by Spain's anti-violence commission. Aragones insisted the comments, made to Henry's Arsenal club-mate Jose Antonio Reyes, were meant to motivate the player," and were not intended to be offensive. ""I never intended to offend anyone", and for that reason I have a very easy conscience," he said at the time. I'm obliged to motivate my players to get the best results. ""As part of that job", I use colloquial language," with which we can all understand each other within the framework of the football world. "" England's players made a point of wearing anti-racism t-shirts when training before their friendly against Spain in Madrid last month. But the storm increased following racist chanting by Spanish fans at England's black players during the game", w hich Spain won 1-0. Spain's minister of sport Jaime Lissavetzky was quick to give his backing to the Federation's decision. ""Everyone who has a public function has to consider their declarations", and make sure they do not give a negative image," he said. We are going to have zero tolerance in questions of racism." "

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"sport 259.txt Benitez deflects blame from Dudek Liverpool manager Rafael Benitez has refused to point the finger of blame at goalkeeper Jerzy Dudek after Portsmouth claimed a draw at Anfield. Dudek fumbled a cross before Lomana LuaLua headed home an injury-time equaliser", levelling after Steven Gerrard put Liverpool ahead. Benitez said: ""It was difficult for Jerzy. It was an unlucky moment. ""He was expecting a cross from Matthew Taylor and it ended up like a shot", so I don't blame him for what happened." Benitez admitted it was a costly loss of two points by Liverpool", who followed up their derby defeat against Everton with a disappointing draw. He said: ""We had many opportunities but didn't score and", in the end," a 1-0 lead was not enough. ""If you don't have any chances you have to think of other things", but when you are creating so many chances as we are there is nothing you can say to the players. It was a pity. ""We lost two points", but we have one more point in the tab

le. Now we have another difficult game against Newcastle and we have to recover quickly from that."

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"sport 260.txt Bellamy fined after row Newcastle have fined their Welsh striker Craig Bellamy two weeks' wages - about £80,000 - following his row with manager Graeme Souness. But Bellamy, 25, has not been put on the transfer list," although he did not train with the first team on Tuesday. Magpies chairman Freddy Shepherd told the Newcastle Evening Chronicle: ""It is not about money. It is about a player thinking he is bigger than this club. ""No individual is", be it the chairman," the manager or a player." Souness dropped Bellamy for Sunday's game against Arsenal", claiming the Welshman had feigned injury after being asked to play out of position. ""When I heard what the manager was saying I was in shock", Bellamy said. I thought 'not only has he gone behind my back, he's lying', he said in response to Souness' remarks. And the Wales international refused to apologise. I won't apologise because I have done nothing wrong, he told the Evening Chronicle. There's no doubt about it," I am out of here." The difficult relationship between Souness and Bellamy boiled over at the weekend", and has led to a war of words in the media. Bellamy's claim that Souness had lied about the background to the bust-up was strongly denied by Shepherd," who accused the striker of ""cheating"" the club. ""I wish to put the record straight regarding the Bellamy situation", said Shepherd. Craig walked off the training ground saying his hamstring was tight (on Friday)," but what he failed to reveal was that he had told other members of the squad before training that he intended to feign injury. ""When Graeme discovered this he immediately ordered Bellamy to attend a meeting in my office. ""At that meeting Bellamy admitted to Graeme and I that he had told the players that he was going to ""fake"" an injury in training and walk off. ""He also agreed at that meeting to apologise to his team-mates for his behaviour. He didn't do this which resulted in the action taken by the manager at the weekend", which I fully support. ""In my book this is cheating on the club", the supporters," the manager and his own team-mates. ""He is paid extremely well and I consider his behaviour to be totally unacceptable and totally unprofessional." Bellamy's latest outburst would appear to make his chances of a first-team recall remote. But even before Newcastle said the player would not be sold", Bellamy insisted he had no intention of handing in a transfer request. ""I don't want the fans to think for one minute that I wouldn't play for this club", he said. I'd play anywhere for this club," even in goal. ""It's a very difficult situation for me at the moment but I'd never ask to leave this club. ""This club means so much to me. I couldn't do it because I know I couldn't come back here and play against Newcastle. It would hurt too much.""

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"sport 261.txt McLaren eyes Uefa Cup top spot Steve McClaren wants his Middlesbrough team to win their Uefa Cup group by beating Partizan Belgrade. Boro have already qualified for the knockout stages alongside Partizan and Villarreal", at the expense of Lazio. But boss McLaren is looking for a victory which would mean they avoid a team that has played in the Champions League in Friday's third-round draw. ""To need a win to finish top is fantastic", but it is going to be a tough one, McLaren said. When the draw was made," I thought it was the toughest group of them all - and so it has proved. ""Lazio were favourites", Villarreal have been semi-finalists," and Partizan have fantastic experience in Europe. ""The pleasing thing is we did the business in the first two games. ""Winning those two has put us in a great position and it has b

een a fantastic experience playing these teams.""

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"sport 262.txt Spurs to sign Iceland U21 star Tottenham a  
re primed to snap up Iceland Under-21 international Emil Hallfredsson after he  
impressed on trial at White Hart Lane. The 20-year-old midfielder", who plays  
for FH Hafnarfjordur, also starred in the Uefa Cup match against Scottish side  
Dunfermline earlier this season. Spurs have agreed a fee for the player," who h  
as yet to agree personal terms. ""He had offers from two other clubs but he dec  
ided to come to Tottenham", said Spurs sporting director Frank Arnesen. He is a  
left-sided player," a position we have been looking at and he showed so much ta  
lent in his time here that we decided to take him. ""It's down the road of brin  
ging in talent", good prospects and giving them a place at Tottenham where the  
y can improve.""  
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"sport 263.txt McLeish ready for criticism Rangers manage  
r Alex McLeish accepts he is going to be criticised after their disastrous Uefa  
Cup exit at the hands of Auxerre at Ibrox on Wednesday. McLeish told BBC Radio  
Five Live: ""We were in pole position to get through to the next stage but we b  
lew it", we absolutely blew it. ""There's no use burying your head in the san  
d", we know we are going to get a lot of criticism. ""We have to take it as we  
have done in the past and we must now bounce back." McLeish admitted his tea  
m's defending was amateurish after watching them lose 2-0 to Guy Roux's French  
side. ""I'm very disappointed because we didn't give ourselves a chance", losi  
ng the first goal from our own corner. It was amateur," he added. The early goa  
l in the second half gave us a mountain to climb and we never created the same  
kind of chances as we did in the first half. ""It's difficult to take positives  
from the game. We've let the fans down."  
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"sport 264.txt O'Leary agrees new Villa contract Aston Vi  
lla boss David O'Leary signed a three-and-a-half year contract extension on Thu  
rsday", securing his future at the club until summer 2008. O'Leary's future wa  
s in question," but Villa chairman Doug Ellis said he was happy to secure the d  
eal. ""David's record since his arrival in 2003 is excellent and he shares the  
board's ambitions in taking this club forward", he told Villa's website. For  
this reason it was important we got this right." O'Leary put pen to paper afte  
r deals were sorted for his right-hand men Roy Aitken and Steve McGregor. ""It  
was important to me Roy and Steve", an integral part of my team, should stay fo  
r the same time," O'Leary said on Thursday ahead of signing his new deal. Someo  
ne has to try and put Aston Villa back where they should belong and I'm up for  
the challenge." Earlier in December", there were rumours O'Leary would quit if  
he is not offered a new deal before the end of the season. But he denied tha  
t," saying he was happy to take on the challenge of improving Villa's fortunes  
in the long term. ""I want to make sure by the end of the five years I would ha  
ve been in charge that Villa are achieving top six finishes in the Premiership  
on a regular basis", said O'Leary, who took over at Villa Park in May 2003. Bu  
t to achieve that", and take the next step forward," we do need to bring in qua  
lity players. ""I would like a couple next month if at all possible to set us o  
n the way." Meanwhile", O'Leary has rapped skipper Olof Mellberg for his comme  
nts before Sunday's derby with Birmingham. Mellberg spoke of his dislike of Vi  
lla's rivals ahead of the match," which Steve Bruce's side won 2-1. ""I've had

more than a quiet word with Olof. It's been said within the whole group", not a s a one-to-one," he told Villa's website. You shouldn't leave yourself open to be shot down. You shouldn't give people the chance to take cheap shots at you a nd he set himself up for that.""  
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"sport 265.txt Gronkjaer agrees switch to Madrid Jesper G ronkjaer has agreed a move to Atletico Madrid from Birmingham City. The 27-yea r-old winger spent just five months at St Andrews following a £2.2m move from C helsea in July after playing for Denmark at Euro 2004. He is set to move during the January transfer window in a deal rumoured to be about £1.4m", " subject to a medical. ""We will meet with the player's representative to finalise the cont ract and decide when he will sign", " said Atletico sporting director Toni Munoz. Gronkjaer has been targeted by Blues fans and was sarcastically applauded wh en taken off against Everton last month. Boss Steve Bruce had said that he woul d be happy to let the Danish international go if the price was right. He added: I'm not going to say the decision to let him go is down to the fans' reaction t owards him. ""He has had a tough time since the summer with the loss of his mo ther and finding it difficult to adjust to a new club and a different area. ""H e has been terrific and not missed a day's training and is someone if your daug hter brought them home you would be delighted. ""It just hasn't quite worked ou t here for him. But we'd like to get back most of what we spent.""  
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///" sport 266.txt Benitez 'to launch Morientes bid' Liverpool may launch an £8m January bid for long-time target Fernando Morientes", accor ding to reports. The Real Madrid striker has been linked with a move to Anfiel d since the summer and is currently behind Raul," Ronaldo and Michael Owen at t he Bernabeu. Liverpool boss Rafael Benitez is keen to bolster his forward optio ns with Djibril Cisse out until next season. ""If there is an attractive propos tion it could be I would be keen to leave", admitted the 28-year-old Moriente s. He added: Unfortunately," I'm not in control of the situation. I'm under con tract to Real and they will make any decisions." The fee could put Liverpool o ff a prospective deal but Real are keen to net the cash as they are reported to be preparing a massive summer bid for Inter Milan striker Adriano. The Reds are currently sixth in the Premiership", 15 points behind leaders Chelsea.  
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///" sport 267.txt Robertson out to retain Euro lure Hearts m anager John Robertson hopes a place in the knock-out stages of the Uefa Cup cou ld help keep some of his out-of-contract players at the club. ""It could help. If we get through and have another European tie it may encourage players to sta y at least until the end of the season", " he said. If we manage to get through it shows how well the club's progressing. ""They have to think whether they are going to get other clubs like that should they decide to move on." A win for R obertson's side against Ferencvaros would put them through to the last 32 if Ba sle fail to beat Feyenoord. ""It's very much the player's prerogative but the f act that we've been playing European football for the last three or four years is obviously an incentive", added Robertson. But we want players who want to pl ay for the football club," who are committed and a run in Europe always helps a little bit." With the game being played at Murrayfield instead of Tynecastle b ecause of Uefa regulations", " Robertson sees both positive and negative aspects to the change of venue. ""The pitch is not in the greatest condition. The Hein

eken Cup game was there at the weekend and the pitch is a bit threadbare", " he said. It's not ideal but it's the same for both teams so we just have to go out and there and perform. That's the most important thing." " But he added: " "If Ty necastle could have hosted 30", "000 it would have been fantastic but that's one of the benefits of Murrayfield - it allows us to bring even more of our supporters into it. " "There will be a good atmosphere and the Hearts fans have an important role to play. " "We need their encouragement", " we need them to get right behind the side and make it as good an atmosphere as possible. " "Hopefully the players will respond to that and I know they will because it's a fantastic European night for the club." "

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"sport 268.txt Campbell rescues Arsenal Sol Campbell proved to be an unlikely match-winner to earn Arsenal a hard-fought win at Portsmouth. The England defender lashed home a 25-yard shot for his first goal in 16 months to take Arsenal back into second spot", five points behind Chelsea. But before Campbell scored the best two chances of the game fell to Pompey striker Ricardo Fuller. In the first half he blasted wide when clear, and his control let him down in the second half when well placed. Portsmouth got plenty of bodies behind the ball to deny Arsenal space in the early stages. But their marking was slack at a corner and Patrick Vieira should have done better when the ball fell to him 16 yards out. A mistake by Arjan de Zeeuw let Thierry Henry in behind the Pompey defence on 17 minutes but as he bore down on goal Linvoy Primus got in a saving tackle. With just Fuller as an out-and-out striker, Portsmouth's shape made life difficult for Arsenal. But a delightful touch by Robin van Persie gave Henry a sight of goal, although the angle was too tight for his shot to trouble Jamie Ashdown. Ashdown caused hearts to flutter on 28 minutes when he missed his punch at a corner and Kolo Toure headed just wide and, as Arsenal began to press, Van Persie blasted over a good opportunity after Henry had set him up. Henry took a quick return pass from Vieira but Ashdown was out quickly to block, and there were some anxious seconds for Pompey as the ball ran loose before Matthew Taylor cleared. After playing second fiddle, Portsmouth should have taken the lead on 34 minutes. Referee Howard Webb played a good advantage to allow Steve Stone to send Gary O'Neil away but, having shrugged off Toure, the Pompey midfielder planted his shot wide from 10 yards. As half-time approached, Henry teased a shot through a ruck of players and inches wide. At the other end, Fuller broke clear but failed to hit the target as Toure closed him down. Fuller was given the best chance of the match so far on 48 minutes when Patrik Berger's break and slipped pass played him clear. But a poor first touch lost him the opportunity and even when he checked back and went down under Vieira's challenge, referee Webb was not interested. Fuller paid the price when he gave way on 55 minutes to Aiyegebeni Yakubu, who returned after six weeks out with a knee injury. But it needed alert reflexes and safe handling from Ashdown to cling on to Van Persie's shot as Henry snuffed for scraps. Portsmouth were growing in confidence and keeper Manuel Almunia had to stand his ground to beat away a powerful shot from Berger. Arsenal were struggling to find their rhythm but took the lead through the unlikely source of Campbell. The England defender needed little invitation as Pompey backed off to stride forward and lash a ferocious shot past Ashdown. Arsenal might have stretched their lead two minutes later when Mathieu Flamini escaped his marker to flash a header wide from Henry's free-kick. Almunia went full length to grab Berger's long-range shot, while Ashdown palmed away substitute Dennis Bergkamp's shot. Ashdown, Griffin, De Zeeuw, Primus, Taylor, Stone, O'Neil, Faye (Berkovic 83), Berger, LuLu, Fuller (Yakubu 55). Subs not used: Hislop, Quashie, Cisse. Almunia, Lauren, Toure, Campbell, Cole,

Pires, Flamini, Vieira, Clichy, Van Persie (Bergkamp 68), Henry. Subs not used: Lehmann, Fabregas, Senderos, Hoyte. Cole. Campbell 75. 20,170. H Webb (S Yorkshire).

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"sport 269.txt Reds sink 10-man Magpies Titus Bramble's own goal put Liverpool on the comeback trail as injury-hit Newcastle were well beaten at Anfield. Patrick Kluivert's close-range finish put Newcastle ahead after 31 minutes", but they were pegged back as Bramble headed in Steven Gerrard's corner. Neil Mellor gave Liverpool the lead before half-time from Milan Baros' pass before the Czech added a third after rounding Shay Given on the hour. Newcastle then had Lee Bowyer sent off for two bookable offences. Liverpool brought back Luis Garcia after a hamstring injury, while Newcastle were forced to draft in Kluivert after Craig Bellamy was a late withdrawal with a back injury sustained in the warm-up. And Garcia should have crowned his return with a goal inside the opening minute when he took a pass from Baros but shot wildly over the top from eight yards. Olivier Bernard was only inches away from giving Newcastle the lead after 20 minutes, when he fired just wide from a free-kick 25 yards out. But Souness's side did go ahead 11 minutes later in highly controversial circumstances. Kluivert looked suspiciously offside when Kieron Dyer set Bowyer free, but the Dutchman was then perfectly placed to score from six yards. The lead lasted three minutes, with Liverpool back on terms as Bramble headed Gerrard's corner into his own net under pressure from Sami Hyypia. And Liverpool were ahead after 37 minutes when Baros slid a perfect pass into Mellor's path for the youngster to slip a slide-rule finish into Given's bottom corner. Garcia's finishing was wayward, and he was wasteful again in first-half injury time, shooting tamely at Given after good work by Xabi Alonso. Any hopes of a Newcastle recovery looked to be snuffed out on the hour when a brilliant turn and pass by Harry Kewell set Baros free and he rounded Given to score. Jermaine Jenas then missed a glorious chance to throw Newcastle a lifeline, shooting over from just eight yards out from Shola Ameobi's cross. Then Bowyer, who had already been booked for a foul on Alonso, was deservedly shown the red card by referee Graham Poll for a wild challenge on Liverpool substitute Florent Sinama-Pongolle. Dudek, Finnan, Hyypia, Carragher, Riise, Luis Garcia (Nunez 73), Gerrard, Alonso, Kewell (Traore 85), Baros, Mellor (Sinama Pongolle 75). Subs not used: Hamann, Harrison. Bramble 35 og, Mellor 38, Baros 61. Given, Andrew O'Brien, Elliott, Bramble, Bernard, Bowyer, Dyer (Ambrose 80), Jenas, Milner (N'Zogbia 72), Kluivert (Robert 58), Ameobi. Subs not used: Harper. Bowyer (77). Bowyer, Elliott, Bernard. Kluivert 32. 43,856. G Poll (Hertfordshire).

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"sport 270.txt Strachan turns down Pompey Former Southampton manager Gordon Strachan has rejected the chance to become Portsmouth's new boss. The Scot was Pompey chairman Milan Mandaric's first choice to replace Harry Redknapp", "who left Fratton Park for rivals Saints earlier in December. "I think it's a fantastic job for anybody apart from somebody who has just been the Southampton manager", Strachan told the BBC. Club director Terry Brady held initial talks with Strachan on Saturday. The former Scotland international added that joining Southampton's local rivals would not be a wise move. It's got everything going for it but I've got too many memories of the other side and I don't want to sour those memories, he said. Everything's right - it's 10 minutes away, there are good players there, a good set-up," a good atmosphere at the ground. "There's lots to do but it's not right for somebody who has just been the Southampton manager." "Since Redknapp's departure", executive director Veli

mir Zajec and coach Joe Jordan have overseen first-team affairs. The duo had gone five matches unbeaten until Sunday's 1-0 defeat at home to champions Arsenal, but the club are still in a respectable 12th place in the Premiership table. Strachan left St Mary's in February, after earlier announcing his intention to take a break from the game at the end of the 2003-04 season. His previous managerial experience came at Coventry, whom he led for five years from 1996 to 2001.

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"sport 271.txt Henry tipped for Fifa award Fifa president Sepp Blatter hopes Arsenal's Thierry Henry will be named World Player of the Year on Monday. Henry is on the Fifa shortlist with Barcelona's Ronaldinho and newly-crowned European Footballer of the Year", AC Milan's Andriy Shevchenko. The latter said: ""Henry", for me," is the personality on the field. He is the man who can run and organise the game." The winner of the accolade will be named at a glittering ceremony at Zurich's Opera house. The three shortlisted candidates for the women's award are Mia Hamm of the United States", Germany's Birgit Prinz and Brazilian youngster Marta. Hamm, who recently retired - is looking to regain the women's award, which she lost last year to striker Prinz. Fifa has changed the panel of voters for this year's awards. Male and female captains of every national team will be able to vote, as well as their coaches and Fipro - the global organisation for professional players.

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"sport 272.txt Newcastle to join Morientes race Newcastle have joined the race to sign Real Madrid striker Fernando Morientes and scupper Liverpool's bid to snap up the player", according to reports. Liverpool were reported to have bid £3.5m for the 28-year-old Spanish international this week. But the Liverpool Echo newspaper has said Anfield boss Rafa Benitez will avoid a bidding war and instead turn his attentions to Nicolas Anelka. Real are believed to still want £7m before selling Morientes. Monaco are also in the race for the player they had on loan last season. Reports suggest Liverpool will lift their offer to £5m - the highest they are willing to go before bowing out of any deal. On Tuesday," Morientes had said: ""I like Liverpool and I am pleased that a club of their stature want to buy me. I have told Madrid that I want it to happen. ""Madrid know my situation and they know they must do something about me. They must sort out the situation by being sensible. ""I am in a position where I want to play", and I will have to look elsewhere to do that. If Madrid do not want me then it's in the best interests of everyone that they are realistic. ""I haven't spoken to Rafa Benitez but I have always appreciated his work and I would like to play for him. But Benitez could yet turn his attentions to the younger Anelka should Morientes be reluctant to pledge his future to Liverpool. Anelka previously played at Anfield under Gerard Houllier before sealing his permanent switch to Manchester City.

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"sport 273.txt Blues slam Blackburn over Savage Birmingham have confirmed Blackburn made a bid for Robbie Savage - but managing director Karen Brady has called it ""derisory"". Rovers have reportedly offered £500",000 up front for the Wales star,30," with the fee rising to £2.2m. But Brady told The Sun the bid was ""a waste of fax paper and my time"". She added: ""The way things are going all this could affect the relationship between the clubs. They've got into Robbie's head. But he's not for sale."" Savage's future at Birmi

ngham has been the source of speculation for several weeks", with some fans criticising his performances for the club earlier in the season. However," good displays against West Brom and Aston Villa have impressed Blues fans. ""The crowd gave me a massive standing ovation when I came off on Saturday which was nice"," he said. It was fantastic even though I was criticised by a number of them in recent weeks and on Saturday it showed how much I mean to them. ""It's not for me to say (about transfer rumours)"," it's between the two clubs. ""I haven't created the speculation myself", I haven't phoned every national newspaper saying," 'Blackburn are trying to buy me'. It's not up to me." Birmingham manager Steve Bruce insists he does not want to sell Savage. ""A lot is said and written about Sav but he has been terrific for Birmingham City the last two and a half years", he said. The fans love him because he epitomises them. He works hard," They like people like that and there are not many like him. ""And why the hell should I sell him to someone else? I am not interested.""  
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"sport 274.txt Gerrard happy at Anfield Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard has reiterated his desire to stay at Anfield and win trophies with the club. The 24-year-old England midfielder is determined to see out his contract", despite reported interest from Chelsea. He said: ""I'm signed here for this season and another two so there is no situation. There's a lot of speculation but that's not down to me. ""As club captain all I want to do is help us get back up the table and into the Champions League again." Gerrard looked set to move to Chelsea during the summer and speculation of a switch to Stamford Bridge has again arisen", with the January transfer window approaching. He raised doubts about his Reds future when he said he wanted the club to prove they were title challengers in the very near future or he might leave. Liverpool boss Rafael Benitez has insisted that Gerrard has promised him he wants to stay at Anfield. Benitez said: ""I said to Steven that I was sure he wanted to stay here and he said 'I do'. ""I then said to him 'Look', if you want to win titles," you want medals and you want Liverpool to have these things then I am going to need your help'. ""I really think he wants to stay so now what we must do is make the squad stronger for him." Meanwhile", Gerrard has urged the Anfield board to sign Real Madrid striker Fernando Morientes in the January transfer window. Morientes,28," has already expressed a willingness to come to England. Gerrard added: ""He's a great player. He scores goals in the league", in cup competitions and also in the Champions League. ""I don't think he'd be able to play for us in Europe this season but if we are able to get hold of him", we'd be getting ourselves a great player. ""He'd have Spanish coaches", a Spanish manager and we have got three or four Spanish players here now so they'll help him settle in. ""Rafael Benitez knows what he wants and he knows how to strengthen the squad he's got and if the right players become available at the right price I am sure we will strengthen. ""It would certainly be nice to see a few new faces in January to freshen things up.""  
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"sport 275.txt Beckham rules out management move Real Madrid midfielder David Beckham has no plans to become a manager when his playing career is over. ""I am not interested in being a coach but I would like to have football schools", the England captain said on television station Canal Plus. I have wanted to do that since I went to the Bobby Charlton school. I'm going to open one in London and one in LA. ""My second passion is charity work - I am an ambassador for Unicef and it gives me great pride." But Beckham revealed that his immediate priority was winning the Spanish league title with Real Madr

id. Real slipped to 13 points behind leaders Barcelona with a 1-0 defeat at the hands of Sevilla on Wednesday. Beckham admitted: ""It's disappointing and frustrating to see the results", considering the team we have. ""I would really like to win La Liga with Real Madrid - I have been here two years and we still have not done it." In a wide-ranging interview", Beckham also revealed that his sending-off against Argentina - and the resulting media storm - had been the most significant moment in his career. Asked for his worst memory," he said: ""To be sent off against Argentina - it was not for the sending-off but for what happened afterwards. ""I was lucky because I had a manager", Sir Alex Ferguson," who supported me and a strong family behind me but I believe that changed me. ""I believe it changed me for the better.""

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"sport 276.txt Mexicans tracking unhappy Juninho Mexican outfit Red Sharks Veracruz hope to sign Juninho if the Brazilian decides to leave Celtic frustrated at his lack of first-team action. Their president", Gustavo Parente Sanchez," says Juninho ""does not wish to remain in Scottish football anymore"". Agent Brian Hassell insists that the 31-year-old Brazilian midfielder is determined to win back his place. ""But", if the manager is not going to pick him, that's a different ball game," he told The Sun. That's something we'd have to look at. Juninho deserves respect. He is not a little kid." Hassell warns that Juninho could reconsider his future at Celtic unless he is given a run of games by the end of the January transfer window. Juninho was signed from Middlesbrough during the summer", but he has failed to live up to high expectations and has lost his place to 18-year-old Aiden McGeady. ""He has 50 caps for Brazil and he's the best signing Celtic ever made", insisted Hassell. He wants to play for Martin O'Neill," but does Martin O'Neill want to play him? ""Juninho is not someone who has come through the Celtic ranks. He deserves much more respect." Sanchez is bullish about his hopes of prising Juninho from the Scottish champions", although Hassell believes Mexico would not be his preferred destination. ""We have already spoken with Juninho and he said", if he has no firm offer from a club in Spain, Veracruz will be his destination, Sanchez told his club's official website. Celtic manager O'Neill is no respecter of reputations. The onus is on Juninho to force his way into the team," he said. Players get a game on merit. That's the way it has always been and that is certainly the case at Celtic Park.""

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"sport 277.txt Celtic unhappy over Bulgaria date Martin O'Neill hopes to block Stilian Petrov's call-up by Bulgaria during Celtic's busy festive programme. The Celtic manager does not view the friendly against Valencia - a region of Spain - on 28 December as important. ""I can't say I was overly pleased at the fixture being played just after Christmas", said O'Neill. We will have to speak with the Bulgarian FA. It's their prerogative for them to arrange a fixture and our prerogative how we handle it." Bulgaria's game comes between Celtic's Boxing Day meeting with Hearts and their 2 January fixture against Livingston. O'Neill believes the extra game will not help a midfielder whose season has already been affected by injury. ""They have organised a game at a rather awkward time", he added. When we were out playing Barcelona, I spoke with the Bulgarian manager, Hristo Stoichkov," and he mentioned this game to me. ""We pay his wages", we are the ones that if an awkward fixture is going to be played at some stage or another it should be to our benefit," rather than anyone else. ""I have said this before", but Bulgaria are the one nation who seem to organise a lot of friendly games.""

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"sport 278.txt Robben and Cole earn Chelsea win Cheslea s  
alvaged a win against a battling Portsmouth side just as it looked like the Pre  
miership leaders would have to settle for a point. Arjen Robben curled in a la  
te deflected left-footed shot from the right side of Pompey's box to break the  
home side's brave resistance. Chelsea had been continually frustrated but Joe C  
ole added a second with a 20-yard shot in injury-time. Nigel Quashie had Pompe  
y's best chance when his effort was tipped over. The Fratton Park crowd were in  
good voice as usual and", even though Portsmouth more than held their own, Chel  
sea still managed to carve out two early chances. Striker Didier Drogba snapped  
in an angled shot to force home keeper Shaka Hislop into a smart save while an  
unmarked Frank Lampard had a strike blocked by Arjan De Zeeuw. But Pompey chase  
d, harried and unsettled a Chelsea side as the south-coast side started to gain  
the upper hand and almost took the lead through Quashie. The midfielder struck  
a swerving long range shot which keeper Petr Cech tipped over at full stretch.  
Pompey stretched Arsenal to the limit recently and were providing a similarly t  
ough obstacle to overcome for a Chelsea team struggling to exert any pressure.  
Velimir Zajec's players stood firm as the visitors came out in lively fashion a  
fter the break but, just as they took a stranglehold of the match, the visitors  
launched a counter-attack. Drogba spun to get a sight of goal and struck a fier  
ce shot which rocked keeper Hislop back as he blocked before Arjan de Zeeuw cle  
ared the danger. The home side were also left breathing a sigh of relief when  
a Glen Johnson header fell to Gudjohnsen who had his back to goal in a crowded  
Pompey goalmouth. The Icelandic forward tried to acrobatically direct the ball  
into goal but put his effort over. But, just like against Arsenal, Portsmouth l  
et in a late goal when Robben's shot took a deflection off Matthew Taylor on it  
s way past a wrong-footed Hislop. And Cole put a bit of gloss on a hard-fought  
win when he put a low shot into the bottom of the Pompey net. Hislop, Griffin,  
Primus, De Zeeuw, Taylor, Stone (Cisse 76), Quashie (Berkovic 83), Faye, O'Nei  
l, Kamara (Fuller 65), Yakubu. Subs Not Used: Berger, Ashdown. Kamara. Cech,  
Paulo Ferreira, Gallas, Terry, Johnson, Duff, Makelele, Smertin (Cole 73), Lamp  
ard, Robben (Geremi 81), Drogba (Gudjohnsen 58). Subs Not Used: Cudicini, Brid  
ge. Paulo Ferreira, Robben, Lampard. Robben 79, Cole 90. 20,210 A Wiley (St  
affordshire).

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"sport 279.txt Newcastle line up Babayaro Newcastle manag  
er Graeme Souness is closing in on signing Chelsea defender Celestine Babayaro  
when the transfer window reopens. Souness is bidding to bolster his defence an  
d", according to reports," contract negotiations are at an advanced stage with  
the player. Babayaro has been in the Premiership since 1997 when he moved to Ch  
elsea for £2.25m from Anderlecht. But the 26-year-old has been surplus to requi  
rements this season. Souness would not be drawn on specifics over individual pl  
ayers. But he said: ""All I can tell you is that the chairman has worked reall  
y hard in the last couple of months to try to do deals. ""We have said from day  
one we want to strengthen",, and that is what we are hoping to do in the coming  
weeks.""  
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"sport 280.txt Mourinho takes swipe at Arsenal Chelsea bo  
ss Jose Mourinho has attempted to pile the pressure on title rivals Arsenal ahe  
ad of the Gunners facing Newcastle on Wednesday. Arsenal will play the Magpies

a day after Chelsea beat Portsmouth during a busy festive programme. And Mourinho said: ""They always seem to have two or three days' rest in which to recover. Perhaps it's something to do with the television schedule. ""All my players are tired," especially John Terry." Chelsea boss Jose Mourinho admitted his side were ""lucky"" to win at Fratton Park but is still unhappy with the amount of games in such a short space of time during this time of year. He added: ""We have had to play two matches in three days which is foreign to many of my players and", although I understand the traditions of football here at this time of year," it is not good for your health to do it. ""You can sit back and smoke cigars", one after another, and it is a good life," but it is not actually good for you. ""Playing so many games is certainly not healthy," especially for teams who still have European commitment.""

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"sport 281.txt Wenger shock at Newcastle dip Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger has admitted he is at a loss to explain why Newcastle are languishing in the bottom half of the table. The Gunners travel to St James' Park on Wednesday", with Newcastle 14th in the Premiership after a troubled season. And Wenger said: ""At the beginning of the season you would expect them to be fighting for the top four. ""I don't know how they got to be where they are. It looks to me from the outside that they have many injuries."" Arsenal go into the game on the back of a 2-0 victory over Fulham on Sunday. And Wenger added: ""The best way to prepare for a game is to win the previous one. We will go to Newcastle in good shape. ""Fatigue won't play too big a part in the next few weeks as we have players coming back so I can rotate a bit more. ""We do not play a season with 11 players and I believe that all of our squad deserve a chance in the team."" Striker Thierry Henry", along with Robert Pires," scored against Fulham. And Henry afterwards described the display as ""beautiful to watch"". He said: ""What matters is winning and the three points", of course. That is the only thing that really matters. But it is more enjoyable when you play like we did against Fulham. ""We are playing as a team and that is important because there were some games when we maybe were not there as a team and suffered for that. Those were games we lost.""

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"sport 282.txt Ferguson hails Man Utd's resolve Manchester United's Alex Ferguson has praised his players' gutsy performance in the 1-0 win at Aston Villa. ""That was our hardest away game of the season and it was a fantastic game of football", end-to-end with lots of good passing," said the Old Trafford boss. We showed lots of character and guts and we weren't going to lose. ""I look at that fixture and think we've been there and won", while Arsenal and Chelsea have yet to come and Villa may have some players back when they do." Ferguson also hailed senior stars Ryan Giggs and Roy Keane", who came off the bench for the injured John O'Shea. ""Roy came on and brought a bit of composure to the midfield which we needed and which no other player has got. ""Giggs was a tremendous threat and he brings tremendous penetration. ""All we can do is maintain our form", play as we are and we'll get our rewards.""

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"sport 283.txt TV calls after Carroll error Spurs boss Martin Jol said his team were ""robbed"" at Manchester United after Pedro Mendes' shot clearly crossed the line but was not given. ""The referee is already wear

ing an earpiece so why can't we just stop the game and get the decision right", " said Jol after the 0-0 draw. But at the end of the day it's so obvious that Pedro's shot was over the line it's incredible. " "We feel robbed but it's difficult for the linesman and referee to see it." " Mendes shot from 50 yards and United goalkeeper Roy Carroll spilled the ball into his own net before hooking it clear. Jol added: " "We are not talking about the ball being a couple of centimetres or an inch or two over the line", " it was a metre inside the goal. " "What really annoys me is that we are here in 2005", " watching something on a TV monitor within two seconds of the incident occurring and the referee isn't told about it. " "We didn't play particularly well but I am pleased - even now - with a point", " although we should have had three." " Mendes could not believe the 'goal' was not given after seeing a replay. He said: " "My reaction on the pitch was to celebrate. " "It was a very nice goal", " it was clearly over the line - I've never seen one so over the line and not given in my career. " "It's really", " really over. What can you do but laugh about it? It's a nice goal and one to keep in my memory even though it didn't count. " "It's not every game you score from the halfway line." " Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson sympathised with Tottenham and said the incident highlighted the need for video technology. " "I think it hammers home what a lot of people have been asking for and that's that technology should play a part in the game", " Ferguson told MUTV. What I was against originally was the time factor in video replays. " "But I read an article the other day which suggested that if a referee can't make up his mind after 30 seconds of watching a video replay then the game should carry on.

" "Thirty seconds is about the same amount of time it takes to organise a free-kick or take a corner or a goal-kick. So you wouldn't be wasting a lot of time. " "I think you could start off by using it for goal-line decisions. I think that would be an opening into a new area of football." " Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger also used the incident to highlight the need for video technology. " "When the whole world apart from the referee has seen there should be a goal at Old Trafford", that just reinforces what I feel - there should be video evidence," said Wenger. It's a great example of where the referee could have asked to see a replay and would have seen in five seconds that it was a goal."

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"sport 284.txt Hodgson shoulders England blame Fly-half Charlie Hodgson admitted his wayward kicking played a big part in England's 18-17 defeat to France. Hodgson failed to convert three penalties and also missed a relatively easy drop goal attempt which would have given England a late win. " "I'm very disappointed with the result and with myself", " Hodgson said. It is very hard to take but it's something I will have to get through and come back stronger. My training's been good but it just didn't happen." " Hodgson revealed that Olly Barkley had taken three penalties because they were " "out of my range" " but the centre could not convert his opportunities either", " particularly the drop goal late on. " "It wasn't a good strike", he added. I felt as soon as it hit my boot it had missed. It's very disappointing," but I must recover." " Andy Robinson said he would " "keep working on the kicking" " with his squad. However", " the England coach added that he would take some positives from the defeat. " "We went out to play and played some very good rugby and what have France done?" " he said. " "They won the game from kicking penalties from our 10m line. " "It's very frustrating. The lads showed a lot of ambition in the first half", " they went out to sustain it in the second but couldn't build on it. " "We took the ball into contact", " and you know when you do that it is a lottery whether the referee is going to give the penalty to your side or the other side. " "We have lost a game we should have won. There is a fine line between winning and los

ing"," and for the second week we've been on the wrong side of that line and it hurts."" England went in at half-time with a 17-6 lead but they failed to score in the second half and Dimitri Yachvili slotted over four penalties as France overhauled the deficit. England skipper Jason Robinson admitted his side failed to cope with France's improved second-half display. ""We controlled the game in the first half but we knew that they would come out and try everything after half-time," he said. We made a lot of mistakes in the second half and they punished us. They took their chances when they came. ""It's very disappointing. Last week we lost by two points"," now one point.""

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"sport 285.txt Vickery out of Six Nations England tight-head prop Phil Vickery has been ruled out of the rest of the 2005 RBS Six Nations after breaking a bone in his right forearm. Vickery was injured as his club side", Gloucester, beat Bath 17-16 in the West country derby on Saturday. He could be joined on the sidelines by Bath centre Olly Barkley, who sat out the derby due to a leg injury. Barkley will have a scan on Sunday and might miss England's trip to Six Nations leaders Ireland next weekend. The news is just the latest blow for coach Andy Robinson, who has seen his side lose their opening two matches in the 2005 Six Nations. Robinson is already without World Cup winners Jonny Wilkinson, Will Greenwood, Mike Tindall, Richard Hill and Trevor Woodman through injury. Vickery has broken the radius, a large bone in his forearm. He only returned to the England side last weekend after a long-term back injury, which was followed by a fractured eye socket. And the Gloucester prop was only recalled after Leicester tight-head Julian White suffered a neck injury which has already seen him ruled out of the Ireland game. Bath prop Matt Stevens is the only remaining tight-head in England's training squad and could be involved against Ireland. But he has to play second fiddle at club level to Duncan Bell," who excelled for England A against France and may now be called into the squad. The extent of Barkley's injury is not yet clear but Bath boss John Connolly rates him no better than ""50-50"" to face Ireland. Barkley played at inside centre in England's defeat by France and if he is unable to play", England's constantly-changing midfield will once again have to be altered. Robinson could choose to recall Mathew Tait or Henry Paul, although Tait endured a nightmare for Newcastle against Leicester on Saturday and Paul limped off with an ankle injury against Bath. In-form Leicester centre Ollie Smith is the other outstanding candidate, and two tries against Newcastle will have boosted his chances. Fly-half Andy Goode is also a strong contender for the match-day 22 after an immaculate kicking display on Saturday. England, fourth in the Six Nations table with zero points, play Ireland, top of the table, in Dublin on 27 February, kick-off 1500 GMT.

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"sport 286.txt Yachvili savours France comeback France scrum-half Dimitri Yachvili praised his team after they fought back to beat England 18-17 in the Six Nations clash at Twickenham. Yachvili kicked all of France's points as they staged a second-half revival. ""We didn't play last week against Scotland and we didn't play in the first half against England"," he said. But we're very proud to beat England at Twickenham. We were just defending in the first half and we said we had to put them under pressure. We did well."" Yachvili admitted erratic kicking from England's Charlie Hodgson and Olly Barkley", who missed six penalties and a drop goal chance between them," had been decisive. ""I know what it's like with kicking. When you miss some it's very hard mentally", but it went well for us," he said. France captain Fabien Pelous insi

sted his side never doubted they could secure their first win against England at Twickenham since 1997. France were 17-6 down at half-time, but Pelous said: "No-one was down at half-time", "we were still confident. ""We said we only had 11 points against us", which was not much. ""The plan was to keep hold of possession and pressure England to lose their composure." France coach Bernard Laporte accepted his side had not played well. ""We know we have to play better to defend the title", he said. I'm not happy we didn't score a try but we're happy because we won."

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"sport 287.txt Laporte tinkers with team France coach Bernard Laporte has made four changes to the starting line-up that beat England for Saturday's Six Nations clash with Wales. He opted for Yannick Nyanga in the back row instead of Grand Slam winner Imanol Harinordoquy", who is back in the squad. Other changes see Julien Laharrague win his first cap at full-back, Aurelien Rougerie return after injury on the wing and Yannick Jauzion in at centre. But Laporte has resisted fan pressure to start Frederic Michalak at fly-half. The dependable Yann Delaigue keeps the number 10 jersey," despite clamours for the flair of Michalak. The 26-year-old Laharrague gets his chance despite playing on the wing for his club Brive. ""We are launching him into the great international level", said team manager Jo Maso. He is young and this is a great opportunity for us and above all for him. ""There are 25 matches left before the World Cup so we must see as many players as possible. The competition is very high and open." Jauzion", France's player of the year in 2004, would probably have played in the first two matches instead of the South African-born Liebeneberg had he been fit. The Stade Toulousain star wins his 23rd cap and is reunited with Damien Traille," with whom he forged an effective midfield in 2004. ""The return of Jauzion is going to be a plus for us", said Laporte. We are going to test him at an international level." Julien Laharrague (Brive)", Aurelien Rougerie (Clermont), Yannick Jauzion (Stade Toulousain), Damien Traille (Biarritz), Christophe Dominici (Stade Francais), Yann Delaigue (Castres), Dimitri Yachvili (Biarritz), Julien Bonnaire (Bourgoin), Yannick Nyanga (Beziers), Serge Betsen (Biarritz), Jerome Thion (Biarritz), Fabien Pelous (Stade Toulousain, captain), Nicolas Mas (Perpignan), Sebastien Bruno (Sale), Sylvain Marconnet (Stade Francais) Replacements: William Servat (Stade Toulousain), Olivier Milloud (Bourgoin), Gregory Lamboley (Stade Toulousain), Imanol Harinordoquy (Biarritz), Pierre Mignoni (Clermont), Frederic Michalak (Stade Toulousain), Jean-Philippe Grandclaude (Perpignan)

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"sport 288.txt Lewsey puzzle over disallowed try England's Josh Lewsey has claimed he was denied a late try in his side's Six Nations loss to Ireland. The Wasps wing insisted he grounded the ball when he was bundled over the line and said referee Jonathan Kaplan had made a wrong decision. ""I'm positive I touched the ball down over the line", Lewsey told BBC Sport. It certainly wasn't a turnover. ""I was driven over and I put the ball on the ground. The whistle went and I let go of the ball." Lewsey added: ""One of the Irish players scooped it back after the whistle and to our surprise the referee then gave a turnover. ""As far as I'm concerned", that incident and Mark Cueto's effort from Charlie Hodgson's cross-field kick that led to what looked like a good try were the two key elements in the game." Cueto was also puzzled as to why his try had been disallowed by Kaplan. ""I don't think I could have been offside for", without a doubt, I was behind the ball, said the Sale player. The move was a planned technique," it was not off the cuff. We rehearse it time and

time again. ""I wouldn't say we were robbed", some decisions go with you and some go against you. Today they went against us and that's tough at international level.""

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"sport 289.txt Fuming Robinson blasts officials England coach Andy Robinson insisted he was ""livid"" after his side were denied two tries in Sunday's 19-13 Six Nations loss to Ireland in Dublin. Mark Cueto's first-half effort was ruled out for offside before the referee spurned TV replays when England crashed over in the dying minutes. ""[I'm] absolutely spitting. I'm livid. There's two tries we've been cost", Robinson told BBC Sport. We've got to go back to technology. I don't know why we didn't." South African referee Jonathan Kaplan ruled that Cueto was ahead of Charlie Hodgson when the fly-half hoisted his cross-field kick for the Sale wing to gather. Kaplan then declined the chance to consult the fourth official when Josh Lewsey took the ball over the Irish line under a pile of bodies for what could have been the game-winning try. ""I think Mark Cueto scored a perfectly legal try and I think he should have gone to the video referee on Josh Lewsey", said Robinson. It is how we use the technology. It is there," and it should be used. ""I am still trying to work out the Cueto try. I have looked at both", and they both looked tries. ""We are very disappointed", and this will hurt," there is no doubt about that. ""We are upset now", but the referee is in charge and he has called it his way and we have got to be able to cope with that. ""We did everything we could have done to win the game. I am very proud of my players and", with a couple of decisions," this could have been a very famous victory. ""I thought we dominated. Matt Stevens had an awesome game at tighthead prop", while the likes of Charlie Hodgson," Martin Corry and Lewis Moody all came through well. ""Josh Lewsey was awesome", and every one of the forwards stood up out there. Given the pressure we were under," credit must go to all the players. ""We have done everything but win a game of rugby", but Ireland are a good side. They defended magnificently and they've got every chance of winning this Six Nations." England have lost their first three matches in this year's Six Nations and four out of their six games since Robinson took over from Sir Clive Woodward in September.

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"sport 290.txt O'Gara revels in Ireland victory Ireland fly-half Ronan O'Gara hailed his side's 19-13 victory over England as a ""special"" win. The Munster number 10 kicked a total of 14 points", including two drop goals," to help keep alive their Grand Slam hopes. He told BBC Sport: ""We made hard work of it but it's still special to beat England. ""I had three chances to win the game but didn't. We have work to do after this but we never take a victory over England lightly." Ireland hooker Shane Byrne echoed O'Gara's comments but admitted the game had been England's best outing in the Six Nations. Byrne said: ""It was a really", really hard game but from one to 15 in our team we worked really," really hard. ""We just had to stick to our defensive pattern", trust ourselves and trust those around us. All round it was fantastic." Ireland captain Brian O'Driscoll", who scored his side's only try," said: ""We are delighted", we felt if we performed well then we would win but with England also having played very well it makes it all the sweeter. ""We did get the bounce of the ball and some days that happens and you've just got to jump on the back of it." Ireland coach Eddie O'Sullivan was surprised that England coach Andy Robinson said he was certain Mark Cueto was onside for a disallowed try just before the break. ""Andy was sitting two yards from me and I couldn't see whether he was offside or not so I don't know how Andy could have known", said O'Su

llivan. What I do know is that England played well and when that happens it makes a very good victory for us. ""We had to defend for long periods and that is all good for the confidence of the team. ""I think our try was very well worked", it was a gem," as good a try as we have scored for a while." O'Sullivan also rejected Robinson's contention England dominated the forward play. ""I think we lost one lineout and they lost four or five so I don't know how that adds up to domination", he said. O'Driscoll also insisted Ireland were happy to handle the pressure of being considered favourites to win the Six Nations title. This season for the first time we have been able to play with the favourites' tag," he said. Hopefully we have proved that today and can continue to keep doing so. ""As for my try it was a move we had worked on all week. There was a bit of magic from Geordan Murphy and it was a great break from Denis Hickie.""

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"sport 291.txt Thomas out of Six Nations Wales captain Gareth Thomas has been ruled out of the rest of the Six Nations with a broken thumb. The full-back will have surgery on Monday after fracturing his thumb in the 24-18 win over France on Saturday. But Welsh legend Phil Bennett insisted Wales can cope without Thomas as they chase a first Grand Slam in 27 years. Bennett told BBC Sport: ""Such is the spirit in the camp", they'll put Kevin Morgan at 15," Rhys Williams at wing and just carry on." Thomas will miss the match against Scotland on 13 March", and what promises to be a huge encounter against the Irish six days later. Bennett added: ""It's a setback. He's a great captain", he leads from the front and the boys love him." Thomas was replaced at half-time by Williams as his side turned around a 15-6 deficit in Paris. ""With Gareth missing I would think Michael Owen will be our captain", said Wales coach Mike Ruddock. He did a great job in the second half in France. He has been vice-captain all along throughout the championship." Wales travel to Edinburgh to take on Scotland in a fortnight and then host Ireland in Cardiff in the final round of matches in what could be the Grand Slam and championship decider. Bennett", an inspirational fly-half for Llanelli and Wales in the 1970s, insisted the national team were entering a new golden period. ""It was a great game and a magnificent result for Wales", Bennett told BBC Radio Five Live's Sportsweek programme. The way this young team are blending, the glory days are on their way back. ""We couldn't get possession early on and France dominated and scored two tries. ""Had they been ruthless", Wales could have gone into the interval 30 points down. But they didn't take their chances. ""Wales defended fairly well but you cannot give that sort of quality ball to good sides. ""The All Blacks would have been ruthless and buried us in the first half. But the character we showed in the second half was quite outstanding.""

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"sport 292.txt Wales coach elated with win Mike Ruddock paid tribute to his Wales side after they came from 15-6 down to beat France 24-18 in the Six Nations. ""After going two tries down in 12 minutes we had to show character", said the national team coach. I didn't have to tell them anything at half-time because those players have stared down the barrel of a gun before. ""They decided they didn't want to do that again and came out fighting. It was a great team effort and we showed great character to come back." Man-of-the-match Stephen Jones", who kicked three penalties, a drop goal and conversion, was ecstatic following after the win at Stade de France. ""It's just a special moment. Two years ago we didn't win a single game in the Six Nations. But we're a very happy camp now", he said. We worked hard as a squad and I'm a proud Welshman. We've got hard matches to come," so we're just happy with the star

t. "" Double try scorer Martyn Williams was keen not to talk about a possible Grand Slam for Wales. ""We've got more self-belief these days. Two or three years ago we might have collapsed after going behind so early. ""There's no mention of a Grand Slam among the players. We've got a tough game against Scotland at Murrayfield. They could bring us crashing down to earth.""  
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"sport 293.txt Newcastle 27-27 Gloucester Newcastle centre Mathew Tait answered his critics as he scored one try and made another", but he could not stop Gloucester grabbing a draw. The Falcons were 22-6 down at the break before Tait, recently axed by England after just one Six Nations outing, inspired his side to a 27-22 lead. A last-gasp touchdown from Luke Narraway pulled the visitors level. But Gloucester missed out on victory when Henry Paul fluffed the conversion and Seti Kiole was denied a late try. Newcastle had a couple of chances at the start of the second half with line-outs in the corner. But they failed to make them count until Joe Shaw found Dave Walder, who released Mark Mayerhofler in his own 22. The former All Black broke clear and popped the ball up for Tait on halfway. He chipped ahead for Michael Stephenson to score through for the try, which Walder converted to give Newcastle a lifeline. They grabbed it with both hands, Mayerhofler breaking through and Tait making a brilliant early run to cut inside and race 30m to score. Walder converted to make it 22-20 before he was just wide with a 40m penalty in the 70th minute. Mayerhofler then scythed through the middle for a try after Hall Charlton popped the ball up, and Walder's conversion took Newcastle 27-22 ahead. With three minutes of normal time left, Narraway was driven over for a try in the corner which levelled the scores at 27-27. Henry missed the conversion but Gloucester nearly won it when Kiole broke through only to be hauled down by Charlton and Tom May. Walder; May, Tait, Mayerhofler, Stephenson; Wilkinson, Grindal; Isaacson, Long, Ward; Gross, Hamilton; McCarthy, Harris, Dowson. Replacements: Peel, Wilson, Thompson, Parling, Sitihi, Charlton, Shaw. Goodridge; Garvey, Simpson-Daniel, Fanolua, Kiole; Paul, Gomarsall; Wood, Curnier, Powell; Eustace, Brown; Forrest, Buxton, Balding. Replacements: Elloway, Sigley, Cornwell, Narraway, Page, Davies, Mauger.  
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"sport 294.txt London Irish 19-33 Wasps Wasps made light of the absence of several internationals to sink London Irish with a trio of second-half tries. Rob Hoadley returned to haunt his old club at the Madejski Stadium", scoring the opening try in the 43rd minute. Tom Voyce powered through the Irish defence for Wasps' second try before Richard Birkett went over unchallenged. Mark van Gisbergen added 18 points. Irish replied with three penalties and a Mark Mapletoft drop goal before Scott Staniforth ran in a consolation try. Barry Everitt, who replaced Mapletoft late in the game, added the conversion to become the fourth Premiership player to reach 1,000 points. He joins Jonny Wilkinson, Tim Stimpson and Paul Grayson in achieving that target. Wasps piled on the pressure in an attempt to grab a fourth try which would have secured them a bonus point," but they were denied by some desperate defending from Irish. Director of rugby Warren Gatland revealed that harsh words at half-time inspired his Wasps side to raise their game after the restart. ""They got a roasting and it was a good second-half performance when they came out and played to instructions", he said. Gatland also singled out stand-in flankers Tom Rees and John Hart for special praise. They did very well. The back row played some fantastic rugby," he added. London Irish coach Gary Gold felt the result exposed his side's lack of consistency. Irish trailed by just two points at the break and Gol

d said: For 55 minutes we lived with the best but we have got to get back for the full 80 minutes." "Gold will now turn his attention to next week's Powergen Cup semi-final at struggling Leeds. " "We've got a good chance but with Leeds facing possible relegation they're going to come out firing", he added. Horak, Staniforth, Penney, Nordt, Bishop; Mapletoft, Edwards; Hatley, van der Walt, Hardwick; Kennedy, Casey; Gustard, Dawson, Murphy. Replacements: Everitt for Mapletoft (53), Hodgson for Edwards (77), Wheatley for Hatley (71), Paice for van der Walt (60), Strudwick for Kennedy (60), Danaher for Gustard (66), Reid for Murphy (47) Van Gisbergen; Voyce, Erinle, Hoadley, Roberts; King, Richards; Payne, Greening, Dowd; Shaw, Purdy; Hart, Rees, Dallaglio. Replacements: Priscott for Roberts (71), Green for Dowd (71), Skivington for Shaw (71), Birkett for Hart (57), Gotting for Rees (39). Not used: Fury, Brooks

sport 295.txt Euan Murray returns to Scotland fold Euan Murray has been named in the Scotland training squad after an eight-week ban, ahead of Saturday's Six Nations match with Ireland. The Glasgow forward's ban for stamping ended on 2 February. I'm just happy to be back playing and be involved with the squad", said Murray on Monday. Hopefully I can get a couple of games under my belt and I might have a chance of playing later in the Six Nations. I'm just glad to be part of it all." Backs: Mike Blair (Edinburgh Rugby), Andy Craig (Glasgow Rugby), Chris Cusiter (The Borders), Simon Danielli (The Borders), Marcus Di Rollo (Edinburgh Rugby), Phil Godman (Edinburgh Rugby), Calvin Howarth (Glasgow Rugby), Ben Hinshelwood (Worcester Warriors), Andrew Henderson (Glasgow Rugby), Rory Lamont (Glasgow Rugby), Sean Lamont (Glasgow Rugby), Dan Parks (Glasgow Rugby), Chris Paterson (Edinburgh Rugby), Gordon Ross (Leeds Tykes), Hugo Southwell (Edinburgh Rugby), Simon Webster (Edinburgh Rugby) Forwards: Ross Beattie (Northampton Saints), Gordon Bulloch (captain, Glasgow Rugby), David Callam (Edinburgh Rugby), Bruce Douglas (The Borders), Jon Dunbar (Leeds Tykes), Iain Fullarton (Saracens), Stuart Grimes (Newcastle Falcons), Nathan Hines (Edinburgh Rugby), Allister Hogg (Edinburgh Rugby), Gavin Kerr (Leeds Tykes), Nick Lloyd (Saracens), Scott Lawson (Glasgow Rugby), Euan Murray (Glasgow Rugby), Scott Murray (Edinburgh Rugby), Jon Petrie (Glasgow Rugby), Robbie Russell (London Irish), Tom Smith (Northampton Saints), Jason White (Sale Sharks).

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"sport 296.txt Fear will help France - Laporte France coach Bernard Laporte believes his team will be scared going into their game with England on Sunday", but claims it will work in their favour. The French turned in a stuttering performance as they limped to a 16-9 win against Scotland in the opening match of the Six Nations on Saturday. " "We will go to Twickenham with a little fear and it'll give us a boost", said the French coach. He added: We are never good enough when we are favourites." "Meanwhile", Perpignan centre Jean-Philippe Granclaude is delighted to have received his first call-up to the France squad. " "It's incredible", the youngster said. I was not expecting it at all. " "Playing with the France team has always been a dream and now it has come true and I am about to face England at Twickenham in the Six Nations." " La porte will announce his starting line-up on Wednesday at the French team's training centre in Marcoussis", near Paris.

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"sport 297.txt Davies favours Gloucester future Wales hooker Mefin Davies is likely to stay with English side Gloucester despite reported interest from the Neath-Swansea Ospreys. BBC Wales understands the Ospreys are interested in the 32-year-old", but that he would prefer to stay where he is. Davies, one of the stars of Saturday's RBS Six Nations win over England, is

only on a year contract at Kingsholm. But the hooker has proved his worth to the Zurich Premiership side and is likely to get a new deal next season. The summer demise of the Celtic Warriors region left Davies in the cold and forced him to take a semi-professional contract with Neath RFC. Although he got match time with the Ospreys at the request of the Wales management," he admitted before his move to Gloucester that he was angry with the way he was treated. ""The WRU didn't give me any help off the field", it was very disappointing, Davies said at the time. It was a hard time throughout the summer," then deciding whether to accept an offer from Stade Francais which would have ended my Wales career.""  
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sport 298.txt Ref stands by Scotland decisions The referee from Saturday's France v Scotland Six Nations match has defended the officials' handling of the game after criticism by Matt Williams. The Scotland coach said his side were robbed of victory by poor decisions made by the officials. But Nigel Williams said: ""I'm satisfied the game was handled correctly." Meanwhile", Matt Williams will not be punished by the Scottish Rugby Union for allegedly using bad language in his comments about the officials. He denies having done so. Nonetheless," he was furious about several decisions that he felt denied his side a famous victory. But Nigel Williams told the Scottish Daily Mail: ""I spoke to Matt Williams at the post-match dinner. ""He made no mention of the disallowed try or any other refereeing decisions whatsoever. ""If Matt has issues with the match officials", then he is very welcome to phone me and discuss them. ""Ultimately there is a match assessor at every international game to give an impartial and objective view of the performance of the officials. ""That is the beginning and end of it.""  
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/// sport 299.txt Robinson ready for difficult task England coach Andy Robinson faces the first major test of his tenure as he tries to get back to winning ways after the Six Nations defeat by Wales. Robinson is likely to make changes in the back row and centre after the 11-9 loss as he contemplates Sunday's set-to with France at Twickenham. Lewis Moody and Martin Corry could both return after missing the game with hamstring and shoulder problems. And the midfield pairing of Mathew Tait and Jamie Noon is also under threat. Olly Barkley immediately allowed England to generate better field position with his kicking game after replacing debutant Tait just before the hour. The Bath fly-half-cum-centre is likely to start against France", with either Tait or Noon dropping out. Tait, given little opportunity to shine in attack, received praise from Robinson afterwards," even if the coach admitted Cardiff was an ""unforgiving place"" for the teenage prodigy. Robinson now has a tricky decision over whether to withdraw from the firing line", after just one outing, a player he regards as central to England's future. Tait himself, at least outwardly," appeared unaffected by the punishing treatment dished out to him by Gavin Henson in particular. ""I want more of that definitely", he said. Hopefully I can train hard this week and get selected for next week but we'll have to look at the video and wait and see. ""We were playing on our own 22 for a lot of the first half so it was quite difficult. I thought we defended reasonably well but we've just got to pick it up for France." His Newcastle team-mate Noon hardly covered himself in glory in his first major Test. He missed a tackle on Michael Owen in the build-up to Wales' try", conceded a penalty at the breakdown, was turned over in another tackle and fumbled Gavin Henson's cross-kick into touch, all inside the first quarter. His contribution improved in the second half, but England cle

arly need more of a playmaker in the inside centre role. Up front, the line-out remains fallible, despite a superb performance from Chris Jones, whose athleticism came to the fore after stepping into the side for Moody. It is more likely the Leicester flanker will return on the open side for the more physical challenge posed by the French forwards, with Andy Hazell likely to make way. Lock Ben Kay also justified his recall with an impressive all-round display on his return to the side, but elsewhere England positives were thin on the ground.

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"sport 300.txt Bell set for England debut Bath prop Duncan Bell has been added to England's 30-man squad to face Ireland in the RBS Six Nations. And with Phil Vickery sidelined for at least six weeks with a broken arm and Julian White out with a neck injury", Bell could make his England debut. Bell, 30, had set his sights on an international career with Wales. But last December, the International Rugby Board confirmed that he could only be eligible for England as he had travelled on tour with them in 1998. England coach Andy Robinson could take a gamble and call inexperienced Sale Sharks prop Andrew Sheridan into his front row. But Sheridan favours the loosehead side of the scrum and a more likely scenario is for uncapped Bell - who was among the try scorers when England A beat France A 30-20 nine days ago - to be drafted in. Robinson also has an injury worry over centre Olly Barkley, who withdrew from Bath's starting line-up to face Gloucester last weekend. He was due to have a hospital scan on Monday, while Gloucester centre Henry Paul, who started at fly-half against Bath, limped out at Kingsholm because of an ankle problem. Despite Barkley's three missed penalties in the 18-17 defeat against France, he is expected to retain his place at inside centre, although Leicester's in-form prospect Ollie Smith would be an obvious replacement. Bath coach John Connolly rates Barkley as no better than a 50/50 chance to make the Dublin trip. Uncapped fly-half Andy Goode has been named in a 30-man training squad for the Ireland game, and he strengthened his selection claims by kicking 28 points during Leicester's record 83-10 win against Newcastle on Sunday. England's players are due to meet at their Surrey training base on Monday.

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"sport 301.txt O'Sullivan quick to hail Italians Ireland coach Eddie O'Sullivan heaped praise on Italy after seeing his side stutter to a 28-17 victory in Rome. "It was a hell of a tough game", said O'Sullivan. We struggled in the first half because we hadn't the football. "Italy played really well. They handled the ball well in terms of kicking it", if that's not a oxymoron. "We said before the game that it might take until 10 minutes from the end for this game to be won", and that's how it turned out." Ireland struggled to cope with Italy's fierce start and were indebted to skipper Brian O'Driscoll, who set up tries for Geordan Murphy and Peter Stringer. "We had our first attack in the Italian half after 22 minutes", said O'Sullivan. We had a good return," with three first-half possessions in their half and we scored twice. "The second half was about spending more time in their half." Scrum-half Peter Stringer was also glad that Ireland escaped with a victory. "All credit to them", he told BBC Sport. We knew it would be tough coming to Rome. They always give us a tough game here and they showed a lot of spirit. "They had a lot of ball in the first half but we got a few scores when we got into their 22."

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"sport 302.txt Italy 17-28 Ireland Two moments of magic from Brian O'Driscoll guided Ireland to a workmanlike victory against Italy. A

pair of classic outside breaks from the Ireland captain set up tries for Georda n Murphy and Peter Stringer. Italy led 9-8 early in the second half but Stringe r's try gave Ireland a lead they never lost. The hosts cut the gap to 18-12 wit h 10 minutes left and nearly scored through Ludovico Nitoglia", but Denis Hicki e's try ensured an Irish victory. Italy came flying out of the blocks and took the lead through a Luciano Orquera penalty after seven minutes. It could have been better for the hosts but the fly-half missed two kickable penalties and Ir eland drew level with a Ronan O'Gara penalty midway through the first half. The Italians were driving at the heart of the Irish defence and, for the first quar ter, the Irish pack struggled to secure any ball for their talented backs. Whe n they finally did, just before the half-hour mark, O'Driscoll promptly created a sparkling try for Murphy. The Ireland captain ran a dummy scissors and made a magical outside break before drawing the full-back and putting the diving Murph y in at the corner. O'Gara missed the twice-taken conversion and the visitors f ound themselves trailing once again. Roland de Marigny took over the kicking du ties for Italy from the hapless Orquera, and he landed a penalty either side of the break to edge Italy into a 9-8 lead. The only Ireland player offering a re al threat was O'Driscoll, and it was his break that set up the second try for t he visitors. Shane Horgan threw an overhead pass as he was about to be forced i nto touch and Stringer scooted over, with O'Gara landing the tricky conversion. A penalty apiece saw Ireland leading 18-12 as the game entered the final quarte r, but they were lucky to survive when Italy launched a series of attacks. Wing er Nitoglia dropped the ball as he reached for the line and Italy nearly rumble d over from a driving maul. An O'Gara penalty put Ireland more than a converte d try ahead and they made the game safe when Hickie latched onto an inside pass from Murphy and crossed for a converted try. O'Driscoll limped off late on, joi ning centre partner Gordon D'Arcy on the sidelines, and the final word went to Italy. Prop Martin Castrogiovanni powered over for a try which was fitting rewa rd for an Italian pack which had kept the Irish under pressure throughout. De Marigny; Mi Bergamasco, Canale, Masi, Nitoglia; Orquera, Troncon; Lo Cicero, On garo, Castrogiovanni; Dellape, Bortolami; Persico, Ma Bergamasco, Parisse. Per ugini, Intoppa, Del Fava, Dal Maso, Griffen, Pozzebon, Robertson. Murphy, Horg an, O'Driscoll, D'Arcy, Hickie, O'Gara, Stringer, Corrigan, Byrne, Hayes, O'Kel ly, O'Connell, S Easterby, Leamy, Foley. Sheahan, Horan, O'Callaghan, Miller, G Easterby, Humphreys, Dempsey. P O'Brien (New Zealand)

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"sport 303.txt Jones happy with Henson heroics Wales fly-half Stephen Jones admitted he was happy to hand Gavin Henson responsibility fo r taking the match-winning kick against England. Jones had missed three earlie r shots at goal when Wales", 9-8 down," were awarded a long-range penalty with four minutes left in Cardiff. ""I knew the percentages of Gavin reaching it wer e far higher than me", Jones said. When he said he wanted it," there were no pr oblems." Jones had seen a long-range effort fall a whisker under the crossbar on the hour", " before Charlie Hodgson put England in front with 10 minutes lef t. ""I looked at where it was and I knew I was going to struggle to make it", J ones added. I said to Gareth (Thomas," the Wales captain) 'This is touch and g o.' It was out of my range and obviously Gavin is phenomenal when it comes to d istance. He was confident and fancied it. ""There were no questions that he'd m iss it the way he was playing. He had a superb game." Jones was happy to hail Henson's heroic contribution to Wales' first win over England in Cardiff since 1993. ""Physically he's a specimen: he's a balanced player", he glides when he runs and obviously he's got a great kicking game as well, Jones said. His defe nce was superb," he made some great hits and he had a great game. ""I'm glad h

e's Welsh." "Victory over England for the first time since 1999 will no doubt fuel expectations of what Wales might achieve in this year's Six Nations. But they now face three away fixtures in Italy", "France and Scotland before completing their campaign against Ireland in Cardiff. " "People all over the world want to see Wales back at the top table of world rugby", "said a proud coach Mike Ruddock. But we are not there yet. The next step is finding the consistency to get further wins. " "We have to travel this week and we can't afford to get too giddy about this result. " "We have got to be professional and keep focused on facing Italy." "None more so than Henson", "who can now expect to have the same sort of spotlight thrust upon him as the likes of Jonny Wilkinson and Brian O'Driscoll. The confident 23-year-old is undaunted by the prospect of dealing with such weighty expectations however. " "I'm the sort of player who likes pressure on me", "he said. It makes me more concentrated and I think I perform better under more pressure. " "I set a high standard against England and I've got to back it up next week. " "Two years ago when we played Italy I wasn't involved and we lost", "so we've got to put that right next week."

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"sport 304.txt Double injury blow strikes Wales Wales centre Sonny Parker and number eight Ryan Jones will miss Saturday's game with Italy because of injury. Parker has not recovered from a trapped nerve in his neck that kept him out of the win over England", and Tom Shanklin is expected to continue at centre. Jones damaged his collar bone after coming on as a replacement against England and joins flanker Colin Charvis (foot injury) on the sidelines. Meanwhile, Mike Ruddock may make Gavin Henson his first-choice kicker in Rome. The centre was Wales' hero in the 11-9 Six Nations win over England, landing a huge late penalty from wide out to clinch the game. First-choice kicker Stephen Jones handed over responsibility because of Henson's greater kicking range, "but the fly-half had already missed a number of shots at goal. " "Our first aim was to get Gavin settled into the team", but giving him the kicks is something we'll talk about in selection this week, Wales coach Mike Ruddock told BBC Sport Wales. Henson himself says he is relishing all the media hype that has been heaped on him since last Saturday's game. I thrive on it and think it makes me perform better, he said. I'm glad it's a short week before the Italy game. There was so much build-up before England," but we fly out to Rome on Thursday and we'll be back playing again."

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"sport 305.txt Kirwan demands Italy consistency Italy coach John Kirwan has challenged his side to match the performance they produced in pushing Ireland close when they meet Wales on Saturday. Despite losing 28-17 in Sunday's Six Nations encounter", the Italians confirmed their continuing improvement. " "Our goal is to match every side we face and against Ireland we showed we could do that", "said Kirwan. But the most important thing is that we build on that performance when we play Wales on Saturday." "Italy's half-backs had a mixed afternoon", "with recalled scrum-half Alessandro Troncon impressing but fly-half Luciano Orquera having an off-day with the boot. Kirwan said: " "I was very happy with Troncon. He had an incredible game - he was very good in attack and defence. " "Orquera's kicking was off but he showed great courage in defence. " "He also followed the game plan. We have to give him confidence because he has the capability to do well."

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"sport 306.txt Fit-again Betsen in France squad France have brought flanker Serge Betsen back into their squad to face England at Twickenham on Sunday. But the player", who missed the victory over Scotland through injury," must attend a disciplinary hearing on Wednesday after being cited by Wasps. ""Serge has a good case so we are confident he will play"," said France coach Bernard Laporte. The inexperienced Nicolas Mas, Jimmy Marlu and Jean-Philippe Grandclaude are also included in a 22-man squad. The trio have been called up after Pieter de Villiers, Ludovic Valbon and Aurelien Rougerie all picked up injuries in France's 16-9 win on Saturday. Laporte said he was confident that Betsen would be cleared by the panel investigating his alleged trip that broke Wasps centre Stuart Abbott's leg. If he was to be suspended", we would call up Imanol Harinordoquy or Thomas Lievremont," said Laporte, who has dropped Patrick Tabacco. We missed Serge badly against Scotland. He has now recovered from his thigh injury and played on Saturday with Biarritz." France's regular back-row combination of Betsen", Harinordoquy and Olivier Magne were all missing from France's side at the weekend because of injury. Laporte is expected to announce France's starting line-up on Wednesday. Forwards: Nicolas Mas, Sylvain Marconnet, Olivier Milloud, William Servat, Sebastien Bruno, Fabien Pelous, Jerome Thion, Gregory Lamboley, Serge Betsen, Julien Bonnaire, Sebastien Chabal, Yannick Nyanga. Backs: Dimitri Yachvili, Pierre Mignoni, Frederic Michalak, Yann Delaigue, Damien Traille, Brian Liebenberg, Jean-Philippe Grandclaude, Christophe Domini, Jimmy Marlu, Pepito Elhorga.

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"sport 307.txt Wales critical of clumsy Grewcock Wales coach Mike Ruddock says England lock Danny Grewcock needs to review his actions after he kicked Dwayne Peel. Trouble flared at a ruck in the first half of Wales' 11-9 win in Cardiff as Grewcock came recklessly over the top with his boot"," leaving Peel bloodied. Grewcock was sin-binned with Wales captain Gareth Thomas for retaliation. ""It's up to the citing commissioner", said Ruddock. I'm not saying it's deliberate," but Grewcock did a similar thing for Bath against Leinster." Last June Grewcock was banned from rugby for two months for reckless use of a boot in a match against New Zealand. Six years earlier", also in New Zealand," Grewcock became only the second England player to be sent off in Tests. The player himself and his captain Jason Robinson have both said that the clash with Peel was accidental. ""If the ball is at the back of the ruck and I feel I can step over and disrupt it then I will do that", said Grewcock. But Ruddock feels that the England man should be more careful. The boy himself should look at his actions, it was a clumsy piece of footwork, he said. He's a great player and I don't want to knock him," we won't be calling for the match commissioner to review the incident. ""I'm not going to go too far with the lad. It could just be a clumsy action and Dwayne had just a minor cut. ""The referee's interpretation was that Grewcock was attempting to step over the ruck."" Ruddock also warned his RBS 6 Nations Championship rivals that his team can make massive improvements. ""We created more opportunities and also squandered them by taking more contact and playing more individually", said the coach. We've looked through things on the video debrief and there were definitely a lot of chances that we wasted." In the forthcoming games", Ruddock may use penalty hero Gavin Henson as his first-choice kicker in place of Stephen Jones. ""Our first aim was to get Gavin settled into the team", but it's something we'll talk about in selection this week," said Ruddock.

sport 308.txt Henson stakes early Lions claim The Six Nations may be a glittering prize in itself but every player from the four Home Unions will also have one eye on a possible trip to New Zealand with the Lions th

is summer. The player who staked the biggest claim for a place in the starting XV over the weekend was Gavin Henson. He's very confident. You just had to listen to his interview afterwards - he beamed with confidence - but although there's an element of arrogance it's good arrogance. He certainly showed some nice touches. He once showed a clean pair of heels to Mathew Tait when he got outside him, his defence was very good and he made some great kicks out of hand. And that's without even mentioning his majestic match-winning penalty. But I think we need to wait and see what happens because he needs to be put to the test. He needs to come up against Brian O'Driscoll or a big French midfield. Wales fly-half Stephen Jones was another player who impressed me. He gave good direction, he was very confident and he was a nice general for his side. He showed he can control a game. With Jonny Wilkinson not playing at the moment due to injury the number 10 shirt could be up for grabs and Jones, or maybe even Henson, could make the Lions team at fly-half. Jones stuck his hand up and he certainly looks a better bet than Charlie Hodgson after Saturday's game. Some of the Wales forwards surprised me because I thought they would be out-muscled in the tight five. England prop Julian White is a capable player but when it comes down to selection Gethin Jenkins is now going to have the upper hand because he came out on top. However, I still think White and Phil Vickery will be in the frame. Some English players did their cause no harm. I thought Joe Worsley had a solid game and Jason Robinson and Josh Lewsey both did nothing wrong. But it looked too soon for young Mathew Tait and I think it will be a while before we see him again. Despite being written off beforehand several Scots caught my eye against France. Tom Smith has been there and done it before, but the likes of Chris Cusiter, Jason White and Ally Hogg all made their mark. Hogg made a couple of good runs while White had a pretty robust game - his defence is right up there. Cusiter looked very lively and he could be a very good option for Lions coach Sir Clive Woodward. The star of Ireland's win over Italy in Rome looks like a certainty to make the starting XV against New Zealand. Brian O'Driscoll is a class act. He ran some good lines against Italy, made the breaks and fed his outside backs, although Italy defended man on man which made it easy for him. Gordon D'Arcy was unlucky to go off injured early on but I think you could get a Henson, D'Arcy, O'Driscoll combination in the Lions midfield. Paul O'Connell just needs to add a hard edge to his game and Malcolm O'Kelly keeps on going and seems to be putting his hand up, while Shane Byrne seems to be a lively character. But they will be a bit worried after the Italian pack drove them off their own ball on Sunday, although I used to play in Italy and I know how difficult it can be. One player who didn't impress me was Wales scrum-half Dwayne Peel. He choked late on in the second half when Wales were trailing. They had good possession and he kicked the ball away - I wouldn't want him as my Lions scrum-half after that.

sport 309.txt Murphy: That was a bruising battle That's what I call a tough game. It was very physical and fair play to the Italians they made us work very hard for our victory. Their organisation was very, very good and they proved again that they are getting better and better as the years go by. It is by far the strongest Italian team that we have faced. We knew all along that we would be a huge threat particularly the first game in the Championship. It was not like the days gone by when you could get scores on the board early. We had to work our socks off and try and build our scores gradually. It was really hard work out there and the players have plenty of bumps and bruises to prove it. I'm not too bad, but there are one or two others who will be feeling it a bit on Monday morning. In the backs, we were not frustrated at such, but the new rucking laws were a little bit problematical. The different interpretations between the referee and the players was a little difficult. But we managed

ed to get the ball in our hands and I got a try near the end of the first half. It's always good to score. It was great work by Brian and I always knew I had scored even though it went upstairs to the video referee. Eddie (O'Sullivan) was very calm at half-time even though we were only 8-6 ahead. He spelled out what we needed to do and advocated getting the ball out of our own territory. That new ruck law made it a bit more difficult to get out of our own half. We were penalised a lot at the breakdown, and if they had kicked all their chances at goal we would have been behind at the break. So really we went back to playing a territory game and simplifying things and having more patience on the ball. Everyone was a little down after the game following the injuries to Brian and Gordon. As yet we do not know the full extent of the injuries, but it does not that good. Now we have to focus on Scotland and only six days to recover. It's a big ask after such a bruising encounter. I was very impressed the way the Scots played against the French on Saturday. It could so easily have gone their way but for a couple of decisions. We will be under no illusions it is going to be tough for us. In the meantime, when in Rome . . . .

sport 310.txt Wales make two changes for France Wales coach Mike Ruddock has made two changes from the team that beat Italy 38-8 for Saturday's trip to France. Kevin Morgan takes over from his injured Newport-Gwent Dragons colleague Hal Luscombe on the right wing. And in the pack Neath-Swansea Ospreys forward Ryan Jones is preferred at blindside flanker to Jonathan Thomas. Thomas, a try-scorer in Rome, drops down to the bench instead of Ian Gough, while Cardiff back Rhys Williams steps up in place of Morgan. Luscombe is sidelined by a hamstring problem sustained during the Six Nations game against Italy last weekend. However, the experienced and in-form Morgan was already pushing hard for a start at Stade de France. Due to his impressive performances from the bench", Kevin was very much in the selection mix anyway, and the unfortunate injury to Hal gives him the chance to start, said Ruddock. Now that Ryan Jones has recovered from injury," we have increased the options in the back row. ""Jonathan Thomas is unlucky to lose his spot after performing well against Italy and scoring a try"," but such is the competition for places that every position is debated in detail. ""For this particular game", we felt we might not always be afforded the open spaces out wide we were able to exploit against Italy," so an extra big ball-carrier in the back-row is thought to be necessary on this occasion. ""Obviously", it's a 22-man game these days," and there is every chance that Jonathan will be making an impact from the bench." Wales have beaten France on two of their last three visits to Paris"," and another victory this time around would keep them firmly on course for a first Five or Six Nations title triumph since 1994. ""Graham Henry (former Wales coach) said a couple of years ago that we should 'be bold' when going to France", and he was proved right, said Ruddock. That is a great way to approach the game," and something we will further endorse with the players this week." G Thomas (Toulouse", capt); K Morgan (Newport-Gwent), T Shanklin (Cardiff), G Henson (Neath-Swansea), S Williams (Neath-Swansea); S Jones (Clermont Auvergne), D Peel (Llanelli); G Jenkins (Cardiff), M Davies (Gloucester), A Jones; (Neath-Swansea), B Cockbain (Neath-Swansea), R Sidoli (Cardiff); R Jones (Neath-Swansea), M Williams (Cardiff), M Owen (Newport-Gwent). Replacements: R McBryde (Llanelli), J Yapp (Cardiff), J Thomas (Neath-Swansea), R Sowden-Taylor (Cardiff), G Cooper (Newport-Gwent), C Sweeney (Newport-Gwent), R Williams (Cardiff).

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"sport 311.txt Ireland surge past Scots Ireland maintained their Six Nations Grand Slam ambitions with an impressive victory over Scotland at Murrayfield. Hugo Southwell's try gave the Scots an early 8-0 lead but s

cores from locks Malcolm O'Kelly and Paul O'Connell put the visitors in command by half-time. A third try from wing Denis Hickie and third penalty from Ronan O'Gara", who kicked 13 points, extended the lead. Jon Petrie scored a second try for Scotland but late scores from John Hayes and Gavin Duffy sealed victory. After two hard-earned away victories, Eddie O'Sullivan' side can now look forward to welcoming England to Lansdowne Road in a fortnight. Scotland will try to give their coach Matt Williams a first Six Nations victory when Italy come to Edinburgh, but they again struggled to turn pressure into points. The home side started with tremendous intensity and dominated territory and possession in the opening 10 minutes. A powerful charge from flanker Jason White was carried on by Ali Hogg and when Ireland conceded a penalty close to their own line, Scotland kicked it to touch. The Irish defence foiled the home side on that occasion, but a stray hand in a ruck allowed Paterson to stroke over a penalty in the eighth minute. If that was a paltry reward for their early pressure, Scotland got the try they deserved when Paterson's searing break and Andy Craig's pass sent Southwell streaking to the right corner. Paterson was off target with the conversion and fly-half Dan Parks then missed a presentable drop-goal attempt. Ireland got themselves on the scoreboard with an O'Gara penalty and by the 24th minute the visitors were ahead. Stuart Grimes pulled down O'Kelly at a line-out, Ireland kicked the penalty to touch and from the set-piece, the big lock was driven over by the rest of his pack. O'Gara added the conversion and a further penalty, after Shane Horgan almost grabbed a second try from O'Gara's chip to the corner, only for the ball to spill from his hand. But Ireland still delivered a hammer blow to Scotland's hopes just before the interval. O'Connell - skipper in the absence of Brian O'Driscoll - powered through Parks' weak tackle after a free-kick from a scrummage to burrow over. Scotland suffered a further blow on the resumption when Ireland flanker Johnny O'Connor won another vital turnover, and O'Gara's basketball pass sent Hickie over in the left corner. O'Gara converted and then thumped over a 40m penalty to give the visitors a commanding 28-8 advantage. Scotland looked bereft of ideas but a half-break from Paterson sparked them back to life just before the hour. Stuart Grimes won a line-out and a well-worked move saw Petrie scuttle round the side of the ruck to dive over in the left corner. But it proved a false dawn, and Ireland reasserted their authority in the final 10 minutes. Peter Stringer and O'Kelly combined to put giant prop Hayes over in the right corner before replacement Gavin Duffy scorched away on the left, David Humphreys adding the final flourish with a touchline conversion. : C Paterson; S Danielli, A Craig, H Southwell, S Lamont; D Parks, C Cusiter; T Smith, G Bulloch (capt), G Kerr; S Grimes, S Murray; J White, A Hogg, J Petrie. R Russell, B Douglas, N Hines, J Dunbar, M Blair, G Ross, B Hinshelwood. G Murphy; G Dempsey, S Horgan, K Maggs, D Hickie, R O'Gara, P Stringer; R Corrigan, S Byrne, J Hayes, M O'Kelly, P O'Connell, S Easterby, J O'Connor, A Foley. F Sheahan, M Horan, D O'Callaghan, E Miller, G Easterby, D Humphreys, G Duffy. Joel Jutge (France)

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"sport 312.txt Wales win in Rome Wales secured their first away win in the RBS Six Nations for nearly four years with a six-try victory in Rome. Tries from Jonathan Thomas", Tom Shanklin and Martyn Williams gave the visitors a 19-5 half-time advantage. Luciano Orquera did reply with one for Italy but second-half efforts from Brent Cockbain, Shane Williams and Robert Sidoli sealed victory. Fly-half Stephen Jones added four conversions as Wales maintained their superb start to this year's tournament. Starting full of confidence after their victory over England, the visitors scored the opening try after just four minutes. Diminutive wing Shane Williams fielded a kick ahead and danc

d past the onrushing Andrea Masi and Aaron Persico into the Italian half. His pass to Tom Shanklin appeared forward but when the centre was held up short, the ball was switched left and Michael Owen's long cut-out pass gave the lurking Thomas an easy run-in. Stephen Jones, who retained the kicking duties despite Gavin Henson's heroics against England, slotted an excellent conversion from wide out. Wales twice threatened further scores but failed to find the crucial pass, and Italy hit back out of the blue in the 11th minute. Henson, sporting gold boots rather than the silver variety that did for England, beat two players with ease out on the left touchline. But his attempted chip ahead was charged down by Orquera, who snaffled the loose ball and hared away from halfway to score in the right corner. With the Welsh line-out stuttering and Italy twice turning the visitors' scrum, the home side's forward power brought them back into it. But a clever high kick from Henson almost brought a try for Hal Luscombe when Roland de Marigny and Ludovico Nitoglia made a hash of claiming it as the ball bounced into touch. Wales regained control with a second try in the 21st minute, Henson lobbing up a high kick to the left corner where Shanklin jumped higher than Nitoglia to dot down his 15th Test try. Jones was unable to convert and De Marigny then hit the upright with a penalty attempt for Italy. Henson was also narrowly short with a long-range effort at goal, but Wales ended the half with a vital third score to give themselves some breathing space. Henson sent Luscombe streaking away and when he off-loaded to Martyn Williams, the flanker showed his nous to ground the ball against the padding of the post, Jones adding the conversion. Italy, who lost flanker Mauro Bergamasco with a head knock before half-time, built up a head of steam on the resumption. De Marigny landed a penalty to make it 19-8 and a Nitoglia break through the middle threatened a try only for the move to break down with a knock-on. But Wales put the outcome beyond doubt with two superb tries in four minutes before the hour. Their fourth after 53 minutes was sparked by another mazy run from Shane Williams, who beat several players with ease, and finished with a powerful angled run from lock Cockbain. Before Italy could recover from that blow, a strong surge from Gareth Thomas and great off-loads from Martyn Williams and replacement Kevin Morgan saw Shane Williams scamper over. With Jones converting both for a 33-8 lead, Wales had the luxury of sending on five more replacements for the final quarter. The icing on the cake came with a sixth try after more superb support work, Shane Williams and Ceri Sweeney combining to send Sidoli over in the left corner. The only downside for Wales was a hamstring injury suffered by Luscombe. But after back-to-back wins at the start of the tournament for the first time in 11 years, they will travel to Paris in a fortnight looking like genuine contenders.

R de Marigny; Mirco Bergamasco, W Pozzebon, A Masi, L Nitoglia; L Orquera, A Troncon; A Lo Cicero, F Ongaro, M Castrogiovanni, S Dellape, M Bortolami (capt), A Persico, Mauro Bergamasco, S Parisse. G Intoppa, S Perugini, CA del Fava, D dal Maso, P Griffen, M Barbini, KP Robertson. G Thomas (capt); H Luscombe, T Shanklin, G Henson, S Williams; S Jones, D Peel; G Jenkins, M Davies, A Jones; B Cockbain, R Sidoli; J Thomas, M Williams, M Owen. R McBryde, J Yapp, I Gough, R Sowden-Taylor, G Cooper, C Sweeney, K Morgan. Andrew Cole (Australia).

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"sport 313.txt White prepared for battle Tough-scrummagin g prop Julian White is expecting a resurgent Wales to give him a rough ride in England's Six Nations opener in Cardiff on Saturday. The Leicester tight-head is in the form of his life"," making the England number three shirt his own. But he knows Wales will put his technique under immense scrutiny. ""The Welsh scrum is a force to be reckoned with"" he told BBC Sport. They have made a lot of changes for the better over the last few years." White is also impressed with

the Welsh pack's strength in depth. ""Gethin Jenkins is starting at loose-head for them. He has played a bit at tight-head but I think his favoured position is loose-head and he is very good," he added. The 31-year-old has made a massive contribution to the England and Leicester cause of late and is arguably the form tight-head prop in the world. He destroyed South Africa's Os du Randt in the scrum at Twickenham last autumn to give England the platform for an impressive 32-16 victory. Leicester, who signed White from Bristol when the West Country side were relegated from the Zurich Premiership in the summer of 2003, have also been aided by White's presence this season. The Tigers are sitting pretty at the top of the Premiership table and have also booked their place in the last eight of the Heineken Cup. I am pleased with my form", he said. But my form is helped by the people I play with at Leicester - people like Martin Johnson and Graham Rowntree. ""It's been a good season so far and to be in the starting XV for the first game of the Six Nations is what every player wants. ""I am delighted with the way things have gone but we have to get it right this weekend." White is now one of the more experienced members of the England squad which takes to the field on Saturday. Injuries have taken their toll and coach Andy Robinson has been deprived of Richard Hill", Jonny Wilkinson, Martin Corry, Mike Tindall, Will Greenwood and Stuart Abbott. And with 27 caps and a World Cup winner's medal to his name," White is now in a position to offer his experience to youngsters such as centres Matthew Tait and Jamie Noon. ""I don't know how much experience a tight-head can give a centre but you are there to give them a pat on the back if things go wrong or to be there if they want to talk in any way", he added. When I first came into the squad," people like Jason Leonard and Martin Johnson were the first to come over and talk through things and help out.

""It gives you a lot of confidence when people like that speak to you. ""I was in awe of a lot of them so to sit down and speak with them and realise you are on the same wavelength is good." White missed the vast majority of last year's Six Nations because of a knee injury and is raring for the 2005 event to get going. And that is despite the opening game taking place amid the red-hot atmosphere in Cardiff. ""I enjoy the atmosphere. The Millennium Stadium is probably one of the best stadiums in the world", he said. To go down there and hear the shouting and the singing - it's one of my favourite places to play. ""This is probably the most even Six Nations for a long time. England", Ireland," France and Wales are all contenders. ""On form", Ireland should be favourites but you just don't know - that's the great thing about this tournament.""

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"sport 314.txt O'Driscoll saves Irish blushes Two moments of magic from Brian O'Driscoll guided Ireland to a workmanlike victory against Italy. A pair of classic outside breaks from the Ireland captain set up tries for Geordan Murphy and Peter Stringer. Italy led 9-8 early in the second half but Stringer's try gave Ireland a lead they never lost. The hosts cut the gap to 18-12 with 10 minutes left and nearly scored through Ludovico Nitoglia", but Denis Hickie's try ensured an Irish victory. Italy came flying out of the blocks and took the lead through a Luciano Orquera penalty after seven minutes. It could have been better for the hosts but the fly-half missed two kickable penalties and Ireland drew level with a Ronan O'Gara penalty midway through the first half. The Italians were driving at the heart of the Irish defence and, for the first quarter, the Irish pack struggled to secure any ball for their talented backs. When they finally did, just before the half-hour mark, O'Driscoll promptly created a sparkling try for Murphy. The Ireland captain ran a dummy scissors and made a magical outside break before drawing the full-back and putting the diving Murphy in at the corner. O'Gara missed the twice-taken conversion and the

visitors found themselves trailing once again. Roland de Marigny took over the kicking duties for Italy from the hapless Orquera, and he landed a penalty either side of the break to edge Italy into a 9-8 lead. The only Ireland player offering a real threat was O'Driscoll, and it was his break that set up the second try for the visitors. Shane Horgan threw an overhead pass as he was about to be forced into touch and Stringer scooted over, with O'Gara landing the tricky conversion. A penalty apiece saw Ireland leading 18-12 as the game entered the final quarter, but they were lucky to survive when Italy launched a series of attacks. Winger Nitoglia dropped the ball as he reached for the line and Italy nearly rumbled over from a driving maul. An O'Gara penalty put Ireland more than a converted try ahead and they made the game safe when Hickie latched onto an inside pass from Murphy and crossed for a converted try. O'Driscoll limped off late on, joining centre partner Gordon D'Arcy on the sidelines, and the final word went to Italy. Prop Martin Castrogiovanni powered over for a try which was fitting reward for an Italian pack which had kept the Irish under pressure throughout. De Marigny; Mi Bergamasco, Canale, Masi, Nitoglia; Orquera, Troncon; Lo Cicero, Ongaro, Castrogiovanni; Dellape, Bortolami; Persico, Ma Bergamasco, Parisse. Perugini, Intoppa, Del Fava, Dal Maso, Griffen, Pozzebon, Robertson. Murphy, Horgan, O'Driscoll, D'Arcy, Hickie, O'Gara, Stringer, Corrigan, Byrne, Hayes, O'Kelly, O'Connell, S Easterby, Leamy, Foley. Sheahan, Horan, O'Callaghan, Miller, G Easterby, Humphreys, Dempsey. P O'Brien (New Zealand)

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"sport 315.txt Barkley fit for match in Ireland England centre Olly Barkley has been passed fit for Sunday's Six Nations clash with Ireland at Lansdowne Road. Barkley withdrew from Bath's team for Friday's clash with Gloucester after suffering a calf injury in training. Gloucester centre Henry Paul has also been cleared to play after overcoming an ankle injury. England coach Andy Robinson", who names his team on Wednesday, has called up Bath prop Duncan Bell following Phil Vickery's broken arm. With Vickery sidelined for at least six weeks and Julian White out with a neck injury, Bell could make his England debut. Bell, 30, had set his sights on an international career with Wales. But last December," the International Rugby Board confirmed that he could only be eligible for England as he had travelled on tour with them in 1998. ""I thought I'd burned all my bridges with England when I expressed an interest in wanting to play for Wales", so it's fantastic to get this opportunity," he said. Bell, who featured in the England A side which beat France 30-20 10 days ago, added: I recognise that I got into the England A squad because of injuries. ""And it's the same again in getting into the senior squad. But now that I have this opportunity I intend to take it fully if selected and play my heart out for my country." England coach Andy Robinson could take a gamble and call inexperienced Sale Sharks prop Andrew Sheridan into his front row. But Sheridan favours the loosehead side of the scrum and a more likely scenario is for uncapped Bell - who was among the try-scorers when England A beat France A 30-20 nine days ago - to be drafted in.

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"sport 316.txt Wales stars need a rest - Ruddock Wales coach Mike Ruddock has defended his decision not to release any of the international stars for this weekend's regional Celtic League fixtures. Ruddock says the players will benefit from the rest", and their absence will give youngsters a chance to impress. ""We've got the WRU charter in place now which outlines exactly what happens", Ruddock told BBC Wales Sport. Once we're in the Six Nations," the players will only be released in his and the WRU's best interests." Th

e Ospreys and Scarlets say they are happy to support the Wales cause", but the Dragons have expressed disappointment at not being able to use their national s quad players in Friday's game with Ulster. Ceri Sweeney, Gareth Cooper," Ian Gough and Kevin Morgan have been used sparingly by Ruddock in the opening two Six Nations wins and captain Jason Forster believes they would benefit from a game with the Dragons. ""I'm sure the guys would want to come back to get some game time", " Forster told BBC Wales Sport. It would also be a timely reminder to Mike [Ruddock] as to what they can do. ""And the supporters want to see the star players - no disrespect to the other guys - performing on the pitch." " Ruddock", though," is keen to protect his players from injury and fatigue. ""At this stage", " there's nothing more [the players] can do in games to impress me further. ""We've got to look at it at another angle and see the opportunities that are provided for the younger players in the region. ""For example", " the Dragons might use James Ireland this weekend. I've been looking at the lad - he's a great prospect for the future." " French and English clubs have requested to have all their international players available which means Stephen Jones", Gareth Thomas and Mefin Davies will play this weekend. The majority of Ireland and Scotland players have also been released for provincial duty.

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"sport 317.txt Munster Cup tie switched to Spain Munster's Heineken Cup quarter-final tie against Biarritz on 3 April has been switched to Real Sociedad's Paseo de Anoeta stadium in San Sebastian. Real's ground holds 32",000 whereas the Parc des Sports Aguilera in Biarritz has a capacity of just 12,667. The Irish province will be given at least 8,"000 tickets. ""The decision to move was a difficult one", but as we considered the fans as one of our primary objectives," said Biarritz chairman Marcel Martin. We hope we will be rewarded as a huge crowd behaving in the best rugby tradition." " The match will be the first Heineken Cup fixture to be played in Spain", and is expected to attract the biggest-ever attendance for a rugby match in the country. Ulster were the last Irish team to play at the Paseo de Anoeta stadium where they faced a Euskarians side during a pre-season tour in 1998.

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"sport 318.txt Williams says he will never quit Defiant Matt Williams says he will not quit as Scotland coach even if his side slump to a new low with defeat by Italy at Murrayfield. That would leave the Scots as favourites to win the Wooden Spoon for the second year running. ""I have never quit anything in my life", apart from maybe painting the kitchen," he told BBC Sport. The support we have been given from Murrayfield in my whole time here has been 100%." " Williams has yet to experience an RBS Six Nations victory after seven attempts and Scotland have lost 12 of their 14 games under his leadership. But he rejected the comparison made in some media sources with Berti Vogts", " recently sacked as Scotland football manager after a poor run of results. ""How can a German football coach and an Australian rugby coach have anything in common?" " he asked. ""It is a bizarre analogy. It is so absurd that it borders on the humorous." " Williams insists that he is revelling in the pressure", " despite the possibility of a second Six Nations series without a victory. ""That is not beyond the realms of possibility", he admitted. There's nothing much between the teams," so we could win the next three games or lose them. ""But I actually really enjoy seeing how you cope with such pressure as a coach. ""It helps the team grow and helps you grow as a coach. ""We could have won in Paris but for the last five minutes and now we have two defeats", " but we were confident for those two first games and we are confident we can beat Italy too." "

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"sport 319.txt Pountney handed ban and fine Northampton c  
oach Budge Pountney has been fined £2,"000 and banned from match-day coaching  
for six weeks for calling a referee ""a disgrace"". Pountney was found guilty  
of bringing the game into disrepute at a Rugby Football Union disciplinary hearing  
in London on Thursday night. Pountney criticised referee Steve Lander's performance  
in Northampton's defeat by Saracens on 5 February. The last two weeks  
of the six-week ban are suspended. Pountney pleaded guilty to the offence before  
a panel consisting of chairman Robert Horner", Nigel Gillingham and Jeff Probyn.  
The ban means former Scotland international Pountney cannot enter the playing  
enclosure, technical areas or go near the touchline, tunnel or players and officials' areas  
on the day of a game.  
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"sport 320.txt France v Wales (Sat) Stade de France", Paris Saturday, 26 February 1600 GMT BBC1, Radio 4 LW and this website France may have beaten Scotland and England but they were tedious and uninspired throughout both matches. Wales, on the other hand, have played some fine rugby and have made their best start since they last won the title in 1994. They also have a good record at the Stade de France, having won their first two games there," in 1999 and 2001. Wales have made two changes from the team that thrashed Italy 38-8 in Rome. Kevin Morgan takes over from his injured Newport-Gwent Dragons colleague Hal Luscombe on the right wing. In the pack Neath-Swansea Ospreys forward Ryan Jones has been brought on the blind-side flank to beef up the Wales back row in place of Jonathan Thomas. Wales coach Mike Ruddock is determined that his team will not go into their shells after their promising start to the championship. ""Graham Henry (former Wales coach) said a couple of years ago that we should 'be bold' when going to France", and he was proved right, said Ruddock. That is a great way to approach the game," and something we will further endorse with the players this week."" Despite their stuttering displays in their first two games defending champions France are also unbeaten. Under-pressure coach Bernard Laporte has made four changes", with Yannick Nyanga, the debutant Julie Laharrague," Aurelien Rougerie and Yannick Jauzion coming into the side. France have been criticised for the absence of traditional ""French flair"" as they have ground their way to victory so far this year but captain Fabien Pelous sees hope on the horizon. ""I get the impression we are getting better", he said. Against Wales, which is different from the teams we have beaten," I hope we can show our proper game." J Laharrague; A Rougerie", Y Jauzion, D Traille, C Dom inici; Y Delaigue, D Yachvili; S Marconnet, S Bruno, N Mas; F Pelous (capt), J Thion; S Betsen, Y Nyanga, J Bonnaire (Bourgoin). W Servat, O Milloud, G Lamboley, I Harinordoquy, P Mignoni, F Michalak, J-P Grandclaude. G Thomas (capt); K Morgan, T Shanklin, G Henson, S Williams; S Jones, D Peel; G Jenkins, M Davies, A Jones; B Cockbain, R Sidoli; R Jones, M Williams, M Owen. R McBryde, J Yapp, J Thomas, R Sowden-Taylor, G Cooper, C Sweeney, R Williams.  
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"sport 321.txt Woodward eyes Brennan for Lions Toulouse's former Irish international Trevor Brennan could be one of Clive Woodward's many surprises when the 44-man Lions tour squad is announced. Brennan", who last played for Ireland against Samoa in 2001," is held in high esteem by the former England coach. ""If you speak to the players there's a huge amount of respect for the guy", Woodward told the Sunday Independent. Players tend to know better t

han most coaches. It's not just the Irish," but Welsh and English players as well." The 31-year-old former Dublin milkman moved from Leinster to Toulouse in 2003 and immediately picked up a Heineken Cup winner's medal in an all-French final against Perpignan at Lansdowne Road. Brennan is highly-rated at Stade Toulousain"," where he is used anywhere in the back five. Woodward is ensuring his preparations for the trip to New Zealand in June are as thorough as possible.

"I've spoken to quite a few players", and they probably don't know what they're actually saying when we're having these conversations," he told the newspaper. But you talk about certain players and they'll say if they think they're up to scratch or that they don't want them in their team. "I haven't heard a bad word said against Trevor", which, considering he has a pretty tough guy reputation, is, to me," impressive."

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"sport 322.txt Scotland v Italy (Sat) Murrayfield", Edinburgh Saturday, 26 February 1400 GMT BBC1, Five Live and this website Victory for the Azzurri in Rome last year saw Scotland end their campaign without a victory. And the pressure is on Scotland coach Matt Williams as he seeks a first Six Nations victory at the eighth attempt. Italy have lost both their opening games at home to Ireland and Wales," but travel to Edinburgh with high hopes. Their coach John Kirwan has warned his side they must eradicate the errors that blighted their loss to Wales however or risk suffering a third successive defeat. "If the defeat against Wales has taught us anything", it's that at this level we can't make any mistakes, Kirwan said. In the Six Nations," every error you make will come at a high price. "We have to be aggressive for 80 minutes"," keep calm in every situation and display great maturity on the pitch. "It will be fundamental to keep cool in the difficult moments - in the key situations of the game." Kirwan has recalled the experienced Cristian Stoica at centre and drafted in David dal Maso at open-side after star flanker Mauro Bergamasco was ruled out for the rest of the tournament. Scotland have also made two changes", Simon Webster replacing Simon Danielli on the wing and Simon Taylor returning for his first Test in a year," for injured flanker Jason White. Taylor's recovery from a serious knee injury is a major boost to Scottish hopes. "He is one of the world-class players in the tournament and you want them in your team", acknowledged Williams. Despite a record of only two victories from 14 Tests, Williams insists he is relishing the pressure. I actually really enjoy seeing how you cope with such pressure as a coach", he said, optimistic despite opening defeats to France and Ireland. We were confident for those two first games and we are confident we can beat Italy too", he added. : C Paterson; S Webster, A Craig, H Southwell, S Lamont; D Parks, C Cusiter; T Smith, G Bulloch (capt), G Kerr; S Grimes, S Murray; S Taylor, J Petrie, A Hogg. R Russell, B Douglas, N Hines, J Dunbar, M Blair, G Ross, B Hinshelwood. R de Marigny; Mirco Bergamasco, C Stoica, A Masi, L Nitoglia; L Orquera, A Troncon; A Lo Cicero, F Ongaro, M Castrogiovanni; S Dellape, M Bortolami (capt); A Persico, D Dal Maso, S Parisse. G Intoppa, S Perugini, CA del Fava, S Orlando, P Griffen, R Pedrazzi, KP Robertson.

sport 323.txt Preview: Ireland v England (Sun) Lansdowne Road, Dublin Sunday, 27 February 1500 GMT BBC1, Radio 4 LW and this website Ireland are going for their first Grand Slam since 1948 after two opening wins, and England represent their sternest test of the Championship so far. England were sloppy and leaderless in the defeats against Wales and France and another loss would be unthinkable. The pressure is on coach Andy Robinson and his side have to deliver. Despite England's dramatic dip in form since the World Cup final - they have lost eight of their last 13 matches - Ireland coach Eddie O'Sull

ivan says his side should not underestimate the visitors. Had they kicked their points they would have beaten France and that would have created a different landscape for Sunday", he said. This is England we are talking about. They have a depth of talent and a very good record against Ireland. ""They will target a victory in Dublin as the turning point in their Six Nations." The differences between the sides is also highlighted in the team selections for the Dublin encounter. Ireland", despite having Gordon D'Arcy still out injured," have been boosted by the return of star skipper Brian O'Driscoll who missed the Scotland game with a hamstring injury. ""The knowledge that the England game was coming up really helped during rehabilitation", he said. The will to play in this game was enormous. It doesn't get much bigger than England at home." As well as entering the tournament without players like Jonny Wilkinson", Mike Tindall and Richard Hill, England have now lost two tighthead props in Julian White and Phil Vickery while blind-side flanker Lewis Moody is a major concern. Robinson, who received a lot of flak for the inclusion and then dropping of centre Mathew Tait, has kept faith with kicking fly-half Charlie Hodgson despite his horror show at Twickenham. If England slump in Dublin, it will be their worst run of results in the Championship since 1987. But Robinson was bullish during the week about the game," saying that his side ""are going there to get in their faces""", and has identified the line-out and tackle area as the key to England's chances. And despite the recent results," skipper Jason Robinson believes there is nothing wrong with the mood in the camp. ""There is no lack of confidence in the team", said the Sale full-back. We have had a good week's training and we are all looking forward to the challenge. ""I still believe in this team. I know if we get our game right we will win the games." G Murphy; G Dempsey", B O'Driscoll, S Horgan, D Hickie; R O'Gara, P Stringer; R Corrigan, S Byrne, J Hayes; M O'Kelly, P O'Connell; S Easterby, J O'Connor, A Foley. F Sheahan, M Horan, D O'Callaghan, E Miller, G Easterby, D Humphreys, K Maggs. J Robinson (capt); M Cueto, J Noon, O Barkley, J Lewsey; C Hodgson, H Ellis; G Rountree, S Thompson, M Stevens; D Grewcock, B Kay; J Worsley, L Moody, M Corry. A Titterrell, D Bell, S Borthwick, A Hazell, M Dawson, A Goode, O Smith.

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"sport 324.txt Leeds v Saracens (Fri) Headingley Friday", 25 February 2000 GMT The Tykes have brought in Newcastle prop Ed Kalman and Tom McGee from the Borders on loan while fly-half Craig McMullen has joined from Narbonne. Raphael Ibanez is named at hooker for Saracens in one of four changes. Simon Raiwalui and Ben Russell are also selected in the pack while Kevin Sorrell comes in at outside centre. - Friday's game at Headingley got the go-ahead on Friday after passing an early pitch inspection. Leeds: Balshaw; Rees, Christopher, Bell, Doherty; McMullen, Dickens; McGee, Rawlinson, Gerber; Murphy, Palmer (capt), Morgan, Parks, Popham. Replacements: Kalman, Regan, Hyde, Rigney, McMillan, Rock, Vickerman. Saracens: Bartholomeusz; Castaignede, Sorrell, Harris, Vaikona; Jackson, Bracken; Yates, Ibanez, Visagie; Raiwalui, Fullarton; Randell, Russell, Vyvyan (capt). Replacements: Cairns, Lloyd, Broster, Chesney, Johnston, Rauluni, Little.

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"sport 325.txt Worcester v Sale (Fri) Sixways Friday", 25 February 2000 GMT They make just one change, with Tim Collier replacing Phil Murphy in the second row. In contrast, Sale are missing 14 players due to a combination of international call-ups and injuries. John Payne and Chris Rhys Jones come into the centres while scrum-half Richard Wigglesworth looks set to play on the wing. Delport; Pieters, Rasmussen, Lombard, O'Leary; Brown, Powell;

Windo, Van Niekerk, Horsman; Collier, Gillies; Hickey, Sanderson, MacLeod- Henderson. Replacements: Fortey, Murphy, Daly, Vaili, Cole, Hayes, Trueman. Hanley; Mayor, Payne, Rhys Jones, Wigglesworth; Hercus, Redpath (capt); Turner, Roddam, Stewart; Day, Schofield; Caillet, Carter, Chabal. Replacements (from): Bozzi, Coutts, Anglesea, Lund, Martens, Riley, C Jones.

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"sport 326.txt Robinson answers critics England captain Jason Robinson has rubbished suggestions that the world champions are a team in decline. England were beaten 11-9 by Wales in their Six Nations opener in Cardiff last week and face current champions France at Twickenham on Sunday. Robinson said: ""We are certainly not on the decline. You lose one game and it doesn't make you a bad team. ""I have no doubt in the players we've got. We have still got the team to go out and beat anyone on our day." England find themselves striving to avoid a third successive championship defeat for the first time since 1987. But full-back Robinson believes the new-look England team can stop the rot against France. ""Last weekend we should have won the game," he said. But if we can under-perform and lose by only two points then I am sure if we play well this week we will get the win we need. ""We proved that in the autumn - when we put in some excellent performances - and we just need to build on that. ""It was a disappointing start against Wales and we might be down on that. ""But we are certainly not out. We will come out fighting this week." Robinson also had words of comfort for 18-year-old Newcastle centre Mathew Tait," who made his international debut against Wales but has been demoted from the squad to face France. ""I have had a word with Mathew," said Robinson. I still believe in him. He is an outstanding player but we have gone for Olly (Barkley) because of the kicking. ""Mathew has just got to take it on the chin," keep working hard like he is doing and I'm sure he will feature in some of the games.""

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"sport 327.txt Sella wants Michalak recall Former France centre Philippe Sella believes coach Bernard Laporte must recall Frederic Michalak to give his side any chance of beating Ireland. Sella admitted he had been impressed by current fly-half Yann Delaigue in the RBS Six Nations to date. But he told BBC Sport: ""Michalak is the answer both now and for the future. Delaigue deserved his chance but the time has come to bring back Michalak. ""He does have weaknesses but has the all-round game to upset Ireland." The 22-year-old Michalak has spent much of the tournament on the bench after Delaigue impressed for Castres early in the season. With Michalak overlooked," the French stuttered to narrow wins over Scotland and then England before ironically playing their best rugby in the defeat to Wales. ""The Wales game was amazing to watch but never did I think the French could lose that game at half-time," said Sella. Their only mistakes were that they didn't score enough points in the first half and were a little bit less focused in the second... but only a little bit." Seilla", however, insisted the pressure had eased on the under-fire Laporte," despite the defeat at the Stade de France. ""This season is very important for shaping a team for the 2007 World Cup," said Sella, which Laporte is doing very well. The French get better every game. ""It's difficult", though," when you change a team and you change your tactics as everything has to gel. ""But he has the players and the talent to take them all the way to World Cup victory. ""As a result," it is important that people give him time. It may not seem good now that we're not winning the Grand Slam but no one will care in two years time if we're world champions." The majority of media criticism centred on the way in

which France produced a performance devoid of running rugby in their opening two games. But while Sella admitted he liked the more flowing style employed against Wales", " he said ""the win was most important"" . ""Winning is all that matters", he added. Ok, the flair may not have been so good, but the discipline, organisation and defence was there," which are all important ahead of 2007." " France play what Sella believes is their hardest game of the Six Nations against Ireland in Dublin on Saturday 12 March. The French go into the game as clear underdogs. But Sella added: ""People forget that France can still win the Six Nations and they'll be focused on that. ""But Ireland will be going for even more in front of their home crowd. It's going to be tough." "

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"sport 328.txt Umaga ready for Lions All Blacks captain Tama Umaga has warned the British and Irish Lions will be his most fearsome opponents yet ahead of their summer tour. But Umaga", in England for Saturday's IRB Rugby Aid match," also backed New Zealand to win the three-Test series against the Lions. He told BBC Sport: ""It's potentially the most fearsome line-up I've ever come up against. They're awesome. ""But I'd back us all the way to be at them when they come over."" Lions boss Sir Clive Woodward is set to announce his squad for the June-July tour next month. When Woodward was appointed last year", it was widely believed he would rely heavily on his former England players. But Umaga said: ""He'd be hard pushed to do that now considering the shape of the Six Nations. ""Don't get me wrong", England have got a lot of talented guys and I'm sure there are some of them who'll make the Lions Test XV. ""But you can't disguise Wales and Ireland in particular. Some of the tries they've scored have been great. I'll admit it'll be fairly awesome lining up against the likes of Brian O'Driscoll." " Umaga will meet O'Driscoll in Saturday's Rugby Aid match at Twickenham", with the Irish captain leading the Northern Hemisphere side. O'Driscoll is among a host of players in the Northern Hemisphere squad, coached by Woodward," that are tipped for Lions call-ups. ""It'll be good for us to get an early idea of some of these guys", although a lot can change between now and June," Umaga said. The 31-year-old admitted interest in the Lions tour was immense, calling it the biggest thing to hit New Zealand since Lord of the Rings"". He added: ""As players", it's enough for us to be driven by the rarity of playing the Lions. In fact," it's not just us All Blacks - it's the talk of the country." " Umaga admitted the fear of injury weighed on his mind ahead of Saturday's charity game", which features a host of big names including George Gregan," Andrew Mehrtens and Chris Latham. But he admitted the value of the cause - proceeds of the match will go to aiding victims of the tsunami - easily won him over. ""The second [Southern Hemisphere coach] Rod Macqueen made the approach", " I didn't hesitate. It was great when New Zealand Rugby then gave me the all clear. ""Thankfully I didn't know anyone that was involved in the tragedy of the tsunami but you couldn't miss all the horrific reports on the news. ""There are so many people that were affected", " are still affected and will be affected for a long time. It's just good to know we can do something minor to help out." " - The match will be televised on BBC One at 1400 GMT on Saturday.

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"sport 329.txt Umaga ready for ""fearsome"" Lions All Blacks captain Tama Umaga has warned the British and Irish Lions will be his most fearsome opponents yet ahead of their summer tour. But Umaga", in England for Saturday's IRB Rugby Aid match," also backed New Zealand to win the three-Test series against the Lions. He told BBC Sport: ""It's potentially the most fearsome line-up I've ever come up against. They're awesome. ""But I'd back us all th

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"sport 330.txt Campese berates whingeing England Former Australian wing David Campese has told England to stop whingeing in the wake of their defeat to Ireland. England coach Andy Robinson lambasted referee Jonathan Kaplan for costing them the game after disallowing tries from Mark Cueto and Josh Lewsey. But Campese told BBC Sport: ""Robinson is living up to England's reputation as whingeing Poms. ""Stop going on about it as who really cares? They're acting like they're the first team to be cheated of a win." " England are contemplating a complaint to the International Rugby Board after potential ""tries"" by Cueto in the first half and Lewsey late on were ruled out without recourse to the video referee. But Campese added: ""Scotland could have beaten France in the same way", " but do you see them whingeing? ""Basically", things didn't go England's way and, in typical fashion," they make more of it when they believe they've lost unfairly." " England are second bottom in the Six Nations table following defeats by Wales", France and Ireland. But although Campese admitted he was surprised about their current predicament," he insisted England were ""no longer world class""". ""England are beginning to realise that being world champions doesn't mean you deserve to win every game", " he said. They lost a few key players and suddenly everyone's realised the ones on the fringes were not all that good in the first place. ""Added to that", " the senior players are not standing up and they can't do anything when the pressure mounts." " Campese", a veteran of 101 international caps, said full-back Jason Robinson would now be the sole Englishman in his World XV. Robinson has been blamed for poor leadership in the tournament," while his coach has been castigated for appointing

a full-back captain. ""I agree that you can't captain from full-back", said Campese. You need someone in the thick of the action," and it's very hard to give orders from all the way back there. ""Some people are leaders and some aren't. He's not but there's no one who stands out in England's pack - no clear-cut leaders." "Campese", though, defended coach Andy Robinson, "who he believes was the ""only choice"" after Sir Clive Woodward's resignation. But he blamed ""a lack of talent in the England camp"" for making the current coach look poor. England face a potential wooden spoon match against Italy on 12 March. And the ex-Wallaby added: ""If England lost that", they'd be in bloody turmoil. That said, "I don't think they will." "Campese has tipped Wales to win both the Six Nations and Grand Slam come the end of the tournament. ""It's been a surprising tournament", he said, and maybe Ireland have a little bit more talent overall. ""But playing at home is a major boost. And the possible Grand Slam decider at the Millennium Stadium will be just too much for the Irish." "

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"sport 331.txt O'Driscoll/Gregan lead Aid stars Ireland's Brian O'Driscoll will lead the Northern Hemisphere team in the IRB Rugby Aid match at Twickenham. O'Driscoll heads a star-studded cast for the contest to raise funds for the tsunami appeal. The South will be led by George Gregan", one of four Wallabies, alongside five Springboks and four All Blacks including captain Tana Umaga. South African flanker Schalk Burger has shaken off a leg injury to take his place in the starting line-up. He will join fellow Springboks John Smit, Cobus Visagie and Victor Matfield in the South pack, with Jacque Fourie among the centres. The North side have been hit by the withdrawals of Scotland duo Gordon Bulloch and Chris Cusiter, plus France captain Fabien Pelous. But Leicester's England centre Ollie Smith has been added to the squad, giving him an opportunity to impress Lions coach Sir Clive Woodward," who takes charge of the North side. ""I think it's fantastic for Ollie", "Tigers coach John Wells told BBC Radio Leicester. He was probably going to have the weekend off this week and I hope Clive gets the chance to see the qualities that Leicester and England have been seeing all year." "Woodward will also assess other potential Lions candidates such as Scotland pair Simon Taylor and Chris Paterson", "Wales scrum-half Dwayne Peel and Ireland lock Paul O'Connell. ""I'm looking forward to working with such outstanding players", "Woodward said. Both teams are fielding top-quality sides and I really hope that the rugby public and community get behind this game to raise as much money as possible for such a deserving cause." "Despite the withdrawal of Wales wing Rhys Williams", who is required for the Blues' Celtic League match with Munster, three other members of their Six Nations squad - Ceri Sweeney," John Yapp and Jonathan Thomas - will also play. ""Not only is it for a good cause but it gives these players the opportunity to play with and against some of the best players in the world", "said WRU general manager Steve Lewis. Supporters can watch the teams train for free at Twickenham on Friday, 4 March. Woodward will put his North team through their paces at 1030 GMT, with the South side, coached by former Wallabies coach Rod Macqueen, due at the stadium at 1330. C Paterson (Scotland), B Cohen (England), B O'Driscoll (Ireland, capt), D Traille (France), O Smith (England), C Sweeney (Wales), D Humphreys (Ireland), D Peel (Wales); A Lo Cicero (Italy), P de Villiers (France), J Yapap (Wales), R Ibanez (France), P O'Connell (Ireland), M Bortolami (Italy), J Thomas (Wales), S Taylor (Scotland), L Dallaglio (England), S Parisse (Italy), Others to be added. C Latham (Australia); B Lima (Samoa), J Fourie (SA) T Umaga (New Zealand), S Bobo (Fiji); A Mehrtens (NZ) G Gregan (Aus, capt); C Hoeft (NZ), J Smit (SA), C Visagie (SA), S Maling (NZ), V Matfield (SA), S Burger (SA), P Waugh (Aus), T Kefu (Aus). E Taukafa (Tonga), E Guinazu (Argentina), S Sitit

i (Samoa), O Palepoi (Samoa), M Rauluni (Fiji), T Delport (SA), A N Other.  
sport 332.txt Harinordoquy suffers France axe Number eight  
t Imanol Harinordoquy has been dropped from France's squad for the Six Nations  
match with Ireland in Dublin on 12 March. Harinordoquy was a second-half repla  
cement in last Saturday's 24-18 defeat to Wales. Bourgoin lock Pascal Pape, who  
has recovered from a sprained ankle, returns to the 22-man squad. Wing Cedric H  
eymans and Ludovic Valbon come in for Aurelien Rougerie and Jean-Philippe Grand  
claude. Rougerie hurt his chest against Wales while Grandclaude was a second-h  
alf replacement against both England and Wales. Valbon, capped in last June's T  
ests against the United States and Canada, was a second half replacement in the  
win over Scotland. France coach Bernard Laporte said Harinordoquy had been axe  
d after a poor display last weekend. Imanol has been dropped from the squad bec  
ause the least I can say is that he didn't make a thundering comeback against W  
ales", said Laporte. We know the Ireland game will be fast and rough and we als  
o want to be able to replace both locks during the game if needed," and Gregory  
Lamboley can also come on at number seven or eight. ""The Grand Slam is gone bu  
t we'll go to Ireland to win. ""It will be a very exciting game because Ireland  
have three wins under their belt", have just defeated England and have their e  
yes set on a Grand Slam." France", who lost to Wales last week, must defeat th  
e Irish to keep alive their hopes of retaining the Six Nations trophy. Ireland  
are unbeaten in this year's tournament and have their sights set on a first Gra  
nd Slam since 1948. Dimitri Yachvili (Biarritz), Pierre Mignoni (Clermont), Ya  
nn Delaigue (Castres), Frederic Michalak (Stade Toulousain), Damien Traille (Bi  
arritz), Yannick Jauzion (Stade Toulousain), Ludovic Valbon (Biarritz), Christo  
phe Dominici (Stade Francais), Cedric Heymans (Stade Toulousain), Julien Laharr  
ague (Brive) Sylvain Marconnet (Stade Francais), Nicolas Mas (Perpignan), Oliv  
ier Milloud (Bourgoin), Sebastien Bruno (Sale/ENG), William Servat (Stade Toulo  
usain), Fabien Pelous (Stade Toulousain, capt), Jerome Thion (Biarritz), Pascal  
Pap&#233; (Bourgoin), Gregory Lamboley (Stade Toulousain), Serge Betsen (Biarri  
tz), Julien Bonnaire (Bourgoin), Yannick Nyanga (B&#233;ziers)

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"sport 333.txt Parker misses England clash Tom Shanklin w  
ill start in the centre for Wales against England in Cardiff on Saturday after  
Sonny Parker failed to recover from a trapped neck nerve. Shanklin was first-c  
hoice wing in the autumn Tests", but prefers centre and will face England debut  
ant Mathew Tait. Dragons three-quarter Hal Luscombe takes Shanklin's wing ber  
t h. Up front, Mefin Davies plays at hooker, open-side Martyn Williams is fit to  
start and lock Rob Sidoli replaces veteran Gareth Llewellyn. Davies wins the vo  
te ahead of Robin McBryde, who sits on the bench having recently returned to ac  
tion for the Scarlets following a neck injury. Sidoli is back for the first ti  
me since last season's Six Nations, the Blues second row back to form after a n  
iggling groin problem. Williams, Sidoli's team-mate at Cardiff, is set to win h  
is 50th cap," replacing the injured Colin Charvis after making a quicker-than-e  
xpected recovery from a neck disc problem. ""Initially when I had the diagnosis  
it was a case of trying to get fit for the Italy game next week", but fortunate  
ly my recovery has been a lot quicker than we all hoped, Williams told BBC Spor  
t Wales. I haven't started a game since 1 January and would have preferred to h  
ave a couple of games in the lead-up to this," but the good thing with the inju  
ry is that I have kept up my fitness levels. ""I feel quite fresh and I just ca  
n't wait to play again."" Williams says he expects a torrid time from an Englan  
d loose-forward trio of Lewis Moody", Joe Worsley and Andy Hazell. ""They are  
three top-class players", especially Worsley and Moody. They have been there an  
d done it, Williams added. They were back-ups behind Richard Hill, Neil Back an

d Lawrence Dallaglio," but now they have come forward and proved what good players they are - there are no weaknesses there."" Luscombe gets the nod on the wing ahead of Dragons team-mate Kevin Morgan", who wins a place on the bench alongside uncapped Blues prop John Yapp. G Thomas (Toulouse (capt); H Luscombe (Dragons), T Shanklin (Blues), G Henson (Ospreys), S Williams (Ospreys); S Jones (Clermont Auvergne), D Peel (Scarlets); G Jenkins (Blues), M Davies (Gloucester), A Jones (Ospreys), B Cockbain (Ospreys), R Sidoli (Blues), D Jones (Scarlets), M Williams (Blues), M Owen (Dragons). R McBryde (Scarlets), J Yapp (Blues), J Thomas (Ospreys), R Jones (Ospreys), G Cooper (Dragons), C Sweeney (Dragons), K Morgan (Dragons).

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"sport 334.txt Stevens named in England line-up England have named Bath prop Matt Stevens in the starting line-up for their Six Nations match against Ireland at Lansdowne Road on Sunday. Fellow Bath prop Duncan Bell will start on the bench", as coach Andy Robinson makes just one change to the team that was beaten by France. It will be Stevens' first start after two caps as a replacement against the All Blacks last year. Leicester duo Ollie Smith and Andy Goode have been drafted onto the bench. Stevens takes over from Phil Vickery," who suffered a broken arm playing for Gloucester last weekend. ""I'm confident Matt will grasp this opportunity and make his mark against Ireland", said Robinson. All three players have shown outstanding form of late, most recently in the England A win against France A and for their club," added Robinson. Selection beckons when players demonstrate such consistent ability. ""This game against Ireland will be massive. We recognise it's a must-win game for us this season." England confirmed that Sale Sharks prop Andrew Sheridan was not considered for selection because of an injury he picked up to the back of his ankle during last Friday's match against Leeds. J Robinson (Sale Sharks", capt); M Cueto (Sale Sharks), J Noon (Newcastle), O Barkley (Bath), J Lewsey (Wasps); C Hodgson (Sale Sharks), H Ellis (Leicester); G Rowntree (Leicester), S Thompson (Northampton), M Stevens (Bath), D Grewcock (Bath), B Kay (Leicester), J Worsley (Wasps), L Moody (Leicester), M Corry (Leicester). A Titterrell (Sale Sharks), D Bell (Bath), S Borthwick (Bath), A Hazell (Gloucester), M Dawson (Wasps), A Goode (Leicester), O Smith (Leicester).

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"sport 335.txt Bortolami predicts dour contest Italy skipper Marco Bortolami believes Saturday's Six Nations contest against Scotland will be a scrappy encounter. With both sides looking for their first win of the championship", the third-round game at Murrayfield has been billed as a wooden-spoon decider. And Bortolami feels the Edinburgh contest could end up being a bruising battle of the packs. ""It will not be a pretty game because both teams are desperate to gain their first win", said the lock forward. Italy have only recorded three wins since they joined the Six Nations in 2000, but two of those have come against Scotland. This year, Italy opened up with a stubborn display against Ireland but ended up losing 28-17. However, they were thoroughly outplayed by an impressive Welsh side in Rome last time out. Now the Italians travel to Edinburgh hoping to claim their first away win in the Six Nations. Scotland played extremely well against France in Paris but not so well when Ireland came to Edinburgh", said Bortolami. We are still very disappointed with our last game against Wales in Rome and we are thoroughly determined to right the wrongs. ""As a nation", our quest is to be respected as a team worthy of a place in this tournament and we can only do this by winning games."

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'' sport 336.txt Corry backs skipper Robinson England forward Martin Corry says Jason Robinson is the right man to lead the national team back to winning ways. After losses to Wales and France", critics have started to wonder whether Robinson can captain from full-back. But Corry has backed Robinson, who was given the role after the injury to fly-half Jonny Wilkinson," ahead of this weekend's trip to Ireland. "Jason is doing a tremendous job. Every week my respect for him goes up", Corry told BBC Radio Five Live. He is an inspirational captain. When he talks with the squad he talks with a lot of sense. "The players have a lot of respect for him. It's an honour to be in the England side and an honour to play under him." England are under immense pressure following their poor start to the year and victory is vital if they are to rescue their Six Nations campaign. But Corry insists England are in the right frame of mind for the contest. "There is apprehension going into every game", he added. But you have to use that fear and put it into a positive mindset. "When the whistle goes on Sunday", what has happened in the past does not count for anything. "We have not performed but if we put in a performance on Sunday then we can start turning results around. "There are a lot of changes taking place with England and we are at the start of something. We have not got off to the greatest of starts but you need to experience the bad before you can fully appreciate the good." A trip to Lansdowne Road is daunting at any time", especially against an Ireland side that are flying high after two impressive wins. They are the form team of the tournament and are tipped to claim their first Grand Slam since 1948. But Corry is relishing the prospect of taking on the Irish in their own backyard. "They are full of confidence and are playing a great team game", he said. The forwards are creating a great platform and they have explosive runners out wide. "If you look at the team on paper", they have stars from one to 15. It's a huge task but it is a great opportunity for us. "Lansdowne Road is a tremendous venue to play in and we have to use it to our advantage."

'' sport 337.txt Prop Jones ready for hard graft Adam Jones says the Wales forwards are determined to set the perfect attacking platform for the backs by dominating the powerful France pack in Paris. The prop said: "If we get stuffed in the front five our backs have had it. "The mentality of the French is 'scrum', scrum," scrum'. We will see how good France are and the scrum is the key. "I just hope [the backs] carry on where they left off against Italy. It's just up to us in the forwards to win the ball and give them the opportunity." Wales have won two of their last three visits to Stade de France", having secured back-to-back wins under Graham Henry in 1999 and 2001. And with the likes of Shane Williams and Gavin Henson finding top form at the right time," Mike Ruddock's team is now one of international rugby's most potent attacking threats. "Gavin is ridiculously talented. He has been bouncing around the place this week", so he is up for it," warned Jones. France have been criticised for their uncharacteristic one-dimensional play in their victories over Scotland and France. Captain Fabien Pelous has acknowledged his side needs to show more attacking flair, but stressed the game will be won or lost up front. The lock believes the Welsh forwards are not big enough to trouble his side in the scrum or line-out, but Jones insisted his fellow front-row colleagues have nothing to fear. Gethin [Jenkins] won't be intimidated tomorrow", none of us will," said Jones, who will be facing France for the first time. We will go out there and front up and hopefully get the ball out to the backs. "Me and Gethin a

re quite young so it is good to have someone of Mefin's experience in there. ""Mefin is a good thinker who puts things across. But what is the saying? If you are good enough you are old enough and Gethin certainly is. ""He is a really good player and I imagine he will be on the Lions tour [to New Zealand this summer].""

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"sport 338.txt Moody joins up with England Lewis Moody has flown to Dublin to join England's camp ahead of their RBS Six Nations game against Ireland on Sunday. Despite joining the squad", the Leicester flanker only has a ""slim"" chance of playing because of an infection in his finger. A decision will be taken on Saturday as to whether the 26-year-old will be declared fit. If he fails to recover in time for the game", his place at the back of the pack will be taken by Andy Hazell. Chris Jones will then start the game on the bench. ""The chances of him playing are very slim", said coach Andy Robinson. The infection is deeper than was thought.""" Moody had to be put on a drip in an attempt to force antibiotics through his infected finger. He suffered the cut playing against France at Twickenham and it became infected during a 10-minute outing as a replacement for Leicester against Newcastle last Saturday. ""The mud got into it", Robinson added. He has had a big course of antibiotics but they haven't done the job we hoped they would.""" Robinson has already been forced to make one change to the starting line-up with Bath prop Matt Stevens coming in for the injured Phil Vickery. The 22-year-old has only made 10 starts for his club but has made 49 appearances from the bench. ""It can be frustrating but I've had a lot more game time this season and I'm ready for it", Stevens said. I've been on tour with these boys and I've been in the England set-up for two years so I know the calls and the way they play.""" Stevens will be winning his third cap on Sunday after coming on twice as a replacement on the tour to New Zealand last year. Robinson has confirmed that fly-half Charlie Hodgson will be the first-choice kicker despite his three missed penalties and a drop goal against France. ""Charlie's state of mind is very good", said Robinson. Obviously," we are all disappointed we lost the French game and the circumstances in which we did. ""But he responded well last week in his goalkicking for Sale and he will be our first-choice kicker this week.""" Robinson also admits his side must improve their line-out work against Irish duo Malcolm O'Kelly and Paul O'Connell", one of the most effective partnerships in the game. ""In each game we've missed a number of line-outs", he added. It cost us the game against Wales but it has improved. ""It was better against France and will have to go up another notch against Ireland. It will be a huge battle. ""Look at the way they tore us apart last year. If it doesn't function", we will be in for a torrid time.""

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"sport 339.txt Captains lining up for Aid match Ireland's Brian O'Driscoll is one of four Six Nations captains included in the Northern Hemisphere squad for the IRB Rugby Aid match on 5 March. France's Fabien Pelous", Gordon Bullock of Scotland and Italy's Marco Bortolami are also in the Northern party. Sir Clive Woodward will coach the Northern team against Rod Macqueen's Southern Hemisphere team in a tsumani fund-raising match at Twickenham. ""I'm looking forward to working with such outstanding players", he said. It will be a chance for Woodward to assess some of his options before unveiling his British and Irish Lions touring party, who will visit New Zealand in the summer. The game promises to be a great spectacle", he said. Both teams are fielding top-quality sides and I really hope that the rugby public and community get b

ehind this game to raise as much money as possible for such a deserving cause." L Dallaglio (England)", B Cohen (England), A Rougerie (France), D Traille (France), F Pelous (France), R Ibanez (France), P de Villiers (France), B O'Driscoll (Ireland, capt), P O'Connell (Ireland), D Humphreys (Ireland), C Paterson (Scotland), C Cusiter (Scotland), G Bullock (Scotland), S Taylor (Scotland), A Lo Cicero (Italy), M Bortolami (Italy), S Parisse (Italy), D Peel (Wales), C Sweeney (Wales), J Thomas (Wales), R Williams (Wales), J Yapp (Wales). C Latham (Australia); R Caucaunibuca (Fiji), J Fourie (S Africa) T Umaga (New Zealand), S Bobo (Fiji); A Mehrtens (New Zealand) G Gregan (Australia, capt); T Kefu (Australia), P Waugh (Australia), S Burger (S Africa); I Rawaqa (Fiji), V Matfield (S Africa); K Visagie (S Africa), J Smit (S Africa), C Hoeft (New Zealand). Reserves: B Reihana (New Zealand), B Lima (Samoa), E Taukafa (Tonga), O Palepoi (Samoa), S Sititi (Samoa), M Rauluni (Fiji), A N Other.

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"sport 340.txt Castaignede fires Laporte warning Former France fly-half Thomas Castaignede has warned the pressure is mounting on coach Bernard Laporte following their defeat by Wales. France suffered a shock loss against the Welsh at the weekend after looking on course for an easy win. Castaignede told BBC Sport: ""The pressure is big on Laporte after a huge loss to New Zealand," a slim win over Scotland and a miracle against England. ""But the French have to get behind him and the team at Lansdowne Road."" Following victories over South Africa and Australia in November", France were deemed by many to be the world's leading side. But they were then trounced 45-6 by New Zealand and only just beat Scotland after the Scots had a try disallowed in their Six Nations opener. It then took some woeful spot kicking from Charlie Hodgson and Ollie Barkley to help them to victory against England at Twickenham. &lt; Castaignede said: ""You can't say any of those results have eased the pressure on Laporte. ""Had England's kickers not been so bad," the position in the Six Nations would be very different now." Laporte has been criticised for France's negative tactics in their wins over Scotland and England. But his side played a more free-flowing style against Wales", making a mockery of the opposition's defence in the first half before suffering a shock turnaround in fortunes after the interval. ""All the chat in France has been about how France will play against Ireland", said Castaignede ahead of the 12 March tie. Everyone wants to see the sort of play we saw against Wales. But everyone also wants a win." Castaignede", a veteran of 43 international caps," admitted the French would go in as underdogs against Ireland. ""Going to Ireland is never easy but the way they're playing right now", it's harder than ever," said Castaignede. They're very experienced and don't often lose at home. They've got some great forwards and some electric runners on the break." Despite praising the Irish he claimed the Welsh had the upper hand in the Six Nations run-in. ""Ireland have such a good pack but Wales are something else on the break", he added. At the weekend they were simply awesome. As a Frenchman it was disappointing to see," but you had to admire it. ""Their commitment to every cause can make them win this championship." The 30-year-old also tipped Yann Delaigue to start ahead of Frederic Michalak at number 10 after an impressive display in Paris last weekend. ""Delaigue played really well and admittedly Michalak played well too", said Castaignede. I'm just glad I'm not the one who has to make the decision."

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"sport 341.txt Charvis set to lose fitness bid Flanker Colin Charvis is unlikely to play any part in Wales' final two games of the Six Nations. Charvis has missed all three of Wales' victories with an ankle injury

and his recovery has been slower than expected. ""He will not figure in the Scotland game and is now thought unlikely to be ready for the final game",," said Wales physio Mark Davies. Sonny Parker is continuing to struggle with a neck injury, but Hal Luscombe should be fit for the Murrayfield trip. Centre Parker has only a slim chance"" of being involved against the Scots on 13 March",," so Luscombe's return to fitness after missing the France match with hamstring trouble is a timely boost. Said Wales assistant coach Scott Johnson: ""We're positive about Hal and hope he'll be raring to go. ""He comes back into the mix again",," adds to the depth and gives us other options. "" Replacement hooker Robin McBryde remains a doubt after picking up knee ligament damage in Paris last Saturday. ""We're getting that reviewed and we should know more by the end of the week how Robin's looking",," added Johnson. We're hopeful but it's too early to say at this stage." Steve Jones from the Dragons is likely to be drafted in if McBryde fails to recover.

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"sport 342.txt Robinson out of Six Nations England captain Jason Robinson will miss the rest of the Six Nations because of injury. Robinson", stand-in captain in the absence of Jonny Wilkinson," had been due to lead England in their final two games against Italy and Scotland. But the Sale full-back pulled out of the squad on Wednesday because of a torn ligament in his right thumb. The 30-year-old will undergo an operation on Friday but England have yet to name a replacement skipper. Robinson said: ""This is very disappointing for me as this means I miss England's last two games in the Six Nations at Twickenham and two games for my club",," Sale Sharks. ""But I'm looking to be back playing very early in April." Robinson picked up the injury in the 19-13 defeat to Ireland at Lansdowne Road on Saturday. And coach Andy Robinson said: ""I am hugely disappointed for Jason. ""As England captain he has been an immense figure during the autumn internationals and the Six Nations",," leading by example at all times. I look forward to having him back in the England squad." The announcement is the latest setback for Robinson's injury-depleted squad. Among the key figures already missing are Jonny Wilkinson",, Mike Tindall, Will Greenwood, Julian White and Phil Vickery - a list which leaves Robinson short on candidates for the now vacant captaincy role. Former England skipper Jeremy Guscott told BBC Radio Five Live his choice would be Matt Dawson," even though he does not hold a regular starting place. ""The obvious choice is Dawson"" said Guscott. ""Especially given that Harry Ellis did not have his best game at scrum-half on Saturday. ""Dawson has the credentials and the experience",," even though his winning record as captain is not great. ""The other option is Martin Corry",," who is the standout forward at the moment. ""Unfortunately England can not rely on leaders on the field at the moment." England will announce their squad for the 12 March game against Italy on Saturday.

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"sport 343.txt England coach faces rap after row England coach Andy Robinson is facing disciplinary action after criticising referee Jonathan Kaplan in his side's Six Nations defeat to Ireland. The Rugby Football Union (RFU) will investigate Robinson after deciding not to lodge a complaint against Kaplan. Robinson may even have to apologise for his comments in order to avoid sanction from the International Rugby Board. Robinson had said he was ""livid"" about Kaplan's decisions on Saturday to disallow two England ""tries." The England coach went on to claim that ""only one side was refereed"". After reviewing tapes of the match", the RFU decided not to formally complain to the

IRB over the standard of Kaplan's refereeing. Instead the RFU said in a statement they would, " "set out any concerns the England team management may have in a confidential manner"" . An IRB spokesman said on the matter: ""We take all breaches of the code very seriously. ""Should the RFU resolve the issue to our satisfaction", as happened last month when the Scotland coach Matt Williams apologised for remarks made," it would be the end of the matter." Kaplan has vigorously defended his performance in England's 19-13 defeat at Lansdowne Road and admitted he was ""very disappointed"" with Robinson's remarks. And the South African has been appointed to take charge of Scotland's match against Wales on 13 March. The RFU recently fined Northampton coach Budge Pountney £2",000 and imposed a six-week ban for his criticism of referee Steve Lander after a Premiership match.

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"sport 344.txt Harinordoquy suffers France axe Number eight Imanol Harinordoquy has been dropped from France's squad for the Six Nations match with Ireland in Dublin on 12 March. Harinordoquy was a second-half replacement in last Saturday's 24-18 defeat to Wales. Bourgoin lock Pascal Pape", who has recovered from a sprained ankle, returns to the 22-man squad. Wing Cedric Heymans and Ludovic Valbon come in for Aurelien Rougerie and Jean-Philippe Grandclaude. Rougerie hurt his chest against Wales while Grandclaude was a second-half replacement against both England and Wales. Valbon, capped in last June's Tests against the United States and Canada," was a second half replacement in the win over Scotland. France coach Bernard Laporte said Harinordoquy had been axed after a poor display last weekend. ""Imanol has been dropped from the squad because the least I can say is that he didn't make a thundering comeback against Wales", said Laporte. We know the Ireland game will be fast and rough and we also want to be able to replace both locks during the game if needed," and Gregory Lamboley can also come on at number seven or eight. ""The grand slam is gone but we'll go to Ireland to win. ""It will be a very exciting game because Ireland have three wins under their belt", have just defeated England and have their eyes set on a Grand Slam." France", who lost to Wales last week, must defeat the Irish to keep alive their hopes of retaining the Six Nations trophy. Ireland are unbeaten in this year's tournament and have their sights set on a first Grand Slam since 1948. Dimitri Yachvili (Biarritz), Pierre Mignoni (Clermont), Yann Delaigue (Castres), Frederic Michalak (Stade Toulousain), Damien Traille (Biarritz), Yannick Jauzion (Stade Toulousain), Ludovic Valbon (Biarritz), Christophe Dominici (Stade Francais), Cedric Heymans (Stade Toulousain), Julien Laharrague (Brive) Sylvain Marconnet (Stade Francais), Nicolas Mas (Perpignan), Olivier Milloud (Bourgoin), Sebastien Bruno (Sale/ENG), William Servat (Stade Toulousain), Fabien Pelous (Stade Toulousain, capt), Jerome Thion (Biarritz), Pascal Pap&#233; (Bourgoin), Gregory Lamboley (Stade Toulousain), Serge Betsen (Biarritz), Julien Bonnaire (Bourgoin), Yannick Nyanga (B&#233;ziers)

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"sport 345.txt Wilkinson return 'unlikely' Jonny Wilkinson looks set to miss the whole of the 2005 RBS Six Nations. England's World Cup-winning fly-half said last week he was hoping to recover from his latest injury in time to play some role in the championship. But Rob Andrew", coach of Wilkinson's club side Newcastle," said that with only two games left to play Wilkinson was unlikely to be fit in time. ""It would be irresponsible to put him straight into a Test match", Andrew told the Times. Wilkinson is recovering from a knee injury which followed long-term neck and arm injuries. He has not played for England since the World Cup final in November 2003, since when the stutteri

ng world champions have lost nine of their 14 matches. Wilkinson is aiming to make his third start to the season in the Zurich Premiership match against Harlequins on 13 March. That game is the day after England play Italy in the Six Nations and six days before their final match of the championship against Scotland. We are hoping Jonny will be ready in a fortnight", but it is touch and go," said Andrew. His recovery is going very well and the key now is how he is reintroduced to playing and with it goal-kicking. ""He will probably have to come off the bench to start and it would be ridiculous and irresponsible to put him straight back into a Test match. ""We can't afford to get it wrong with a knee injury. We are in touch with England and they are relaxed about it." "Despite not playing for England", Wilkinson is still hoping to make the Lions tour to New Zealand this summer. Lions coach Sir Clive Woodward has not set a deadline for when Wilkinson has to start playing again in order to be considered for selection.

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"sport 346.txt England 'to launch ref protest' England will protest to the International Rugby Board (IRB) about the referee's performance in the defeat by Ireland", reports the Daily Mail. England coach Andy Robinson has called on ex-international referees Colin High and Steve Lander to analyse several of Jonathan Kaplan's decisions. ""I want to go through the tape with Colin and Steve", Robinson told the Daily Mail. I want to speak to the IRB about it. I think only one side was refereed." "High", the Rugby Football Union's referees' manager, claimed Kaplan made three major errors which changed the outcome of Sunday's match. England were beaten 19-13 by the Irish in Dublin," their third straight defeat in the 2005 Six Nations. ""The International Rugby Board will be disappointed", High told the Daily Mail. Jonathan Kaplan is in the top 20 in the world but that wasn't an international performance. ""It would not have been acceptable in the Zurich Premiership. ""If one of my referees had done that", I would have had my backside kicked for making the appointment. ""If any English referee refereed like that in a European match", there would be an inquest. No question about that. ""If someone had performed like that", he would have been pulled from the next game."

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"sport 347.txt Moore questions captaincy Brian Moore believes the England captain should not be a full-back. Jason Robinson has led the team during their opening three defeats in the Six Nations tournament", in the absence of fly-half Jonny Wilkinson. The world champions have struggled since the retirement of former captain Martin Johnson," a lock forward. And former England captain Moore told the BBC: ""Full-backs are too far away from the action. That's not a reflection on Robinson personally." "He added: ""I just think the point of influence needs to move closer to the pack - which is", after all," where games usually start and finish." "Moore says a lack of cohesion in the forwards is one of the reasons why England have lost against Wales", France and Ireland in this year's tournament. ""Assertiveness in the pack isn't there", we're not getting enough people into the breakdowns, he explained. We're not getting quick ball," which means the backs are being stifled. Their creativity depends on quick ball and we're not getting that." "With injuries depriving him of key players like Wilkinson", coach Andy Robinson has given youngsters such as Harry Ellis and Jamie Noon a chance. And Moore believes the last two games against Italy and Scotland are a good opportunity to experiment further. ""The problem is the players that are around to replace the icons which have been lost because of retirement and injury don't have the requisite experience", Moore added

d. You can't do anything about that but play them. There are players who have been knocking on the door," it's time for them to be looked at in these last two games because there's nothing on them. ""We then go into next season with a greater certainty of who can and cannot handle the pressure of international rugby.""

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"sport 348.txt Owen set for skipper role Wales number eight Michael Owen says replacing Gareth Thomas as Wales' captain will be straight forward because of the leadership quality in the squad. ""You dream about playing for Wales", but it never enters your head that you will one day captain your country, he said. It's an easy job really because there are so many experienced players in the side," but it will be a massive honour." Coach Mike Ruddock says the 24-year-old should take the armband from broken thumb victim Thomas against Scotland. Ruddock praised Owen's contribution as vice-captain and pack leader in this year's wins over England", Italy and France, notably his role in the second-half in Paris following Thomas' injury. The 22-cap Dragons man says that Thomas will be badly missed," though. ""Gareth is going to be a massive loss because he is a brilliant player and he has done a fantastic job since he has been captain", said Owen. He has put his own unique stamp on things. We are going to miss him but the strength of the squad is shown when you have someone like Kevin Morgan to step in." Owen admitted the Grand Slam had been mentioned within the squad but that no-one was getting carried away with the three victories over England", Italy and France. ""We can't get ahead of ourselves", he said. We have a massive game next up and we are just looking forward to preparing for that. ""Scotland are improving all the time. Like us they did well in France and were unlucky not to get a win. ""Against Ireland they played fantastically well in the first 15 minutes before falling away. ""They are probably going on a similar journey to the one we have been on in the last couple of years.""

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"sport 349.txt Italy aim to rattle England Italy coach John Kirwan believes his side can upset England as the Six Nations wooden spoon battle heats up. The two sides", both without a win," meet on 12 March at Twickenham and Kirwan says his side will be hoping to make the most of England's current slump. ""We have to make sure the England and France games are tough for them. ""England have not been having the best of championships. That is a big one for us and them and I am sure my players will rise to the occasion", he said. But Kirwan admits that a lot of hard work will be needed with his kickers before the trip to London. Roland de Marigny and Luciano Orquera had a miserable time with the boot in the dire defeat to Scotland as Chris Paterson stole the show to give the hosts a much-needed 18-10 victory. Kirwan said: The kicking was the decisive factor in Scotland which cost us and it could go down to the kicking again next time. ""But I have a lot of confidence in my players and I am positive we can put everything together against England." England", meanwhile, are licking their wounds and rueing what might have been had two decisions from referee Jonathan Kaplan not gone against them in the second half in Dublin. First Mark Cueto was judged offside as he chased fly-half Charlie Hodgson's kick," and then Kaplan opted not to call upon video evidence to see if Josh Lewsey had touched down after being driven over Ireland's line. But centre Jamie Noon believes the side at least showed better form than their previous two defeats. ""We definitely improved against an in-form Irish side", he said. We went to Dublin quietly confident that we would be able to compete," and I think we showed that. ""We have got to make sure we now take the form and positives into the Italy ga

me. We are under no illusions that it is going to be easy", " but we definitely need a win." " England have now equalled an 18-year low of four successive championship defeats", including France in Paris last season, and have lost four in a row under Andy Robinson. His predecessor, Sir Clive Woodward, began his seven-year reign with three defeats and two draws.

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"sport 350.txt Dal Maso in to replace Bergamasco David da l Maso has been handed the task of replacing the injured Mauro Bergamasco at flanker in Italy's team to face Scotland on Saturday. Alessandro Troncon continues at scrum-half despite the return to fitness of Paul Griffen. The experienced Cristian Stoica is recalled at centre at the expense of Walter Pozzebon. " "We are going to Scotland for the first away win and nothing else", " said manager Marco Bollesan. I really believe this is the team who will have all our faith for Saturday's game. " "We lost a player like Mauro Bergamasco who has been important for us", but (coach) John (Kirwan) has put together the best team at present, if not ever. R de Marigny (Parma); Mirco Bergamasco (Stade Francais), C Stoica (Montpellier), A Masi (Viadana), L Nitoglia (Calvisano); L Orquera (Padova), A Troncon (Treviso); A Lo Cicero (L'Aquila), F Ongaro (Treviso), M Castrogiovanni (Calvisano), S Dellape (Agen), M Bortolami (Narbonne, capt), A Persico (Agen), D dal Maso (Treviso), S Parisse (Treviso). G Intoppa (Calvisano), S Perugini (Calvisano), CA Del Fava (Parma), S Orlando (Treviso), P Griffen (Calvisano), R Pedrazzi (Viadana), K Robertson (Viadana).

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"sport 351.txt Teenager Tait picked for England Newcastle's teenage centre Mathew Tait has been named as a centre in England's team to face Wales in the Six Nations opener in Cardiff on Saturday. The 18-year-old will play alongside Falcons' team-mate Jamie Noon in England's midfield. Scrum-half Matt Dawson is also recalled", despite being left out of the initial squad after a row over clashing TV and training commitments. Bath lock Danny Grewcock will also start, pending a possible citing. England coach Andy Robinson has also awarded Gloucester flanker Andy Hazell his first Six Nations start. In another change to the side that lost to Australia in November, Leicester lock Ben Kay replaces Bath second row Steve Borthwick. Robinson was already without Jonny Wilkinson, Mike Tindall, Stuart Abbott, Richard Hill and Will Greenwood, while Mike Catt had been left out of England's squad. J Robinson (Sale Sharks, capt); M Cueto (Sale Sharks), M Tait (Newcastle), J Noon (Newcastle), J Lewsey (Wasps); C Hodgson (Sale Sharks), M Dawson (Wasps); G Rowntree (Leicester), S Thompson (Northampton), J White (Leicester), D Grewcock (Bath), B Kay (Leicester), L Moody (Leicester), A Hazell (Gloucester), J Worsley (Wasps). Replacements: A Titterrell (Sale Sharks), P Vickery (Gloucester), S Borthwick (Bath), J Forrester (Gloucester), H Ellis (Leicester), O Barkley (Bath), B Cohen (Northampton).

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"sport 352.txt Wood - Ireland can win Grand Slam Former captain Keith Wood believes Ireland can win only their second Grand Slam - and first since 1948 - in this year's RBS Six Nations Championship. After claiming their first Triple Crown for 19 years last season", " Wood tips his former teammates to go one better. " "Things have been building up over the past few years and I think this is the year for Ireland", " he told BBC Sport. There is a great chance to win a Grand Slam. A lot of things are in our favour with England and France at home." " Ireland have finished runners-up three times", including last year, since the old Five Nations became Six in 2000, and not finished outside t

he top three in the past five years. Despite being without flanker Keith Gleeson," coach Eddie O'Sullivan has not had to contend with the sort of casualty lists that have hit England and Scotland in particular prior to the tournament. ""For Ireland to win it we need to stay relatively injury free", and fortunately we are one of the few teams that have done that so far," Wood added. It is going to be tough and we need to take all the luck and opportunities that come our way." Ireland's last game of the tournament is against Wales in Cardiff - a fixture they have not lost since 1983. But despite their traditional hospitality when the Irish are visiting", Wood believes Wales might end their four-match losing run against England in Cardiff. ""So many of the major England players have either retired in the last year or are injured that I think it will be very hard for them down in Cardiff", Wood added. Wales have had four brilliant games in the last year or so and lost all four," so the time is right for them now to beat one of the major teams."

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sport 353.txt Scots suffer another injury blow Scotland's back row crisis has worsened ahead of the RBS Six Nations with news that Scott Gray will miss out on the opening matches. The Borders flanker has a knee injury and joins Donnie Macfadyen and Allister Hogg on the sidelines. Star number eight Simon Taylor will miss at least the first two games after damaging an ankle during his comeback. Scott MacLeod (ankle ligaments) and Jon Petrie (cartilage) are also doubtful for the opener in Paris on 5 February. Gray",26, who won his first cap against Australia at Murrayfield last year," was hurt in club action at the weekend. Scotland doctor James Robson said: ""A scan has shown damage to the medial ligaments of Scott's right knee ruling him out of the first part of the Championship. ""We will seek further specialist advice in due course to determine just how long Scott may be out for." Another potential option", Glasgow flanker Andrew Wilson," has been ruled out for a month after damaging ligaments in both knees against Northampton recently. Flanker Jason White and prop Tom Smith have also been suffering from flu and missed this week's training sessions. ""We have got plenty of good", young players coming through and we have got to look at the opportunities it represents for them, rather than the negatives," Williams added. Williams could now turn to Edinburgh pair Alasdair Strokosch and Simon Cross. Leeds Tykes flanker Jon Dunbar also trained with the squad but is still awaiting verification of his eligibility to qualify for Scotland.

sport 354.txt O'Sullivan keeps his powder dry When you are gunning for glory and ultimate success keeping the gunpowder dry is essential. Ireland coach Eddie O'Sullivan appears to have done that quite successfully in the run-up to this season's Six Nations Championship. He decreed after the 2003 World Cup that players should have a decent conditioning period during the year. That became a reality at the end of last summer with a 10-week period at the start of the this season. It may have annoyed his Scottish, and in particularly Welsh, cousins who huffed and puffed at the disrespect apparently shown to the Celtic League. We will say nothing of Mike Ruddock ''poaching'' eight of the Dragons side that faced Leinster on Sunday. But, like O'Sullivan, he was well within his rights, particularly when you are talking about the national side and pride that goes along with it. The IRFU has thrown their weight behind O'Sullivan, who must be glad that in the main, there is centrally-controlled contracts. Bar Keith Gleeson who is just returning from a broken leg, everyone of O'Sullivan's squad is fit, fresh and standing at the oche ready to launch this season's campaign. But I doubt whether O'Sullivan is going to gloat about the handling of his players. He is not that sort of person. However, he may look at the

overworked and injury-hit England, Wales and France squads whose players have been overworked, and then pat himself on the back for his foresight. But there is still the question of turning up and transferring that freshness into positive results when the referee signals the start of the game. Already Ireland are being earmarked as hot favourites in many quarters to go the whole hog this season. A first Grand Slam since Karl Mullen's led the team to a clean sweep in 1948. With England and France visiting Lansdowne Road for the last time before the old darling is pulled down, everything looks perfectly placed. But in the days of yore that frightened the life out of any Irishman. Under the burden of great expectations, Ireland have crumpled. Take the Triple Crown-winning side of 1985 under Mick Doyle. They were expected to up the ante further for a Grand Slam, only the second in Ireland's history. What happened in 1986? Whitewashed. You see, Ireland, in any sport, love to be downsized. Then they can go out and prove a point to the contrary. It is the nature of the beast. But O'Sullivan's side are very capable of proving a salient point this season. After their first Triple Crown for 19 years, they can live up to their success and take a further step up the ladder. O'Sullivan has kept faith and displayed loyalty to his players, and they have repaid him in spades ... and there is more to come. He has some old dogs in his squad, but he will come to this season's championship with a different box of tricks, and a new verve to succeed. Ireland can indeed succeed, but just whisper it.

sport 355.txt Wales get Williams fitness boost Wales are hopeful that openside flanker Martyn Williams could be fit for Saturday's RBS 6 Nations championship opener against England in Cardiff. Williams was expected to miss the match with a disc problem in his neck, but has been making a speedy recovery. He will have tests in the next 48 hours and we are pretty optimistic he is getting there", Wales' team physiotherapist Mark Davies said. It has been frustrating but he is on the mend," he has made good progress." Last week Williams", along with fellow flanker Colin Charvis - who is unlikely to play for at least a month while he recovers from a foot injury - was all but ruled out of the Millennium Stadium clash. With Williams initially thought to be struggling, the signs pointed towards Wales coach Mike Ruddock handing a first cap to former Wales Under-21 skipper Richie Pugh. Cardiff Blues flanker Williams, 29, offers considerable experience and if he is declared fit then Ruddock might be tempted to include him in the back row. Charvis will be reviewed by the Wales medical staff next Monday," but Davies admitted that there was only an ""outside chance"" of him being fit to face France in Wales' third championship game on 26 February. Wales' other injury concern is Pugh's fellow Neath-Swansea Ospreys player Sonny Parker", as the centre has a trapped nerve in his neck. ""Sonny's injury is still an issue", Davies said. It is still painful and irritable. We will run the rule of thumb over him in the next couple of days." Ruddock will name his starting line-up for the England game at 1830 GMT on Tuesday evening", as Wales target their first victory in Cardiff over the world champions since 1993.

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"sport 356.txt Dawson joins England injury list Scrum-half Matt Dawson is an injury doubt for England's Six Nations opener against Wales next weekend. The World Cup winner missed Wasps' 12-9 loss to Bath on Saturday after injuring his right calf. Wasps coach Warren Gatland said: ""He's got a fitness test in the week but he's got a good chance of playing." Gloucester's Andy Hazell and Leicester star Lewis Moody also received knocks during their respective league matches", but should be fit for Wales next week. If Dawson is not fit to face Wales, Robinson will have to choose from Gloucester's Andy Gomarsal

l or Leicester youngster Harry Ellis. Jamie Noon is another player on the side lines after he limped off in the first half against Saracens on Friday with a dead leg. The centre, who is in line for a first Six Nations start against Wales, will have to wait 48 hours before knowing the state of his injury.

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"sport 357.txt Wales want rugby league training Wales could follow England's lead by training with a rugby league club. England have already had a three-day session with Leeds Rhinos", and Wales are thought to be interested in a similar clinic with rivals St Helens. Saints coach Ian Millward has given his approval, but if it does happen it is unlikely to be this season. Saints have a week's training in Portugal next week," while Wales will play England in the opening Six Nations match on 5 February. ""We have had an approach from Wales", confirmed a Saints spokesman. It's in the very early stages but it is something we are giving serious consideration to." St Helens", who are proud of their Welsh connections, are obvious partners for the Welsh Rugby Union, despite a spat in 2001 over the collapse of Kieron Cunningham's proposed £500,000 move to union side Swansea. A similar cross-code deal that took Iestyn Harris from Leeds to Cardiff in 2001 did go through, before the talented stand-off returned to the 13-man code with Bradford Bulls. Kel Coslett, who famously moved from Wales to league in the 1960s, is currently Saints' football manager, while Clive Griffiths - Wales' defensive coach - is a former St Helens player and is thought to be the man behind the latest initiative. Scott Gibbs, the former Wales and Lions centre, played for St Helens from 1994-96 and was in the Challenge Cup-winning team at Wembley in 1996.

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"sport 358.txt Saint-Andre anger at absent stars Sale Sharks director of rugby Philippe Saint-Andre has re-opened rugby's club-versus-country debate. Sale host Bath in the Powergen Cup on Friday", but the Frenchman has endured a ""difficult week"" with six players away on England's Six Nations training camp. ""It's an important game but we've just the one full session. It's the same for everyone but we need to manage it. ""If five players or more are picked for your country they should move the date of the game", he told BBC Sport. Unless the authorities agree to make changes, Saint-Andre believes England's national team will suffer as clubs opt to sign foreigners and retired internationals. That's not good for the politics of the English team or for English rugby", he argues. It is an issue he has taken up before, most notably during the autumn internationals when Sale lost all three Zurich Premiership matches they played. Now he fears it could derail the club's hopes of cup silverware after eight players, including captain Jason Robinson and fly-half Charlie Hodgson, were away with their countries. We're in the quarter-finals", it's always better to play at home than away and it's a great opportunity, he added. But we have to be careful. Bath have just been knocked out of Europe and will make it a tough game. It also comes at the end of a very, very difficult week. ""Sebastien Bruno's been with France", Jason White with Scotland and there are six with England," that's eight players plus injuries - 13 players out of a squad of 31. ""We'll have just one session together and will have to do our best to make that a good one on Thursday afternoon."" Gloucester have also been caught in a club-versus-country conflict after England sought a second medical opinion on James Simpson-Daniel's fitness. The winger is carrying a shoulder injury and the national team management believe he requires time on the sidelines. As a result he misses the Cherry and White's quarter-final at home to Bristol. ""Under the

Elite Player Squad agreement", England wanted a second opinion, which they can do," director of rugby Nigel Melville told the Gloucester Citizen. They obviously want him for international rugby and we want him for club rugby in what is a very important game for us. There is a conflict of interests. ""The surgeon who carried out his operation said he was fine for us but England say he is still vulnerable to be damaged again and want him on a full rehab programme." Simp son-Daniel added: ""I've said to Nigel I want to be back playing and that means if everything goes well this week", " I can target the Worcester game (on 29 January) for a return.""

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"sport 359.txt Ruddock backs Yapp's credentials Wales coach Mike Ruddock says John Yapp has what it takes as an international. The 21-year-old Blues prop is the only uncapped player in Wales' Six Nations squad", " gaining a chance in the absence of Ospreys loose-head Duncan Jones. ""John is a young man with a big future. He has been playing with the Blues for two years and has racked up mileage on his playing clock", said Ruddock. He has international size, is a big, " physical lad and a good ball-carrier with a high tackle-count." Ruddock's assessment was backed up by Yapp's coach at the Blues", " former Wales and Lions prop Dai Young. ""John's been on an upward curve all season and is going from strength to strength", Young told BBC Sport Wales. His ball carrying gives us good go-forward," he impresses in defence and his work-rate is excellent. ""He's working hard on his scrummaging technique", " which he is keen to improve to become a destroyer on the loose-head. ""To be fair to him he's not quite there with the scrummaging yet", but nobody can fault his effort," commitment and attitude. ""John's a very strong man and is eager for the challenge", " if he's pitched in he won't let anyone down. ""He's developing quickly", " but I hope he isn't pushed too quickly in a way that would hurt his development." Ruddock hopes that the selection of Yapp and Dragons lock Ian Gough - out of the international reckoning since falling out with former coach Steve Hansen - will send a message to other players in Wales. ""John and Ian have been rewarded for impressing during the Heineken Cup competition", said Ruddock. Both of them have played well," and we want to send a message out that consistently playing well gets you in the squad. ""We believe this is an exciting squad representing traditional values of Welsh rugby", " and based on the performances in the November internationals. ""We have strength and experience up front", and well-recognised talent," pace and skill behind. ""The management team just want to get hold of the players and get out on the training pitch at the moment. ""They are all due in on Sunday", " and that's when the hard work starts.""

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"sport 360.txt Player burn-out worries Robinson England coach Andy Robinson says English rugby has to act now to prevent injury destroying players' careers. He will be without a host of big names for the Six Nations as the intensity of professional rugby union hits players. ""Injuries are part of the sport but we have to have a look at the amount of injuries that occur in the English season", " Robinson told BBC Sport. I think players are probably going to have three or four years taken off their careers." Robinson will be missing an entire midfield for the Six Nations with the likes of Jonny Wilkinson", " Mike Tindall and Will Greenwood injured. Rugby union has become far more physically demanding since the game went professional nearly 10 years ago. As a result three of the major stakeholders in English rugby have launched an ""injury audit"" to find out how players are coping. The audit is jointly funded by the Professional Rugby Players' Association", " the Rugby Football Union and Prem

ier Rugby. As far as Robinson is concerned its findings must not be ignored. ""I think there's an injury audit coming out in March that's got some great information in there that I think everybody in the English game has got to look at", he said. If we don't the situation is going to get worse and not better," so I think rugby as a whole has got to look at this.""  
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, "sport 361.txt Hodges announces rugby retirement Scarlets and USA Eagles forward Dave Hodges has ended his playing career to pursue a coaching role in the States. The 36-year-old", who has 54 caps, was Llanelli's player of the season in 2001/2, but has battled injury for the last two of his seven years at Stradey. He tore a pectoral muscle against the Ospreys on Boxing Day," an injury that would have kept him out for the season. ""Realising I would be unable to play this season", the club and I agreed to end my contract early," said Hodges. It allows me to move back to the US and pursue opportunities there and allows the Scarlets to look to the next generation." The Scarlets have begun to rebuild their squad for next season after a disappointing Heineken Cup campaign", with plenty more signings and departures expected in the coming weeks. Scarlets chief executive Stuart Gallacher confirmed that 17 of the current squad would be out of contract in the summer. ""We have a deliberate policy whereby around half the squad are coming out of contract and they know they won't all be re-signed", it's a chance to invigorate the squad," he said. I'm positive about the future of the Scarlets both on and off the field." Gallacher was keen to pay tribute to the role back-five forward Hodges has played at Stradey Park", though. ""David has been a highly influential member of our squad for seven years", said Gallacher. He is a real professional and we thank him for the part he has played in our success. ""I am sure he has an enormous contribution to make to the development of rugby in the US and we wish him and his family well." Hodges described his years at Stradey as ""the best time of my life.""  
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"sport 362.txt Funding cut hits Wales Students The Wales Students rugby side has become a casualty of the Welsh Rugby Union's reorganisation at youth level. An amalgamated Under-18 side formed from separate schools and national youth teams plays its first match on Thursday", against Italy at the Gnoll. But that move has seen the WRU decide to end its funding of representative sides such as Wales Students. As a result, traditional international fixtures against England and France in the New Year have been cancelled. The Welsh Students Rugby Football Union feels that it is unable to properly prepare for or stage the matches. The secretary of the Welsh Students Rugby Football Union, Reverend Eldon Phillips," said: ""It is a shame that fixtures cannot be maintained this year. ""The competition provided by the strong English and French teams has enabled the Welsh Students to test themselves in high quality matches. ""The increasing number of young rugby players entering Higher Education look for the biggest challenge", that is representative rugby, but this year that opportunity will be denied them. Players who have played for Wales Students before going on to win full senior representative honours include Robert Jones, Rob Howley, Jon Humphreys, Darren Morris, Martyn Williams and Ceri Sweeney.  
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"sport 363.txt Calder fears for Scottish rugby Former Scotland international Finlay Calder fears civil war at the SRU could seriously ha

mper his country's RBS Six Nations campaign. Four members of the executive board", including the chairman, David Mackay," have resigned after a simmering row. And Calder said: ""This is terrible news for every level of Scottish rugby. ""David is a successful businessman and I thought that if anybody could transform the negative atmosphere and rising debt level",, it was him." Mackay's executive board has been in a power struggle with the general committee",, which contains members elected by Scotland's club sides. ""He has been driven out by people who seem happier waging civil war than addressing the central issue that professional rugby can't be run by amateurs", said Calder. In fact," I don't understand why we are still having this argument 10 years after professionalism arrived. ""But I don't believe the rest of the SRU will take this lying down. ""I think the banks will be dismayed at this decision and", ultimately," it is them who pull the strings. ""So I wouldn't be surprised if they reviewed their position. But", in the wider picture," what message does this send out?"" He thought the work of Scotland's coaches", who have been attempting to arrest the decline of the national side," would be made much more difficult. ""Matt Williams and Willie Anderson must be wondering",, 'what have we walked into here?'" said Calder. ""And we can now expect weeks of arguments and acrimony just at a time when we should be looking forward to the Six Nations Championship. ""I am very", very disappointed," more than you can imagine. Why do so many Scots have this knack of turning on each other when the going gets tough?""

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sport 364.txt A year to remember for Irish There used to be one subliminal moment during a year in Irish rugby that stood out more than most. Well", at least there used to one. Now there is a handful to look back with a mixture of satisfaction, and sorrow. It has been quite a year for the Irish, and not just with Eddie O'Sullivan's Triple Crown winning international outfit either. Right down through the ranks Irish rugby is creating waves and upsetting the more established teams in the game. But most of the kudos will go to O'Sullivan and his merry band of warriors who not only collected their first Triple Crown for 29 years, but also finished their autumn campaign with a 100% record. For the second year in succession they also finished in the runners-up spot in the RBS Six Nations. But in the three games in November which included a victory over Tri-Nations champions and Grand Slam chasing South Africa, Ireland finished the year on a high. The 18-12 victory at Lansdowne Road was only their second victory over the Boks after the initial success back in 1965. That success was revenge for the consecutive defeats in Bloemfontein and Cape Town in the summer. Those two reverses and the 35-17 flop against France, were the only dark patches in an otherwise excellent 12 months. But the big one, of course, was the 19-13 defeat of World Cup champions England on their precious Twickenham turf. The winning try was conceived in O'Sullivan's mind, perfectly executed by the team and finished immaculately by Girvan Dempsey. For me, the try of the Championship. O'Sullivan's career is now in vertical take-off mode. It is no wonder that Sir Clive Woodward has elevated the Galway-based coach to head the Lions Test side. Not only that, but a fair majority of the present Ireland side will be wearing red next June in New Zealand. There can be no doubt that Ireland's representation will be the biggest ever, albeit in a proposed 44-man squad. In Brian O'Driscoll and Paul O'Connell, Ireland have now the two front-runners for the captaincy. Gordon D'Arcy, whose career began as a teenager back in 1999, finally arrived when he was named the Six Nations Player of the Tournament. But it was not only the senior squad that brought kudos to Ireland, the youngsters strutted their stuff on the big stage as well. The under-21 squad confounded the doubters as they went all the way to the World Cup final in Scotland only to be

beaten by a powerful All Black side in the decider. The young Irish boys had stated their intentions earlier in the season when they finished runners-up to England in the Six Nations under-21 tournament. On the provincial front, Leinster, for second year in succession, blew it when the Heineken Cup looked a good wager. While Ulster finished runners-up in their very tight group for the second season in succession, it was Munster again flying the flag for the Irish. Looking to reach their third final, they went down 37-32 to eventual winners Wasps in what many believe was the most competitive and thunderous game ever witnessed at Lansdowne Road. How Wasps recovered from that energy-sapping duel, and then go onto to defeat Toulouse in the final was anybody's guess. Ulster, meanwhile, just lost out to adding the inaugural Celtic Cup in winning the Celtic League when they were pipped at the post by the Scarlets in the final game. Ulster, however, took time to start the new season under new coach Mark McCall. The once famous Ravenhill fortress was breached four times as Ulster only managed five wins from their first 12 outings in the Celtic League. Leinster are again looking the most potent outfit going into 2005, but whether they can take that final step under Declan Kidney is another thing. On the down side, Irish rugby was hit by a number of tragedies. Teenage star John McCall died while playing for the Ireland against New Zealand in the under-19 World Cup game in Durban. That happened only 10 days after he led Royal Armagh to their first Ulster Schools' Cup success since 1977. The death of former Ireland coach and Lions flanker Mike Doyle in a car crash in Northern Ireland shocked the rugby fraternity. A larger than life character, Doyle had coached Ireland to the Triple Crown in 1985, the last time that goal had been achieved before this season. Ulster rugby also suffered the sudden deaths of well-known Londonderry YM player Jim Huey, Coleraine's Jonathan Hutchinson, and Belfast Harlequins lock Johnny Poole. They all passed away long before the full-time whistle.

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"sport 365.txt Williams stays on despite dispute Matt Williams insists he has no thoughts of quitting as national coach as a result of the power struggle currently gripping Scottish rugby. The chairman, chief executive and three non-executive directors all departed in a row over the game's future direction. But Williams said: ""I want to make it clear that I'm committed totally to Scottish rugby. ""I've brought my family here and we've immersed ourselves in Scottish life. There's no way that I'm walking away." However, he attempted to steer clear of taking sides in the dispute. ""I'd like to stress that the national team is separate to the political situation", he said. When you come to an undertaking like this and you are trying to make a difference then there are always people who will begrudge you," who are jealous and want to try to drag you down. ""When you have that situation", you have to have the courage of your convictions to see it through. ""There was some very unhelpful and uninformed comment that the national team had received a massive increase in budget at the expense of other parts of Scottish rugby and that is simply not the case. ""Like all good coaches", you go and ask for an increase. But we were told in no uncertain terms that the financial situation did not allow that. ""The idea that we are lighting cigars with £20 notes while the rest of Scottish rugby flounders is absolutely untrue. ""We also attracted criticism because of the number of days players spent with the national team. ""But let me give you the truth. Our Irish counterparts", whom we have to compete with in a few days' time," had 70 days together at the summer. ""They are currently in camp now and they will have another 21 days in camp before the Six Nations. ""That means they will have 91 days away from their club from July until the Six Nations. We", on the other hand," will have 16. ""There must be a win-win philosophy and

attitude within Scottish rugby and that is what we are after - both groups winning", "not competing."

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"sport 366.txt Lomu relishing return to action Former All Black star Jonah Lomu says he cannot wait to run out on the pitch for former England rugby union captain Martin Johnson's testimonial on 4 June. The 29-year-old had a kidney transplant in July 2004 but will play his first full match for three years", "leading a southern hemisphere side at Twickenham. ""I actually started training three weeks after my operation but I was very limited until a few months ago. ""Now it's basically bring it on!"" said the giant winger. ""The match on 4 June will be my first 15-man game but I have a training schedule which is quite testing and combines with sevens and a whole lot of things", said Lomu. I have got so much energy since my operation that I train three times a day, "six days a week. ""Mohammed Ali has always been my ideal. Coming back to rugby", "people said 'you are dreaming' but it always starts off with a dream. ""It's up to you whether you want to make it a reality." Opinion has been divided on whether Lomu should attempt to return to the game after such a major operation. But when Lomu was asked whether he was taking a risk he replied: ""As much as someone going down the road being hit by a bus. ""There are a lot of people in the world with one kidney who just don't know it. ""I have talked this over", "had a chat with the donor and this is to set my soul at peace and finish something I started in 1994 [when he made his All Blacks debut]."" At his lowest ebb Lomu was so ill he could barely walk", "but he says he is now getting stronger every day and his long-term target is to play for New Zealand again. ""The only person who saw me at my worst was my wife", he added. I used to take two steps and fall over but now I can run and it is all coming back," and a lot more quickly than I ever thought it would. ""To play for the All Blacks would be the highest honour I could get. That is the long-term goal and you have to start somewhere."

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"sport 367.txt Johnson announces June retirement Former England captain Martin Johnson has announced he is to retire from rugby union at the end of the season. Johnson", who captained England to World Cup glory in 2003, will play his final match in June. Johnson won 84 England caps and quit Test rugby at the start of 2004, "just two months after leading Sir Clive Woodward's team to victory in Sydney. The 34-year-old Leicester lock's final match will be his testimonial at Twickenham on 4 June. ""I'm confident I have made the right decision to retire", said Johnson. I'm sure there will be times next season when I'll wish I was out there playing for the Tigers," but you know when the time is right to go and I feel this is the right time. ""I feel physically that I could play for another season", "but playing week in and week out in the Premiership is a full-time occupation and I only want to be out there for the right reasons." Johnson will always be revered by England fans for captaining England to their dramatic World Cup win against Australia in Sydney", but his list of achievements does not stop at that. He is the only man to captain the Lions twice and he also led England to a Six Nations Grand Slam. Johnson also had huge success as captain of Leicester, guiding the Tigers to back to back Heineken Cup victories and several Premiership titles. Apart from his marvellous captaincy Johnson was also one of the finest second rows to ever play the game. Tough and physically intimidating, he ruled the rucks and mauls for the best part of a decade and was integral in England's rise to the top of the world game. His final appearance will be in his testimonial at Twickenham," where he will lead

a team against a side captained by New Zealand winger Jonah Lomu. The All Black is aiming to return to action after a kidney transplant and Johnson expects it to be a memorable occasion. "This game against Jonah will be a great way to end the season and end my career", said Johnson. Lomu, rugby union's first global superstar after his exploits in the 1995 World Cup, said he was proud to be part of Johnson's farewell. We hold him in such high esteem", said Lomu. He is such a great leader and I am just honoured to be on the same pitch."

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"sport 368.txt A November to remember Last Saturday", one newspaper proclaimed that England were still the number one side in the world. That statement was made to look a little foolish by events later that afternoon at Twickenham. But it illustrated the wonderful unpredictability of Test rugby at the highest level, at the end of a richly entertaining autumn series. The final weekend threw the world pecking order into renewed confusion," with Australia's triumph in London followed by France's capitulation to New Zealand. "Clearly", there is no number one side in the world at the moment, declared Wallabies coach Eddie Jones on arrival back in Sydney. There are four," five or probably six sides all competing at the same level and on any given day the difference between one side and another is only about 1%." While that bodes well for rugby as a whole", it also sharpens the sense of excitement ahead of what could be the most open Six Nations Championship for a decade. While the Wallabies, All Blacks and Springboks hit the beach before turning their attention to Super 12 matters in the new year, Europe's finest have less than 10 weeks before they return to the international fray. And for the first time in more than a decade, it will not simply be a straightforward choice between England and France for the Six Nations title. That owes much to Ireland's continued progress and the belief that Wales are on the verge of delivering a major scalp to cement the promise of their autumn displays. , who secured a first Triple Crown in 19 years last season, could go one better and win their first Five/Six Nations title since 1985. They start with away games against Italy and Scotland, before England and France come to Lansdowne Road. Their momentous victory over the Springboks can only bolster Ireland's self-belief, while Ronan O'Gara's late drop goal to deliver victory over Argentina was further proof that Eddie O'Sullivan's side can now close out tight games. Not that England or France, who have won nine of the last 10 Six Nations titles between them, will lay down quietly. dismantling of the Springboks suggested that even after the loss of such influential figures as Martin Johnson and Lawrence Dallaglio, they still have the personnel to prosper. The narrow defeat to Australia was a timely reminder that not everything is blooming in the red rose garden, but the fresh shoots of post-World Cup recovery have been sown by new head coach Andy Robinson. A fresh desire to regain former heights is evident, and if England emerge triumphant from an opening Six Nations engagement in Cardiff, a fourth title in six years is within reach. are in familiar revival territory, but this time it appears there is substance behind the rediscovered style. While South Africa's over-confidence in Cardiff made for a closer scoreline than expected, Wales could legitimately claim to have had victory within their grasp against the All Blacks in one of the best Tests in recent memory. If Mike Ruddock can coax a reliable set-piece platform from his pack, there is no reason why victories should not ensue come February. The last fortnight has left in a state of bewilderment after an autumn series that began with a superb victory over Australia. A stunning defeat to Argentina, their first loss since the World Cup, could have been attributed to trademark French inconsistency. But the manner of New Zealand's 45-6 demolition job in Paris has coach Bernard Laporte bemoaning a lack of young talent coming through to re

place the old guard. Fortunately for the French, the opening match of the Six Nations sees them entertaining in Paris. After two reasonable performances against Australia, the Scots' humbling by the Springboks forced coach Matt Williams to reassess his belief that a win over one of the major nations was imminent. While individuals such as Chris Cusiter and Ali Hogg enhanced their reputations, a lack of top-class players will continue to undermine their best efforts. , who start with home games against Ireland and Wales before travelling to Scotland, are also hopeful of registering more than one victory for the first time in the Championship. As autumn gives way to winter and the Heineken Cup prepares to resume centre stage meantime, the joy of Six will keep the home fires burning until February.

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"sport 369.txt South Africa sweep top awards South Africa's Schalk Burger was named player of the year as the Tri-Nations champions swept the top honours at the International Rugby Board's awards. The flanker topped a list which included Ireland star Gordon D'Arcy and Australian sensation Matt Giteau. Jake White claimed the coaching award while his side held off Grand Slam winners France to take the team award. England player Simon Amor beat teammate Ben Gollings and Argentine Lucio Lopez Fleming to win the sevens award. Burger's award came just a week after he won the equivalent prize from his fellow international players and White", who also coached Burger at under-21 level," paid tribute to him. ""Schalk's emergence as a major force has meant a lot to South African rugby", but has also influenced world rugby," said White. He's become to South African rugby what Jonty Rhodes was to South African cricket. It's amazing what he has achieved in such a short time so far in his international career." "Amor", who will captain England in this season's opening IRB Sevens tournament, the Dubai Sevens, which start on Thursday," was delighted with his award. ""There are so many great sevens players on the circuit at the moment that this is a genuine honour", said the Gloucester fly-half.

sport 370.txt Robinson wants dual code success England rugby union captain Jason Robinson has targeted dual code success over Australia on Saturday. Robinson, a former rugby league international before switching codes in 2000, leads England against Australia at Twickenham at 1430 GMT. And at 1815 GMT, Great Britain's rugby league team take on Australia in the final of the Tri-Nations tournament. Beating the Aussies in both games would be a massive achievement", especially for league," said Robinson. England have the chance to seal their third autumn international victory after successive wins over Canada and South Africa, as well as gaining revenge for June's 51-15 hammering by the Wallabies. Meanwhile, Great Britain could end 34 years of failure against Australia with victory at Elland Road. Britain have won individual Test matches, but have failed to secure any silverware or win the Ashes (with a series victory) since 1970. They have a great opportunity to land a trophy and it would be a massive boost for rugby league in this country if we won", said Robinson. I know the boys can do it - they've defeated the Aussies once already in the Tri-Nations." But Robinson was not losing sight of the task facing his England side in their final autumn international. ""For us", we've played two and won two this November," he said. If we beat Australia it would be the end to a great autumn series for England. If we stumble then we'll be looking back with a few regrets. Robinson also revealed that the union side had sent the Great Britain team a good luck message ahead of the showdown in Leeds. ""We signed a card for them today and will write them an email on Saturday wishing them all the best", said Robinson. Everyone has signed the card - a lot of the guys watch league and we support them fully. ""Both games will be very tough and hopefully we'll both do

well. ""

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"sport 371.txt All Black magic: New Zealand rugby Playing colours: All black The Haka and more! The All Blacks Charles John Munro discovered rugby at London's Christ College", and on his return to Nelson he staged New Zealand's first game. Nelson Town met Nelson College on 14 May, 1870, the Town triumphing by two goals to nil, instigating a game that would become a national obsession and come to dominate the country's sporting passions. The game appealed to the Kiwi psyche and quickly spread, the native Maoris finding a particular empathy with the sport's warrior ethos. In 1888 a British team led by A E Stoddart toured New Zealand and Australia, and soon after a Maori named Joe Warbrick and an English ex-pat called Thomas Eyton decided to gather a combined New Zealand team. Twenty-two Maori and four 'pakiha' formed the 'New Zealand Native Team,' who played a total of 107 matches in New Zealand, Australia and the UK. The integration of white and Maori was a reflection of enlightened New Zealand rugby and society, even if the British press were somewhat mystified by the pre-match tradition of the Maori war dance, the Haka! The other great symbol of New Zealand rugby, the all black kit with the silver fern on the breast, was proposed by Tom Ellison at the first annual meeting of the New Zealand Rugby Football Union in 1893. New Zealand played their first international against Australia in 1903, the Kiwis triumphing 22-3 in Sydney, and the following year an official British touring team came to New Zealand for the first time. The tourists had gone through Australia undefeated but their captain, David Revell Bedell-Sivright, created animosity in New Zealand with his patronising attitude. The Kiwis shocked the rugby world with a 9-3 triumph in Wellington, sparking great celebrations across the country, but Bedell-Sivright churlishly suggested that the victors would have no chance when they visited the UK. Their opportunity to prove him wrong came in 1905 with the first official New Zealand tour to Europe. The tourists won their early games with a quick-thinking, inventive approach, but press criticism began to grow over their 2-3-2 scrum formation that left a 'roving' forward free to disrupt opposition attacks. The tactic was effective, two late tries seeing the Kiwis to a 12-7 win over Scotland, before Ireland were despatched 15-0 in Dublin. A huge crowd at Crystal Palace convulsed with laughter at the sight of the Haka - but the smiles were soon wiped from their faces when the tourists ran in five tries in a 15-0 hammering of England. New Zealand headed to Wales to meet a country in the midst of its first 'Golden Age,' and the encounter would be the first in a series of controversial clashes between the sides. An excellent try on the left wing by Teddy Morgan sealed a 3-0 win in a hard-fought encounter at Cardiff Arms Park, but post-match talk was dominated by a Bob Deans try that was ruled out by Scottish referee John Dallas. Dallas said that Deans was tackled short," but the Kiwi said he was dragged back into the field of play after grounding a try - on his death-bed three years later he exclaimed: ""I did score that try in Cardiff." Four of the 1905 All Blacks went over to the newly formed 'All Golds' rugby league side soon after the tour", but New Zealand were strong enough to crush an Anglo-Welsh touring team in 1908. The first South Africa tour of New Zealand in 1921 saw honours shared in a three-Test series, starting the greatest rivalry in rugby - and the long-running controversy between the countries over the All Blacks' inclusion of Maori players. The awesome 1924-5 All Black tourists became known as 'The Invincibles' after winning all 30 of their games in France, Britain and Ireland, including a crushing 19-0 victory over Wales at St Helen's. Despite their success, the All Blacks' 2-3-2 scrum formation left them somewhat short of possession at times, and the flaws were exploited by the Springboks in South Africa in 1928. Emp

loying the modern 3-4-1 scrum line-up against the New Zealand 'rover' system for the first time, South African teams defeated the All Blacks in five games and the Test series was drawn two-all. The controversial New Zealand scrum method finally disappeared after the 1930 Lions tour (a series won 3-1 by New Zealand), the Lions manager describing the tactic as 'cheating,' prompting the International Rugby Board to rule that three men had to pack down in the front row of the scrum. The All Blacks' 1935 European tour started inauspiciously with an 11-3 loss to a Swansea side inspired by teenage, schoolboy half-backs Hayden Tanner and Willie Davies. A thrilling Test at Cardiff Arms Park went to Wales 13-12, although the winning try from Geoffrey Rees-Jones was controversial following an illegal Claude Davey tackle in the build-up. New Zealand's next visit to Wales in 1953 proved difficult as they lost 8-3 to Cardiff and drew 6-6 at Swansea. The All Blacks were on top in the Test with Wales at the Arms Park, but the team s were locked at 8-8 when a Clem Thomas cross kick was gathered by Ken Jones for a famous, match-winning try. The tourists made some amends with wins over the other home nations, before a 19-5 success over the Barbarians in an Arms Park thriller. New Zealand built from that tour, and by the time they returned in 1963-4 they were undoubtedly the leading side in the world. That made the shock all the greater when a drop goal by student John Uzzell gave Newport an unlikely 3-0 win over the tourists at Rodney Parade. Wilson Whinneray's side rallied to beat Wales 6-0, their first win at the Arms Park in four attempts, and went unb eaten through the rest of the tour," but when they returned home the first question put to them was: ""What happened in Newport?"" The only blemish on the record of the awesome 1967 tourists was a draw with East Wales", as they beat the full Wales team 13-6 in Cardiff to take the lead in the series between the countries for the first time. That lead was increased with two comfortable wins for the home side in New Zealand in 1969, the first time Wales had toured the country as an independent team. A ferocious game at the Arms Park in 1972 was edged 19-16 by the All Blacks, a measure of revenge for the defeat inflicted on New Zealand by the Carwyn James-inspired Lions of 1971. James guided Llanelli to a famous 9-3 win over the tourists at Stradey Park, though, and in the final game of the tour the Barbarians defeated the All Blacks 23-11 in Cardiff in a game regarded by many as the greatest ever played. New Zealand defeated a Wales XV 12-3 at the Arms Park in a non-cap game in 1974, but it was the 1978 game in Cardiff that would reignite the history of controversy between the two countries. Wales were leading 12-10 with one minute left when Andy Haden flew to the floor from a line-out. Television pictures clearly showed that he dived, but English referee Roger Quittenton was fooled and awarded a penalty, duly converted by Brian McKechnie for a 13-12 win. Since that infamous game, the competition has largely left Wales v New Zealand fixtures as the men in red have slipped from the pinnacle of the world game. A crushing 23-3 win for New Zealand in Cardiff in the Welsh Rugby Union's 1980 centenary game was a sign of things to come. The new professionalism in the southern hemisphere game that had left Europe behind was shown as the All Blacks swatted Wales aside 49-6 in Brisbane in the semi-final of the inaugural World Cup. The Kiwis went on to claim the Cup, and would inflict further misery on Wales on their ill-fated 1988 tour of New Zealand. A young, talented Wales side left Britain full of confidence as Triple Crown winners, but one of the greatest ever New Zealand teams demolished them 52-3 and 54-9. After also taking some fearful beatings in the provincial games, Wales captain Jonathan Davies returned home calling for urgent change in the national game, but as his views were ignored he - along with a generation of Wales' best players - chose to head north to rugby league. A 34-9 win in Cardiff followed for New Zealand in 1989, and at the 1995 World Cup Wales' big talk was made to look embarrassing as the All Blacks eased to victory in Johannesburg. A crushing

42-7 Kiwi triumph in Wembley followed in 1997, and as Wales' misery increased they turned to New Zealand for their salvation in the shape of coaches Graham Henry and Steve Hansen. There was a temporary resurgence in the Welsh game, but when an experimental New Zealand side came to Cardiff's new Millennium Stadium in 2002 they left with a 43-17 victory. A bruising 55-3 defeat followed for Wales in Hamilton in 2003 as Hansen built towards the World Cup, but in Australia it was a remarkable performance against the All Blacks that gave his side renewed hope. Wales were given no chance going into the game, but in the course of the match they rediscovered the value of attacking flair to lead 37-33 early in the second half. New Zealand rallied to a 53-37 win, but the style shown by Wales has been used as an inspiration as they look to a better future. They now face an All Blacks team led by Henry and Hansen, coming to Europe with a weakened squad at the end of a long season. An encouraging display against South Africa has inspired a confident Wales camp to believe they can claim their first win over the men in black for over 50 years. They have a chance, but clearly history is not on their side.

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"sport 372.txt WRU proposes season overhaul The Welsh Rugby Union wants to restructure the Northern Hemisphere season into four separate blocks. The season would start with the Celtic League in October", followed by the Heineken Cup in February and March, and the Six Nations moved to April and May. After a nine week break," the WRU then proposes a two-month period of away and home international matches. WRU chairman David Pickering said the structure would end problems of player availability for club and country. He added: ""We feel sure that spectator interest would respond to the impetus of high intensity rugby being played continuously rather than the fragmented timetable currently in operation. ""Equally", we suspect that the sponsors would prefer the sustained interest in a continuous tournament and hopefully," the broadcasters would also enjoy increased exposure." Moving the Six Nations from its traditional February beginning should also ensure better weather conditions and ""stimulate greater interest in the games and generally provide increased skills and competition and attract greater spectator viewing""", Pickering argued. The plan will be put before the International Rugby Board next month," where four other plans drawn up by independent consultants for a global integrated season will also be discussed. Pickering added: ""It's very early days and there are a number of caveats associated with it - not least the revenue from the broadcasters", which is extremely important. ""We've got a good plan and one which should be judged on its merits.""

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"sport 373.txt Wilkinson to lead England Fly-half Jonny Wilkinson has been named as England's new rugby union captain for the three November Tests. The 25-year-old Newcastle star takes over from Lawrence Dallaglio who retired from internationals in August. England's acting head coach Andy Robinson said: ""He is a natural leader", holds the respect of the squad and is a formidable talent on the pitch. ""And he consistently demonstrates the energy and commitment I feel is essential to be captain of England."" Robinson added: ""There are several players in the squad I would feel comfortable in calling upon to be England captain but for me Jonny is in every way the right player to take on this challenge. ""Captaincy offers a challenging environment for any player", especially following in the footsteps of Lawrence Dallaglio and before him the World Cup captain," Martin Johnson. ""But I am confident Jonny has what it takes to do an outstanding job as we look ahead towards the next Rugby Wor

ld Cup in France and I look forward to working with him." " Wilkinson", who has scored 817 points in 52 internationals, kicked the winning drop-goal in the final seconds of extra-time in England's 2003 Rugby World Cup triumph against Australia. But he then missed the entire 2004 Six Nations campaign while recuperating from shoulder surgery," before making his comeback for Newcastle in the Zurich Premiership in August. " "It's the ambition of so many players to one day be captain of England and today I have realised a dream", he said. I'm honoured Andy wants me to be his captain," and to follow Lawrence and Martin means a lot to me as they are inspirational men who have given so much to England rugby over many years. " "Getting my first England cap against Ireland six years ago was something I'll never forget because to play for your country is very special. Taking on the captaincy is another important step in my career and I do so with immense pride." " Wilkinson made his international debut in the 1998 Six Nations Championship against Ireland when he came off the bench to replace Paul Grayson. He has been a regular in the England starting line-up ever since", played in all three Lions Tests in 2001 and all but one of England's games in the 2003 World Cup. He becomes the 117th captain of England since Fred Stokes held the position in 1871. England's first autumn Test is against Canada on 13 November, followed by the visit of Tri-Nations champions South Africa a week later and then a World Cup re-match with Australia.

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"sport 374.txt Hong Kong in 2011 World Cup bid Hong Kong is hoping to join Japan as co-host of the 2011 Rugby World Cup. Japan has applied to host the tournament on its own", with the aim of taking it outside rugby's traditional strongholds for the first time. But Hong Kong Rugby Football Union (HKRFU) chairman John Molloy has called for the territory to host one of the pools and a quarter-final. The Japanese Rugby Football Union (JRFU) says it has yet to receive a formal presentation from the HKRFU. " "At this stage", we are only considering hosting the event by ourselves," said JRFU secretary Koji Tokumasu. We cannot examine any proposal unless we get it in a definitive form." " Japan faces stiff competition in the form of South Africa and New Zealand to host the event in seven years' time. " "Until now", the World Cup has been held in countries from the Six Nations or Tri-Nations, said Tokumasu. We think, and the IRB thinks," that it is time for rugby to go global. " "Japan is ready to host the tournament and we are looking forward to welcoming the world of rugby to Japan." " Tokumasu added that the 2002 football World Cup", co-hosted by Japan and South Korea," had been a huge success. " "As well as having the infrastructure in place", Japan also has the commercial clout to host one of sport's top competitions," he said. Last year, Japan launched its first professional rugby league and it has the fourth largest number of registered players (125,508) in the world after England, South Africa and France.

sport 375.txt Dallaglio his own man to the end Controversy and Lawrence Dallaglio have never been very far away from each other throughout a glittering international career. Even the end of his nine-year career came out of the blue, just four days before the start of the season. But then Dallaglio has always been his own man. Ever since emerging onto the international scene Dallaglio has polarised opinions. To supporters of England, Dallaglio could do no wrong. An integral part of a sustained period of success for England, Dallaglio's crowning glory was his part in the side that won the Rugby World Cup in 2003. Rival fans, meanwhile, have tended to take an alternative view, seeing Dallaglio as the epitome of the less agreeable characteristics of English rugby. Never afraid to speak his mind, be it to the referee or the opposition on the pitch, or his coach or the media off it, Dallaglio has sometimes rubbed peop

le up the wrong way. Dallaglio arrived as part of the unheralded England side which became the shock winners of the first Rugby Sevens World Cup in 1993. It took him another two years to graduate to the full England XV, but once there he proved to the manor born. Displaying maturity and physical power beyond his years, Dallaglio rapidly established himself as an automatic choice able to play any one of the three back-row positions at international standard. Within two years of his debut, Dallaglio was offered the England captain's band, and his career continued to go from strength to strength as he made the 1997 Lions tour to South Africa. Although overlooked for the captaincy in favour of England team-mate Martin Johnson, he played a massive role in the 2-1 series victory. But after building up a seemingly unstoppable momentum, Dallaglio's career hit the buffers at speed in 1999. First came the last-minute defeat to Wales in which Dallaglio's decision not to kick for goal in the dying minutes was blamed for costing England a Grand Slam. Worse was to follow though as an infamous newspaper sting cost him his treasured England captaincy. With sensational allegations of drug use - of which he was subsequently cleared - splashed across the front pages, a devastated Dallaglio stepped down as England skipper. But he bounced back, getting his head down at club level before returning to the England fold, albeit now as a lieutenant to new captain Johnson. As a member of a new-look England side on the long road to World Cup glory - a journey not without mishaps as a succession of Grand Slams opportunities were spurned - Dallaglio emerged as a key performer once again. Yet another setback arrived in 2001 as a serious knee injury cut short Dallaglio's involvement on the Lions tour to Australia. Rumours began to circulate that his career was over but, in typical Dallaglio style, he embarked on a punishing schedule of rehabilitation to return an even more fearsome physical specimen. One effect of the injury was to rob Dallaglio of much of his pace, but ever the pragmatist, he reinvented himself as a close-quarters number eight of the highest calibre. The only player to play every minute of England's World Cup triumph in Australia, Dallaglio could hardly have done more to secure England's historic win, and for that he will always be held in the highest esteem by England supporters. Following Johnson's retirement, Dallaglio's career came full circle as Woodward restored him as England captain. While England did not hit the heights in Dallaglio's second spell as captain, losing five of their eight post-World Cup Tests, Dallaglio led by example, leaving him as one of the few members of a squad lacking many World Cup stars to live up to expectations. Dallaglio walks away from the international game safe in the knowledge that he will go down as one of England's most accomplished players, if not one of the great captains despite his evident pride in leading his country. The problem now for England is how to replace the almost irreplaceable. The likes of Matt Dawson, Jonny Wilkinson, Phil Vickery and Hill have all been mentioned as contenders for Dallaglio's role as captain. But it is as a player that England will really struggle to replace the 32-year-old. Although players like Joe Worsley and Chris Jones are more than capable of stepping up, the fact that there is no stand-out candidate speaks volumes about Dallaglio's massive influence on English rugby.

sport 376.txt Wasps 31-37 Leicester Leicester withstood a stunning Wasps comeback to win a pulsating Heineken Cup encounter at the Causeway Stadium. The Tigers stormed 22-6 ahead within 18 minutes through tries from Lewis Moody, Geordan Murphy and Martin Corry. European champions Wasps fought back through a Josh Lewsey try and Mark van Gisbergen's boot, and they were level at 31-31 with five minutes remaining. But it was the visitors who kept their cool as Andy Goode kicked the Tigers to victory with a penalty and a drop goal. The closing moments saw desperate defence from Leicester as Wasps turned down several penalties to go for the try they needed. Wasps pounded the line and a pe

nalty try looked likely before referee Nigel Williams controversially blew for full-time. Fly-half Goode was the Tigers hero, kicking 22 points in total, while Leicester's overwhelming domination in the scrums ultimately told. Even their lack of discipline in defence - which presented the admirable Van Ginsberg with 26 points - could not undo them as they held out for a famous win. Lawrence Dallaglio's team have now got it all to do in the quest for a quarter-final place given that two of their last three games are away - against Leicester and Biarritz. However, Wasps rugby director Warren Gatland warned his side will not relinquish their European title without a fight. If we lose next week", then we are struggling, said Gatland. But we don't want to give this trophy away. We worked so hard to win it last season," we will go down fighting. ""We have got to get our scrum right next week"," it is the biggest cause for concern." Leicester coach John Wells saluted the outstanding work of Graham Rowntree and Julian White"," who were magnificent up front. ""They were the backbone of our performance today", said Wells. And to score three tries against the European champions at home was also something I am pleased about." Van Gisbergen; Lewsey", Ernle, Abbott, Voyce; King, Dawson; Dowd, Greening, Green; Shaw, Birkett; Worsley, O'Connor, Dallaglio (capt). Replacements: Gotting, McKenzie, Lock, Hart, Bill Jon, Brooks, Hoadley. Murphy; Rabeni, Smith, Gibson, Healey; Goode, Ellis; Rowntree, Chuter, White, M Johnson (capt), L Deacon; Moody, Back, Corry. Replacements (from): Buckland/Cockerill, Morris, Kay, W Johnson/B Deacon, H Tuilagi, Bemand, A Tuiliagi, Lloyd, Vesty.

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"sport 377.txt Ireland 17-12 South Africa Ronan O'Gara scored all Ireland's points as the home side claimed only their second ever win over South Africa on an emotional day at Lansdowne Road. O'Gara's first-half try", poached after a quick tap-penalty, helped the Irish to a 8-3 lead at half-time. Three further O'Gara penalties extended Ireland's lead to 17-6 as the game entered the final quarter. Two Percy Montgomery penalties set up a frantic finish but Ireland held out to claim a famous victory. Ireland began strongly and were never led, but the match was tense and closely fought throughout. Aware of the threat posed by the South Africans, Ireland pressed hard from the outset, and played some impressive rugby while searching for a breakthrough. Early on, Denis Hickie thought he was in for a try after a delightful backline move but Shane Horgan's pass was adjudged to have gone forward by referee Paul Honiss. Ireland continued to press and they showed their intent by opting for a line-out in the 19th minute when three straight-forward points were on offer. Another South African infringement a minute later led to Ireland's first points - O'Gara took a quick tap-penalty and charged over the opposition line for an Irish try. The Springboks could feel hard done by as captain John Smit had his back to the play when O'Gara pounced after referee Honiss had told the skipper to warn his own players after consistent infringements. Stung by the score, the South Africans almost replied with a try of their own within 60 seconds with Geordan Murphy's ankle-tap tackle denying a certain try for Percy Montgomery. However, the Springboks did win a penalty a minute later which Montgomery easily slotted to cut Ireland's lead to 5-3. Ireland got out of jail when the South Africans had a three-to-one overlap near the Irish line only to waste the chance. After the sustained Springboks pressure, the Irish produced an attack of their own in the 34th minute which culminated with O'Gara's clever drop-goal to restore his side's lead to five points which remained the margin at half-time. Sustained Irish pressure immediately after half-time was rewarded by another O'Gara penalty. However, Montgomery responded quickly by slotting over a superb penalty from near the right touchline to cut Ireland's lead to five points again. Montgomery then

burst through the Irish defence in the 48th minute and it took a superb Girvan Dempsey tackle to prevent a try. The South Africans suffered a double-blow in the 52nd minute when Schalk Burger was sin-binned for the second week in a row after killing the ball and O'Gara punished the transgression by notching another penalty. In the 61st minute, Hickie was left frustrated by a poor pass from Girvan Dempsey as a chance to seal the match was wasted. However, a late tackle on Brian O'Driscoll enabled O'Gara to notch another penalty in the 63rd minute which extended Ireland's lead to 17-6. However, two Montgomery penalties had Ireland's lead in peril again as the Springboks closed to within five points with seven minutes remaining. South Africa produced a huge effort in the closing minutes but Ireland held on to claim a deserved victory. G Dempsey; G Murphy, B O'Driscoll (capt), S Horgan, D Hickie; R O'Gara, P Stringer; R Corrigan, S Byrne, J Hayes, M O'Kelly, P O'Connell, S Easterby, J O'Connor, A Foley. F Sheahan, M Horan, D O'Callaghan, E Miller, G Easterby, D Humphreys, K Maggs. : P Montgomery; B Paulse, M Joubert, De Wet Barry, A Willemse, J van der Westhuyzen; F Du Preez; O Du Randt, J Smit (captain), E Andrews, B Botha, V Matfield, S Burger, AJ Venter, J van Niekerk. : H Shimange, CJ van der Linde, G Britz, D Rossouw, M Claassens, J de Villiers, G du Toit/J Fourie. Paul Honiss (New Zealand)

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"sport 378.txt Ireland v USA (Sat) Saturday 20 November Lansdowne Road," Dublin 1300 GMT The Irish coach knows a repeat of the record 83-3 victory over the States in 2000 is not on the agenda and expects a real test at Lansdowne Road. "Their coach Tom Billups will have them very organised", said O'Sullivan. They ran five tries past the French in the summer," so we will not take them for granted. We have guys coming into the team who are chomping at the bit." The Irish line-up shows nine changes from the team which started against South Africa with winger Tommy Bowe and flanker Denis Leamy making their international debuts. The other changes see recalls for backs David Humphreys", Kevin Maggs and Guy Easterby with Eric Miller, Marcus Horan, Donnacha O'Callaghan and Frank Sheehan all returning to the pack. O'Sullivan said the players coming in had the opportunity to stake claims for inclusion against Argentina on 27 November. Easterby gets a rare start at scrum-half while Humphreys, now effectively Ronan O'Gara's deputy at fly-half," wins his 65th cap. "We have got to get the focus right on the day", said Ulster man Humphreys. The US may be classed as weaker opposition," but we will treat them with the respect they deserve." The States lost 39-31 against France in their last international and are ranked 16th in world rugby. The Americans have made three changes", plus one positional switch from the game in July against the French. Lock Alec Parker, blind-side flanker Brian Surgener and right wing Al Lakomskis return and captain Kort Schubert of the Cardiff Blues shifts to number eight. Schubert is the only Eagles player remaining from the sides' meeting four years ago. G Murphy; S Horgan, B O'Driscoll (capt), K Maggs, T Bowe; D Humphreys, G Easterby; M Horan. F Sheahan, J Hayes, D O'Callaghan, P O'Connell, S Easterby, D Leamy, E Miller. S Byrne, S Best, L Cullen, A Foley, P Stringer, R O'Gara, G Dempsey. Viljoen; Lakomskis, Emerick, Sika, Fee, Hercus, Timoteo; MacDonald, Wyatt, Waasdorp, Parker, Klerck, Surgener, Petruzzella, Schubert (capt). Hobson, Osentowski, Gouws, Mo'unga, Williams, Sherman, Tuipulotu.

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"sport 379.txt Ireland call up uncapped Campbell Ulster's scrum-half Kieran Campbell is one of five uncapped players included in Ireland's RBS Six Nations squad. Campbell is joined by Ulster colleagues Roger Wilson and Ronan McCormack along with Connacht's Bernard Jackman and Munster's Shaun Pay

ne. Gordon D'Arcy is back after injury while Munster flanker Alan Quinlan also returns to international consideration. "The squad is selected purely on form. A lot of players put their hands up," coach Eddie O'Sullivan told BBC Sport. Kieran Campbell was just one of those players. He has been playing very well in the Heineken Cup and deserves his call-up. "There is big competition in some departments and not so much in others. There were one or two players who were unfortunate just to miss out." Back-row forwards David Wallace and Victor Costello are omitted", with O'Sullivan having Quinlan, Wilson, Simon Easterby, Anthony Foley, Denis Leamy and Johnny O'Connor vying for the three positions. With David Humphreys, Kevin Maggs, Simon Best and Tommy Bowe again included," it is Ulster's biggest representation in a training panel for quite some time. Munster and Leinster have 12 and 11 players in the squad respectively while Jackman is the sole Connacht representative. Four British-based players are also included. Ulster forward Ronan McCormack said he was "totally shocked" to be included. "I'm really looking forward to it," said McCormack. I played with guys like Brian O'Driscoll and Denis Hickie back in my school days in Leinster so I do know a few of them although not that well. "It will be great to work with them." S Best (Ulster)", S Byrne (Leinster), R Corrigan (Leinster), L Cullen (Leinster), S Easterby (Llanelli), A Foley (Munster), J Hayes (Munster), M Horan (Munster), B Jackman (Connacht), D Leamy (Munster), E Miller (Leinster), R McCormack (Ulster), D O'Callaghan (Munster), P O'Connell (Munster), J O'Connor (Wasps), M O'Kelly (Leinster), F Sheahan (Munster), R Wilson (Ulster), A Quinlan (Munster). T Bowe (Ulster), K Campbell (Ulster), G D'Arcy (Ulster), G Dempsey (Leinster), G Duffy (Harlequins), G Easterby (Leinster), D Hickie (Leinster), A Horgan (Munster), S Horgan (Leinster), D Humphreys (Ulster), K Maggs (Ulster), G Murphy (Leicester), B O'Driscoll, (Leinster), R O'Gara (Munster), S Payne (Munster), P Stringer (Munster). K Gleeson (Leinster), T Howe (Ulster), J Kelly (Munster), N McMillan (Ulster).

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"sport 380.txt Ireland 21-19 Argentina An injury-time dropped goal by Ronan O'Gara stole victory for Ireland from underneath the noses of Argentina at Lansdowne Road on Saturday. O'Gara kicked all of Ireland's points", with two dropped goals and five penalties, to give the home side a 100% record in their autumn internationals. An impressive Argentina appeared in control until the dying seconds. The Pumas shocked the Irish early on with a try from Federico Aramburu, and Felipe Contepomi kicked 14 points. The well-drilled and sharper Pumas out-played and out-thought Ireland in the early stages. Indiscipline allowed Argentina's Leinster fly-half Contepomi to open the scoring in the third minute with a straightforward penalty. He was on the mark again two minutes later when Argentina shocked a ragged Ireland with the first try of the game. Ireland turned the ball over and Manuel Contepomi broke through an unstructured defence before feeding his midfield partner Aramburu to sprint in under the posts. O'Gara finally got Ireland on the board with a dropped goal in the ninth minute only for Contepomi to rifle over his second penalty two minutes later. Playing into a strong wind and rain, Ireland continued to come second best in tight situations, and turnovers began to mount up against a rugged defence. O'Gara managed to land his second penalty in the 36th minute, but once again Contepomi replied in kind four minutes into first-half injury time. The second-half started as the first had ended. O'Gara rifled over another penalty in the 45th minute, but Contepomi matched it three minutes later. The upper-body strength of the Pumas never allowed Ireland to take control up front, while the three-quarters had no space to manoeuvre. Ireland had to rely on O'Gara's boot to keep in touch rather than any contrived running plays. The Munsterman landed two more p

enalties - one of them from 48 metres - to bring his team to within four points with 13 minutes on the clock remaining. And Ireland's chance came when Argentina's number eight Gonzalo Longo was yellow carded with six minutes to go for an offence in the line-out. O'Gara made no mistake as he rifled over his fifth penalty to set up a tense final few minutes. But Ireland showed great composure to get themselves into a position to allow O'Gara to thump over a massive drop goal to complete a tremendous, if fortuitous, comeback.

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"sport 381.txt England claim Dubai Sevens glory England beat Fiji 26-21 in a dramatic final in Dubai to win the first IRB Sevens event of the season. Having beaten Australia and South Africa to reach the final", England fell behind to an early try against Fiji. They then took charge with scores from Pat Sanderson, Kai Horstman, Mathew Tait and Rob Thirlby, but Fiji rallied to force a tense finale. Scotland were beaten 33-15 by Samoa in the plate semi-final and Ireland lost 17-5 to Tunisia in the shield final. Mike Friday's England side matched their opponents for pace, power and skill in the final and led 19-7 at half-time. But Neumi Nanuku and Marika Vakacegu touched down for Fiji," only for a needless trip by Tuidriva Bainivalu on Geoff Appleford to allow England to run down the clock. ""To be honest", England have wanted to win in Dubai for a very long time now, and the people here have wanted us to win for just as long," said Friday. We didn't want to put pressure on ourselves but we are thankful we have achieved that and brought through some young talent at the same time that can hopefully play for the England '15s' in a few years."" Portugal confirmed their impressive progress in Sevens rugby by recording a sudden-death win over France in the bowl final. Samoa won the plate title by edging out Argentina 21-19.

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"sport 382.txt Barbarians 19-47 New Zealand New Zealand proved too strong for an Australian-dominated Barbarians to round off their unbeaten northern hemisphere tour with an easy win. Rico Gear ran in two of the All Blacks' seven tries in what was a predominantly second-string line-up. The Baa-Baas did threaten", scoring tries through Albert van den Bergh, Xavier Rush and Andrea Lo Cicero, but never looked like winning. All Black Aaron Mauger was in good form with the boot, adding 10 points. The All Blacks featured only two of the side which started last weekend's emphatic Test victory over France in Paris," while the Baa-Baas had nine Wallabies in their starting line-up. And New Zealand coach Graham Henry said: ""It was a quality performance against a very experienced side and a number of young guys came through very well. ""They learnt from the older players and this was a way of thanking the guys who had been mentoring them on the tour." But the running rugby the crowd had been hoping for rarely materialised. Marty Holah got the All Blacks onslaught under way with his fifth-minute try before Rush hit back moments later. But New Zealand went a head once more as Gear made use of the space vacated by a temporarily injured Chris Latham to slide in. Ma'a Nonu then found his way through the Barbarians defence to give his side a 19-7 half-time lead. The hosts failed to ignite in the second half and", the moment Gear scored his second just after the interval, there was only ever going to be one winner. Lo Cicero, the sole European for the Barbarians, bundled over for a try to briefly curtail the deficit. But the match was blighted by controversy moments later when Justin Marshall, was felled with a high tackle by Jimmy Cowan. Referee Andy Turner waved play on and Casey Laulala coasted in for his side's fifth try. Jermoe Keino and Piri Weepu both added tries to the All Blacks' tally before the final whistle, while van den Bergh

gained some consolation for the Baa-Baas. After the match, Barbarians coach Bob Dwyer warned that South African flanker Schalk Burger needed a proper off-season break to maintain his standards. Burger, 21, was recently crowned player of the year by both his peers and the International Rugby Board, "but has struggled for form in recent weeks. ""It's his first year at that level and he was phenomenal up until the end of the southern hemisphere season. ""I don't think he's played anywhere near that level on tour", "he said.

sport 383.txt Dawson wins England squad recall Wasps scrum-half Matt Dawson has been recalled to England's training squad ahead of the RBS Six Nations and been reinstated in the Elite Player Squad. Coach Andy Robinson dropped Dawson for the autumn Tests after he missed training to film 'A Question of Sport.' I always said I would consider bringing Matt back if I felt he was playing well", "Robinson said. He merits his return on current form." Newcastle's 18-year-old centre Mathew Tait is also in the training squad. ""It's obviously an honour to be asked to train with England", "said Tait, who has burst into contention recently. I look forward to going down and doing the sessions", but the most important thing at the moment is Sunday's game against Newport," so I'm not looking any further than that." "Robinson has invited 42 players to attend a three-day session in Leeds next week", in which his squad will train in part with the Leeds Rhinos rugby league squad. With Mike Tindall ruled out of the opening two matches and Will Greenwood sidelined for the entire Six Nations, Tait is one of six or seven contenders for the two centre berths. Stuart Abbott, Jamie Noon, Ollie Smith, Olly Barkley and Henry Paul - who retains his place despite his early substitution against Australia - are also in the mix. Ben Cohen could also be considered after switching from the wing for his club Northampton recently. Prop Phil Vickery and lock Simon Shaw both return to the squad after missing the autumn Tests through injury," while Wasps wing Tom Voyce is recalled. The group also includes Bath flanker Andy Beattie and Leicester hooker George Chuter. ""Beattie has matured greatly as a player these past two seasons", "Robinson said. Jonny Wilkinson, Tindall and Martin Corry have all been included despite their unavailability for the opening two matches against Wales and France. The revised 56-man elite squad includes Wasps hooker Phil Greening, who replaces the retired Mark Regan, and Sale wing Mark Cueto. Cueto was selected for the November internationals despite not being part of the group, but scored four tries in three England appearances. Leicester scrum-half Harry Ellis has also been promoted from the senior national academy, and will contest the number nine jersey with Dawson and Gloucester's Andy Gomarsall. The players in Robinson's elite squad can only play 32 matches for club and country. They can be called up for a total of 16 training days in addition to the recognised international weeks for each of the years leading up to the next World Cup. Balshaw, Cohen, Cueto, Lewsey, Robinson, Simpson-Daniel, Voyce, Abbott, Noon, Paul, Smith, Tait, Tindall, Barkley, Hodgson, King, Wilkinson, Dawson, Ellis, Gomarsall, Chuter, Thompson, Titterrell, Rowntree, Sheridan, Stevens, Vickery, White, Borthwick, Brown, L Deacon, Grewcock, Kay, Shaw, Beattie, Corry, Forrester, Hazell, Jones, Moody, Vyvyan, J Worsley. Abbott, Balshaw, Borthwick, A Brown, Chuter, Cohen, Corry, Cueto, Dawson, Ellis, Flatman, Gomarsall, Greening, Greenwood, Grewcock, Hazell, Hill, Hodgson, Kay, King, Lewsey, Moody, Noon, Paul, Robinson, Rowntree, Shaw, Simpson-Daniel, Thompson, Tindall, Titterrell, Vickery, Vyvyan, White, Wilkinson, J Worsley, M Worsley. Barkley, Beattie, Christophers, L Deacon, Forrester, C Jones, Palmer, Rees, Sheridan, Skinner, Smith, Stevens, Tait, Voyce. Dowson, Haughton, Monye, Roques, P Sanderson.

sport 384.txt Borders 19-20 Ulster Ulster clung on for a morale-boosting Celtic League win over bottom club Borders at Netherdale on Friday night. A late try by Borders substitute Jonny Weston had set up a dramatic

finish, but the Scottish side could not complete the fightback. Ulster had led 20-6 with tries from Paul Steinmetz and Bryn Cunningham. But the Irish province failed to add to the tally in the second half and ended up relieved to get the win to lift them to eighth place in the table. Borders had edged ahead with a sixth-minute penalty by Charlie Hore - only to hand the visitors the initiative via a gift try. Calum MacRae surrendered possession before centre Steinmetz sent a chip into the danger zone. Substitute Joe Pattison - who had come on for the injured Gareth Morton - wrongly thought the ball was trickling out of play and eased up on the chase. The speedy Steinmetz had other ideas and he raced up to get the vital touch in the nick of time, giving Adam Larkin an easy conversion. Ally Warnock clawed back three points for Borders, but they were soon hit by another double-blow. First, Mark Blair was yellow carded for killing the ball on the ground and then full-back Cunningham bagged the second touchdown in the wake of fine work by skipper Andy Ward. Larkin again added the extras. Even worse was to come for Borders when Larkin kicked two more penalties just before the break, the second of which also led to Kelly Brown being sin-binned. The hosts gave themselves a glimmer of hope immediately after the restart, however, when Warnock struck a penalty at the other end. And he repeated the feat to set up the tense finale. Ulster coach Mark McCall said he was delighted to get the victory. Borders are a tougher proposition this year in spite of the fact that they have not had a victory in some time", "said McCall. In the first 20 minutes we were edgy but in the second 20 minutes we played some of our best rugby this season and scored two good tries." "Morton", Moffat, MacRae, Hore, Berthinussen, Warnock, Moore, Thomson, Ford, Douglas, Blair, Stewart, Gray, Brown, McEntee, Kay, Parr, McGee, Rennick, Weston, Millar, Pattison, Cunningham, Maxwell, Bell, Steinmetz, Howe, Larkin, Campbell, S. Best, Shields, Moore, Frost, McCullough, Ward, Feather, N. Best, Brady, McCormick, Longwell, Browne, Doak, S. Young, Bowe. Phil Fear (WRU)

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"sport 385.txt Lions blow to World Cup stars British and Irish Lions coach Clive Woodward says he is unlikely to select any players not involved in next year's RBS Six Nations Championship. World Cup winners Lawrence Dallaglio", "Neil Back and Martin Johnson had all been thought to be in the frame for next summer's tour to New Zealand. " "I don't think you can ever say never", "said Woodward. But I would have to have a compulsive reason to pick any player who is not available to international rugby." "Dallaglio", "Back and Johnson have all retired from international rugby over the last 12 months but continue to star for their club sides. But Woodward added: " "The key thing that I want to stress is that I intend to use the Six Nations and the players who are available to international rugby as the key benchmark. " "My job", along with all the other senior representatives," is to make sure that we pick the strongest possible team. " "If you are not playing international rugby then it's still a step up to Test rugby. It's definitely a disadvantage. " "I think it's absolutely critical and with the history of the Lions we have got to take players playing for the four countries." "Woodward also revealed that the race for the captaincy was still wide open. " "It is an open book", "he said. There are some outstanding candidates from all four countries." "And following the All Blacks' impressive displays in Europe in recent weeks", including a 45-6 humiliation of France, "Woodward believes the three-test series in New Zealand will provide the ultimate rugby challenge. " "Their performance in particular against France was simply awesome", said the Lions coach. Certain things have been suggested about the potency of their front five," but they're a very powerful unit." "With his customary thoroughness", Woodward revealed he had taken soundings from Australia

coach Eddie Jones and Jake White of South Africa following their tour matches in Britain and Ireland. As a result," Woodward stressed his Lions group might not be dominated by players from England and Ireland and held out hope for the struggling Scots. ""Scotland's recent results have not been that impressive but there have been some excellent individual performances. ""Eddie in particular told me how tough they had made it for Australia and I will take on board their opinions."" And Scotland forward Simon Taylor looks certain to get the call," provided he recovers from knee and tendon problems. ""I took lessons from 2001 in that they did make a mistake in taking Lawrence Dallaglio when he wasn't fit and went on the trip. ""Every player has to be looked at on their own merits and Simon Taylor is an outstanding player and I have no doubts that if he gets back to full fitness he will be on the trip. ""I am told he should be back playing by March and he has plenty of time to prove his fitness for the Lions - and there are other players like Richard Hill in the same boat.""

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"sport 386.txt Campbell to be Lions consultant Former government communications chief Alastair Campbell will act as a media consultant to Sir Clive Woodward's 2005 Lions on their tour to New Zealand. Campbell", who left Downing Street earlier this year," will advise on media strategy before and during the tour. ""I hope I can contribute to the planning and preparation", and to ensuring the media and public get the most out of the tour itself," he said. I am also looking forward to going out for the later stages of the tour." Woodward's decision to call in Prime Minister Tony Blair's former spin doctor springs from the deterioration in media relations on the last Lions tour of Australia in 2001", "when New Zealander Graham Henry was the head coach. The furore surrounding the newspaper diaries of Matt Dawson and Austin Healey was compounded by other disillusioned players venting their frustration through the media. ""The Lions is a massive media event", "said Woodward, who will be the head coach. There will be a huge level of interest from the travelling media", "the fans that will go out in their thousands and the New Zealand public. ""We need to have the strategy and processes in place to deal with the pressures that will bring. ""[Alastair] will act as an advisor both in the build up to and on the tour itself. His role is to work closely with not only myself but (tour manager) Bill Beaumont", " (media manager) Louisa Cheetham and (team manager) Louise Ramsay." " Campbell is due to resume working for the government in the new year in the build-up to an anticipated May general election. The Lions leave for New Zealand on 24 May", with the first Test match against the All Blacks in Christchurch on 25 June.

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"sport 387.txt Lions blow to World Cup winners British and Irish Lions coach Clive Woodward says he is unlikely to select any players not involved in next year's RBS Six Nations Championship. World Cup winners Lawrence Dallaglio", " Neil Back and Martin Johnson had all been thought to be in the frame for next summer's tour to New Zealand. ""I don't think you can ever say never", " said Woodward. But I would have to have a compulsive reason to pick any player who is not available to international rugby." " Dallaglio", " Back and Johnson have all retired from international rugby over the last 12 months but continue to star for their club sides. But Woodward added: ""The key thing that I want to stress is that I intend to use the Six Nations and the players who are available to international rugby as the key benchmark. ""My job", along with all the other senior representatives," is to make sure that we pick the strongest possible team. ""If you are not playing international rugby then it's still a s

tep up to Test rugby. It's definitely a disadvantage. ""I think it's absolutely critical and with the history of the Lions we have got to take players playing for the four countries." Woodard also revealed that the race for the captaincy was still wide open. ""It is an open book," he said. There are some outstanding candidates from all four countries." And following the All Blacks' impressive displays in Europe in recent weeks", including a 45-6 humiliation of France," Woodard believes the three-test series in New Zealand will provide the ultimate rugby challenge. ""Their performance in particular against France was simply awesome", said the Lions coach. Certain things have been suggested about the potency of their front five," but they're a very powerful unit." With his customary thoroughness", Woodard revealed he had taken soundings from Australia coach Eddie Jones and Jake White of South Africa following their tour matches in Britain and Ireland. As a result," Woodard stressed his Lions group might not be dominated by players from England and Ireland and held out hope for the struggling Scots. ""Scotland's recent results have not been that impressive but there have been some excellent individual performances. ""Eddie in particular told me how tough they had made it for Australia and I will take on board their opinions." And Scotland forward Simon Taylor looks certain to get the call," provided he recovers from knee and tendon problems. ""I took lessons from 2001 in that they did make a mistake in taking Lawrence Dallaglio when he wasn't fit and went on the trip. ""Every player has to be looked at on their own merits and Simon Taylor is an outstanding player and I have no doubts that if he gets back to full fitness he will be on the trip. ""I am told he should be back playing by March and he has plenty of time to prove his fitness for the Lions - and there are other players like Richard Hill in the same boat.""

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"sport 388.txt Wilkinson fit to face Edinburgh England captain Jonny Wilkinson will make his long-awaited return from injury against Edinburgh on Saturday. Wilkinson", who has not played since injuring his bicep on 17 October," took part in full-contact training with Newcastle Falcons on Wednesday. And the 25-year-old fly-half will start Saturday's Heineken Cup match at Murrayfield on the bench. But Newcastle director of rugby Rob Andrew said: ""He's fine and we hope to get him into the game at some stage." The 25-year-old missed England's autumn internationals after aggravating the haematoma in his upper right arm against Saracens. He was subsequently replaced as England captain by full-back Jason Robinson. Sale's Charlie Hodgson took over the number 10 shirt in the internationals against Canada", South Africa and Australia. Wilkinson's year has been disrupted by injury as his muscle problem followed eight months on the sidelines with a shoulder injury sustained in the World Cup final.

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"sport 389.txt Dallaglio eyeing Lions tour place Former England captain Lawrence Dallaglio still harbours hopes of a place on the British and Irish Lions tour to New Zealand. Lions coach Sir Clive Woodward has made it clear he will pick his squad to tour next summer based on form shown in the Six Nations championship. But Dallaglio", who called time on England earlier this year," said: ""I assure you I wouldn't let anyone down. ""I know what it takes and what I have to offer"," he told the Daily Telegraph. Dallaglio toured South Africa with the Lions in 1997 but was forced home early with a knee injury from the trip to Australia three years ago. The 32-year-old also felt concentrating on club rugby could have prolonged his international shelf-life. He said: I'll be in good shape and fresh without another 10 Tests on the clock. ""From w

hat I witnessed at close quarters on Sunday in our Heineken Cup match against L eicester", I certainly didn't feel out of place alongside those players," many of whom will be on the trip. ""If I'm fit and playing well"," then I'm most ce rtainly available. ""If Clive feels he has no need to look outside the internat ional crop", then fine. If he does, then he won't need to look too far," will h e?""

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"sport 390.txt Dawson set for new Wasps contract European champions Wasps are set to offer Matt Dawson a new deal. The 31-year-old World Cup winning scrum-half has impressed since joining the London side from Northam pton this summer on a one-year contract. Wasps coach Warren Gatland told the Daily Mirror: ""We have not yet offered Matt a new contract but we will be doing so. ""I'm very happy with his contribution and I think he's good enough to play for another couple of years."" Dawson played a vital part in England's World Cu p win last year but has fallen out of favour with new coach Andy Robinson after missing a training session in September. However he hopes the new deal will hel p him regain his England place. ""Rugby is still my priority and there's still a burning desire within me to play the best rugby I possibly can", he said. I k now within myself," if I was given the chance I could play for England again. ""I know I'm fit enough", I'm strong enough," I'm skilful enough.""

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"sport 391.txt Healey targets England comeback Leicester wing Austin Healey hopes to use Sunday's return Heineken Cup clash with Wasps as a further springboard to an England recall for the Six Nations. Healey", who won 51 caps prior to the 2003 World Cup," has been in good form in the Tigers' resurgence this season. ""I definitely still have ambitions to play for Englan d"," Healey told the BBC. We will have to see what happens after the previous (autumn) Tests but when I look at the current squad I definitely feel there is a place there for me."" Healey", who has also played both half-back positions and full-back during his career, has reverted to the wing, where he won most of his England caps. After recovering from a trapped nerve in his back sustained at the end of September," the 31-year-old is relishing his role in the Tigers re vival. ""I had six weeks out but fortunately I have resumed the sort of form I had before", he said. I am basically playing where it best suits Leicester. Ob viously I can play scrum-half," fly-half or full-back at a moment's notice. ""B ut playing on the wing actually gives me a bigger free role to come in where I am not expected and influence things." That has been apparent in parts one and two of the Wasps-Leicester trilogy in recent weeks. First", Healey came off his flank with an angled run to score an injury-time try that earned the Tigers a 1 7-17 draw in their Premiership meeting on 21 November. Then, in the first of th eir Heineken cup double header last Sunday," Healey slotted in at stand-off and delivered a superb cross-kick for Martin Corry to score the Tigers' third try. ""I caught 'Cozza's' eye a couple of phases before that and was hoping to get i t to him on the full", but fortunately even with the bounce he managed to scor e," Healey recalled. Healey, twice a Heineken Cup winner, believes last Sunda y's match was up there"" with some of the biggest club contests he has played in. ""It was a very intense occasion and a very destructive game"," he recalled. There was not a huge amount of rugby played but it was a great game to be involved in. ""After about 15 minutes I thought we might stride away with it but Was ps really came back into it and in the last couple of minutes it could have gone either way." The same outcome this Sunday would put Leicester in pole posit

ion to top their Heineken pool with a home game against Biarritz and away trip to Calvisano to come. But Healey insists the Tigers must summon the same desire if they are to deliver the knockout blow in what has been dubbed ""rugby's version of Rocky II""." "There was a lot of satisfaction in the dressing room afterwards but it is really only a case of a job half done", he added. It was the first of a two-leg trip and if we lose at Welford Road it will negate all the positives we can take from result. "I think it came down to who wanted it more and in the end I think we did. We have got to show the same desire again this week."

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"sport 392.txt Scrum-half Williams rejoins Bath Bath have signed their former scrum-half Andy Williams on a short-term deal from the Neath-Swansea Ospreys. Wales international Williams", whose contract with the Welsh region was due to expire in June, has agreed a contract until the end of the season. With Martyn Wood's injury likely to keep him out until February," Bath need experienced back-up to Nick Walshe. Said Williams: ""When this opportunity presented itself", I did not really have to think twice about it." Williams", capped by Wales against Romania in 2003, should figure in the match squad for Monday's Zurich Premiership match at Sale Sharks. He lost his Ospreys starting place to New Zealander Jason Spice and has fallen further behind in the pecking order. The Welsh region has two outstanding young No 9 prospects in Richie Rees and Rhodri Wells. Bath director of rugby Jack Rowell, though," believes Williams fits the bill perfectly. ""He has been playing regular Heineken Cup and Celtic League rugby and he has a great affection for Bath", Rowell told Bath's official website. We are delighted to be able to welcome him back to the club."

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"sport 393.txt Bath faced with Tindall ultimatum Mike Tindall's agent has warned Bath they have until next week to improve their contract offer to the England man or risk losing him to a rival club. Dipo Alli says he has received an offer for Tindall which dwarfs Bath's deal and that two other clubs want to talk. ""Mike does not want to go into the Six Nations worrying about where he will be playing his club rugby next season", Alli told the Guardian newspaper. It is up to (Bath owner) Andrew Brownsword. He has to make it happen." Tindall is out of contract at the end of the season but it is understood that Brownsword is unwilling to break the club's salary structure to accommodate the 26-year-old's demands. But Alli insists the player is worth more than Bath have put on the table. ""Mike has been at Bath for eight years and wants to remain with the club and his demands are anything but excessive", the agent added. But Brownsword has to recognise Mike's value and we want to resolve things by the end of next week."

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"sport 394.txt Tindall wants second opinion England centre Mike Tindall is to seek a second opinion before having surgery on a foot injury that could force him to miss the entire Six Nations. The Bath player was already out of the opener against Wales on 5 February because of a hand problem. ""Mike had a specialist review on a fracture in his right mid foot", said England doctor Simon Kemp. Before a final decision is made on surgery... medical teams have decided he should see a second specialist." England coach Andy Robinson is already without centre Will Greenwood and flanker Richard Hill while fly-half Jonny Wilkinson is certain to miss at least the first two games. Robinson

n is expected to announce his new-look England line-up on Monday for the match at the Millennium Stadium. And Newcastle's 18-year-old centre Mathew Tait is set to stand in for Tindall alongside club team-mate Jamie Noon. Meanwhile", Tindall is targeting a return to action before the end of the regular Zurich Premiership season on 30 April. He will also aim to be back to full fitness before the Lions tour to New Zealand this summer.

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''' "sport 395.txt Paris promise raises Welsh hopes Has there been a better Six Nations match than Saturday's epic in Paris? And can the Welsh revival continue all the way to a first Grand Slam since 1978? Those are the two questions occupying not just Wales supporters but rugby fans as a whole after a scintillating display in Paris. Welsh legend Mervyn Davies", a member of two of three Grand Slam-winning sides of the 1970s," hailed it as ""one of the great performances of the past three decades"". Martyn Williams", Wales' two-try scorer on the day," called it ""one of the most surreal games I have ever played in"". A crestfallen France coach", Bernard Laporte," simply observed: ""There was a French half and there was a Welsh half"". And what a half it was for the Red Dragonhood", transforming a 15-6 half-time deficit into an 18-15 lead within five mesmerising minutes of the second period. But while that passage of play showed the swelling self-belief of a side prepared to back its own spirit of adventure, the final quarter told us a whole lot more about this Welsh side. That they recovered from a battering in the first half-hour to first stem the tide before half-time, then reverse it on the resumption, was remarkable enough. But in resisting a seemingly unstoppable wave of French pressure in a nail-biting final five minutes, Wales showed not only their physical attributes but their mental resolve. In international rugby, any of the top seven sides can beat each other on a given day, but the great sides are those that win the close contests on a consistent basis. England suffered some infamous Six Nations disappointments en route to World Cup glory, the pain of defeat forging bonds that ultimately led to victory when it really mattered. Wales have some way to go before they can be remotely considered in a similar light. But the signs are that players previously on the receiving end are learning how to emerge on the right side of the scoreline. Ten of the 22 on duty on Saturday were also involved when Wales were trounced 33-5 in Paris two years ago. But since they threw off the shackles against New Zealand in the 2003 World Cup," Wales have rediscovered much of what made them a great rugby nation in the first place. ""The confidence in the squad has been building and building since the World Cup and we now have young players who are becoming world class", noted coach Mike Ruddock. The likes of Michael Owen, Gethin Jenkins, Dwayne Peel and Gavin Henson are certainly building strong cases for inclusion on this summer's Lions tour to New Zealand. And players like Stephen Jones, Martyn Williams, Shane Williams and Gareth Thomas are proving it is not only the youngsters that are on an upward curve. Jones, after his superb man-of-the-match display, observed that we are a very happy camp now"". Ruddock and Thomas can take much of the credit for that", ensuring the tribal and regional divisions that have often scarred Welsh rugby do not extend to the national squad. The joie de vivre so evident in that magical second-half spell in Paris also stems from a style of play that first wooed supporters the world over in the 1970s. If England had half the innate attacking exuberance Wales have produced in this championship, they would not be contemplating the debris of three consecutive defeats. Similarly, Wales have learnt that style alone does not win matches, and that forward power, mental toughness and good decision-making under pressure are equally important. So on to Murrayfield, where

Wales have not won on their last three visits. While the hype in the Principality will go into overdrive, the players will set about the task of beating Scotland. Only then - with the visit of Ireland to finish - can they start thinking about emulating the hallowed players of the 1970s, and writing their own names into Welsh legend.

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"sport 396.txt Wales silent on Grand Slam talk Rhys Williams says Wales are still not thinking of winning the Grand Slam despite a third Six Nations win. ""That's the last thing on our minds at the moment," said Williams, a second-half replacement in Saturday's 24-18 win over France in Paris. We all realise how difficult a task it is to go up to Scotland and beat them. ""We've come unstuck there a couple of times recently so our focus is on that game and we'll worry about Ireland hopefully after we've beaten Scotland." With captain Gareth Thomas ruled out of the rest of the campaign with a broken thumb", Williams is vying for his first start in the championship so far. Kevin Morgan is probably favourite to replace Thomas at full-back, leaving Williams and Hal Luscombe to battle for the right wing berth. A hamstring injury denied Luscombe the opportunity to make a third successive start, but the Dragons winger is expected to be fit for the trip to Murrayfield on 13 March. Hooker Robin McBryde is doubtful after picking up a knee injury in Paris," but centre Sonny Parker and flanker Colin Charvis are set to recover from injury to be in contention for selection. Said Wales assistant coach Scott Johnson: ""They've worked through the weekend and the reports are a bit more positive. ""So we're getting a couple back and that adds to the depth of the squad." Scotland secured their first win of the campaign on Saturday by grinding out an 18-10 win over Italy. Matt Williams' side has shown little in attack", but Johnson insisted the Scots will be difficult opposition to break down. ""Italy are really brave opposition and sometimes it's very hard to win", he said. So an ugly win can be just as effective as a 30 or 40 point victory. ""Scotland are a hard side and very underrated so we're not taking anything for granted. ""We're not basking in the glory of winning our first three games. We've got to be diligent in our preparation. ""That's my job and we've got to make sure we're focused."

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"sport 397.txt Sculthorpe wants Lions captaincy Paul Sculthorpe has admitted he would love to succeed Andy Farrell as Great Britain skipper if the Wigan star does switch codes to rugby union. Sculthorpe was vice-captain in the Tri-Nations", and took the St Helens captaincy from Chris Joynt last year. ""I would definitely want the job - I make no bones about it", Sculthorpe told BBC Sport. It's something I've always wanted to do. I'd gladly take it if it was offered to me." The 27-year-old", who captained St Helens to Challenge Cup success last year," said following in the footsteps of Farrell would be a challenge. ""Andy would be a hard act to follow but it's something I'm confident of being up to", he said. The GB team isn't a one-man team. There are a lot of good young players who are pushing for places anyway." Sculthorpe said the rugby league world would understand if Farrell did decide to move to rugby union. ""It's a short career and you have to make of it what you can", said Sculthorpe. Nobody can blame him if he does go - he's done everything in the game of rugby league. ""Financially it could set him up for life. If he fancies a new challenge", then who could fault him?"" Sculthorpe also called on the rugby league authorities to have a serious look at the number of games the top players are being asked to play. Sean Long", Sculthorpe's Saints and Lions team-mate," has expressed doubts about his international future ""I think Sean's situat

ion is to do with the sheer number of games we're playing", he said. The way he's looking at it is that if he can extend his career by a couple of years by not playing international rugby," then he's willing to do that. ""The RFL has got to do something about the fixtures. We're playing 42 weeks of the year and it's too much. ""A lot of the niggly injuries that I've suffered with over the last couple of years have come about because of the lack of rest time."" St Helens have been strongly linked with a move for brilliant young forward Sonny Bill Williams", and Sculthorpe said he would love the 19-year-old to come to Knowsley Road. ""He's a great player - a big strong lad who can certainly hit hard in defence", but who is also very skilful, he said. I'd love him to come to St Helens. Who knows what might happen? But you want the best players in your team," and he's certainly one of the best players in the world.""

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"sport 398.txt Tigers wary of Farrell 'gamble' Leicester say they will not be rushed into making a bid for Andy Farrell should the Great Britain rugby league captain decide to switch codes. ""We and anybody else involved in the process are still some way away from going to the next stage", Tigers boss John Wells told BBC Radio Leicester. At the moment, there are still a lot of unknowns about Andy Farrell," not least his medical situation. ""Whoever does take him on is going to take a big", "big gamble." Farrell", who has had persistent knee problems, had an operation on his knee five weeks ago and is expected to be out for another three months. Leicester and Saracens are believed to head the list of rugby union clubs interested in signing Farrell if he decides to move to the 15-man game. If he does move across to union, Wells believes he would better off playing in the backs," at least initially. ""I'm sure he could make the step between league and union by being involved in the centre", " said Wells. I think England would prefer him to progress to a position in the back row where they can make use of some of his rugby league skills within the forwards. ""The jury is out on whether he can cross that divide. ""At this club", "the balance will have to be struck between the cost of that gamble and the option of bringing in a ready-made replacement.""

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"sport 399.txt Farrell saga to drag on - Lindsay Wigan chairman Maurice Lindsay says he does not expect a quick solution to the on-going saga of captain Andy Farrell's possible switch to rugby union. Leicester and Saracens are leading the chase for the player", "but Lindsay told the BBC it was not yet a done deal. ""As well as the Rugby Football Union", the league, the individual club and the England coaching team have a say, so it's not a quick decision, he said. He's given us 12 years service so if he wants to go," we'd support him." The prospect of Farrell switching codes has been the main talking point of the Super League season so far. ""It came as a bolt out of the blue to us", admitted Lindsay. But he's a very loyal friend to the club," so there's no question that he's deserting us. He just fancies a challenge." Although the move would be a lucrative one for both Farrell and Wigan", "Lindsay said money was not a motivating factor for the club. ""The money side of things hasn't been concluded", but it's not the point for Wigan," he told Radio Five Live. A short age of money has never been a problem for us. ""Even if we did have it", "under the salary cap we can't spend a penny of it anyway - we'd rather have the player." L Lindsay also said he understood why rugby union was so interested in signing up Farrell. ""It'd be a great loss for us but a great boost for them", "said the Warriors chief. This guy is an absolute sporting icon. He's been at the top for so long and has demonstrated so many attributes that you need to make it

in a tough contact sport. ""Athletes like him - Ellery Hanley and Martin Johnson - don't come along very often. You're very lucky to have them whilst you've got them.""

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"sport 400.txt England given tough Sevens draw England will have to negotiate their way through a tough draw if they are to win the Rugby World Cup Sevens in Hong Kong next month. The second seeds have been drawn against Samoa", France, Italy, Georgia and Chinese Taipei. The top two sides in each pool qualify but England could face 2001 winners New Zealand in the quarter-finals if they stumble against Samoa. Scotland and Ireland are in Pool A together with the All Blacks. England won the first event of the International Rugby Board World Sevens series in Dubai but have slipped to fourth in the table after failing to build on that victory. However," they beat Samoa in the recent Los Angeles Sevens before losing to Argentina in the semi-finals. ""England have the ability and determination to win this World Cup and create sporting history by being the only nation to hold both the 15s and Sevens World Cups at the same time", said England sevens coach Mike Friday. England have a fantastic record in Hong Kong and have won there the last three years," but the World Cup is on a different level. ""Every pool contains teams who have caused upsets before and we will have to work hard to ensure we progress from our group. ""We have not performed consistently to our true potential so far in the IRB Sevens which has been disappointing - but we can only look forward." England won the first Rugby World Cup Sevens in 1993 with a side that included the likes of Lawrence Dallaglio and Matt Dawson. In 1997 and 2001", England lost in the quarter-finals. (seeds in brackets) New Zealand (1), Scotland (8), Tonga, Ireland, Korea, USA. England (2), Samoa (7), France, Italy, Georgia, Chinese Taipei. Fiji (3), Australia (6), Canada, Portugal, Japan, Hong Kong. Argentina (4), South Africa (5), Kenya, Tunisia, Russia, Uruguay.

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"sport 401.txt Wales hails new superstar One game into his Six Nations career", and Gavin Henson is already a Welsh legend. A mesmeric display against England, topped off by his howitzer of a match-winning penalty, has secured life membership of that particular club. At 23, Henson has the rugby world at his silver-booted feet. And if his natural self-assurance and swagger is shared by his Wales team-mates," then a full-blown revival could be more than just a lot of hot air drifting up from the Valleys. The ""Red Dragonhood"" subdued the ""Red Rose Army"" in most areas of the field",, but Henson's stellar performance ensured their efforts yielded the win they craved above all others. He announced himself in the game's opening salvo with a ""Welcome to Cardiff f"" greeting for Mark Cueto on the gain line. And his defence was a major feature of the match", his principal victim poor old, or rather young, Mathew Tait. The England centre will have spent his 19th birthday on Sunday shuddering at the memory of how he was up-ended not just once, but twice, by Henson's all-enveloping tackles. The second time, after the interval, single-handedly lifted the record Millennium Stadium crowd at a time when England were starting to show menace. Showing awesome strength, Henson nonchantly held the bewildered debutant in mid-air, a master predator toying with his helpless prey, savouring the kill. His kicking game also prospered, particularly when he moved to full-back for 10 minutes either side of half-time when his captain Gareth Thomas was in the sin-bin. One huge clearance from Tait's kick sent England retreating rapidly while another booming punt to the right corner kept the visitors pinned in their own half. Henson was also creativity personified: one little chip ahead for Shan

e Williams narrowly missed its target; a precise cross-kick forcing Jamie Noon to fumble the ball into touch. He also had a hand in the game's only try, finished superbly by Williams, and might have scored himself on the half-hour as he glided into space, only to be scragged by Tait. Henson was twice repelled as Wales laid siege to the English line after Charlie Hodgson's penalty had edged the visitors in front for the first time. But he was not to be denied as the crescendo rose to a deafening din, and the outcome of the match fell to him. Replacement Gareth Cooper made the most of a poor Welsh scrum by chipping into space, where Jason Robinson was penalised for holding on in the tackle. Five metres in from the right touchline, 44 metres out, it was not a kick Stephen Jones, who had seen a long-range effort fall agonisingly under the bar," would have approached with confidence. ""It was out of Steve's range but I looked at Gavin", and he gave me a reassuring nod," said Thomas. Henson, surveying his date with destiny, positively relished the responsibility, and the chance to make himself a hero. Without further ado, he nervelessly slotted the kick that ended five years of English dominance and 12 years of waiting in Cardiff. I knew I was going to get it before I even took the kick", "he said later, his distinct spiky locks freshly gelled into an appropriate star shape. I have been getting them from that distance all year so it wasn't a problem." "There were still four minutes for Wales to hold out", and the frenzy was such that Henson could not even hear Jones shouting instructions at him from three yards away. But it was Wales who finished the game on the attack," almost snatching a second try in a thunderous climax. ""Just Do It"" implored the front page headline on Saturday's Western Mail newspaper. And", thanks to Henson, Wales did.

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"sport 402.txt Sydney to host north v south game Sydney will host a northern versus southern hemisphere charity match in June or July", "the Australian Rugby Union (ARU) said on Wednesday. The match will include players from the Lions tour of New Zealand. ""The Australian Rugby Union has thrown its support behind a proposed North-South match to raise funds for the tsunami appeals", the ARU said. The date is yet to be decided but the most likely venue is Sydney's Olympic Stadium. ARU chief executive Gary Flowers said the world cricket charity match in Melbourne earlier this month had inspired the ARU. We still need to discuss the options with the IRB (International Rugby Board), the Lions and our SANZAR (South Africa, New Zealand and Australia Rugby) partners, but June or July is seen as a better option than March to ensure we have the cream of southern hemisphere rugby available," he said. Wallabies captain George Gregan said the charity match was a great initiative". Tri-Nations rivals Australia", New Zealand and South Africa would feature prominently in a southern team against a northern side comprised of Six Nations teams France, Ireland, England, Wales, Italy and Scotland. Coach Clive Woodward's Lions squad will tour New Zealand in June and July, including Tests on 25 June, 2 and 9 July. Almost 80,000 fans packed into Melbourne Cricket Ground on 10 January for a charity match that raised £5.9m for victims of the Asian tsunami.

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"sport 403.txt Celts savour Grand Slam prospect The Six Nations has heralded a new order in northern hemisphere rugby this year and Wales and Ireland rather than traditional big guns France and England face a potential Grand Slam play-off in three weeks' time. But before that game in Cardiff", Wales must get past Scotland at Murrayfield, while Ireland face the not insignificant task of a home fixture with the mercurial French. No-one knows what mood France will be in at Lansdowne Road on 12 March - sublime, as in the first

half against Wales, or ridiculous, like in the same period against England at T wickenham. But how the mighty have fallen. England sat on rugby's summit 15 mon ths ago as world champions and 2003 Grand Slam winners. But they have lost nine of their 14 matches since that heady night in Sydney. And they face the ignomin y of what could amount to a Wooden Spoon play-off against Italy in a fortnight. England are enduring their worst run in the championship since captain Richard Hill was dumped in favour of Mike Harrison after three straight losses in 1987. Coach Andy Robinson, who took over from the successful Sir Clive Woodward in Se ptember, has lost a phalanx of World Cup stars. And he is enduring the toughest of teething problems in bedding down his own style with a new team. The same ye ar that England ruled the roost, a woeful Wales lost all five matches in the Si x Nations. And they won only two games, against Scotland and Italy, in 2004. Wa les' most recent championship title was in 1994, and their last Grand Slam succ ess came in 1978 in the era of Gareth Edwards, Phil Bennett, JPR Williams et al. But Welsh rugby fans remain on permanent tenterhooks for the blossoming of a new golden age. After several false dawns, coach Mike Ruddock may have come u p with the team and philosophy to match expectations. The fresh verve is inspir ed by skipper Gareth Thomas, now out with a broken thumb, accurate kicking from either fly-half Stephen Jones or centre Gavin Henson, a rampant Martyn Williams leading the way up front, and exciting runners in the guise of Henson and Shane Williams. Ireland coach Eddie O'Sullivan and captain Brian O'Driscoll have got their side buzzing too," and they are close to shedding the ""nearly-men"" tag that has dogged them for the past few years. The men from the Emerald Isle have been Six Nations runners-up for the past two years", to France and England. Bu t they have not won the title since 1985 and last clinched a Grand Slam in 194 8. As for Scotland," they have struggled this decade and the 2004 Wooden Spoon ""winners"" have not been in the top two since they lifted the title in 1999. I taly continue the elusive search for their first Six Nations away win", and can still only account for the scalps of Scotland (twice) and Wales since joining t he elite in 2000. Coach John Kirwan is a passionate and dedicated believer in t he Azzurri, but is lacking in raw materials. And so to France. Brilliant one mi nute, inept the next. But the reigning champions could quite easily turn on the style in Dublin and end up winning the title through the back door. Ireland, th ough, have won three times in their last five meetings. Welsh romantics would p robably prefer a glorious victory in the Celtic showdown to crown their Grand S lam. But given that Ireland have beaten Wales in four of their last five meetin gs, the Welsh legions are likely to be behind Les Bleus on 12 March.

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"sport 404.txt Ireland win eclipses refereeing 'errors' T he International Rugby Board may have to step in to stop frustrated coaches and players from publicly haranguing referees when things go belly-up. It may have to go the whole way and have NFL-style video cameras all over the field", or sl ap the vociferous perpetrators over the knuckles. What the IRB does not want is a football scenario where the verbal slanging matches often overshadow the game itself. Sunday's explosive Six Nations clash at Lansdowne Road was a good examp le as Ireland took another step towards their first Grand Slam since 1948. The game was as exciting as it comes, with a much-improved England side enraged at a few decisions that did not go their way. One can understand that frustration. There was no doubt that Ireland had the rub of the green in their 19-13 victor y," but the reaction from the England camp may not have endeared them to the sp ort's ""blazers"". Referee Jonathan Kaplan was not perfect by any means and two decisions in particular made him the villain of the piece. I doubt whether Kapl an would have been too pleased at the comments made. After all", he has no publ

ic recourse to criticism. It was the same for Simon McDowell, the touch judge who was heavily criticised by Scotland coach Matt Williams after their defeat against France. As far as England were concerned, there were queries over Mark Cueto's first half-effort when he went over in the corner from a Charlie Hodgson kick. England coach Andy Robinson referred to a similar case at Ravenhill in January when Ulster were playing Gloucester in the Heineken Cup. On that occasion, David Humphreys kicked to Tommy Bowe, who touched down in the corner only for the try to be wiped out. But you cannot have cameras at every conceivable angle to pick up such anomalies. Perhaps Robinson was right to say the referee should have gone upstairs when Josh Lewsey was driven over the Irish line near the end. Lewsey claims he touched it down and was in full control. However, one has to credit Ireland flanker Johnny O'Connor for cleverly scooping the ball away and blocking any evidence of a touchdown. But in rugby, everything tends to even out over the 80 minutes. The referee also missed England's Danny Grewcock taking out Ronan O'Gara off the ball to allow Martin Corry a Sunday stroll to the line. Those were the stand-out moments in a classic game between the two old foes. But there were many more, and one should not take away from those. Brian O'Driscoll's winning try was as well-conceived as they come, while Charlie Hodgson's brilliant kicking display was another highlight. And Ronan O'Gara's tremendous ability to control the game was also a crucial component. But the defining moments came with Ireland under the cosh in the final 15 minutes. Two outstanding pieces of defensive play denied England and allowed Ireland to hold on. The first was Denis Hickie's brilliant double tackle in the right-hand corner. He gobbled up Cueto from another Hodgson cross-field kick, then regained his feet to stop Lewsey from scoring a certain try. Ireland's second-row colossus Paul O'Connell was equally superb. England had turned Ireland one way then the other, and the defence cordon was slowly disintegrating. England prop Matt Stevens ran in at full steam to suck in a few more tacklers. Unfortunately he ran into O'Connell who hit him hard - very hard - and then wrestled the ball away for a crucial turnover. That spoke volumes about Ireland's back-foot display, with defensive coach Mike Ford taking a bow at the end. To win a game like that showed that Ireland have moved forward. It may be tries that win games, but it is defence that wins championships.

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"sport 405.txt Ireland 19-13 England Ireland consigned England to their third straight Six Nations defeat with a stirring victory at Lansdowne Road. A second-half try from captain Brian O'Driscoll and 14 points from Ronan O'Gara kept Ireland on track for their first Grand Slam since 1948. England scored first through Martin Corry but had ""tries"" from Mark Cueto and Josh Lewsey disallowed. Andy Robinson's men have now lost nine of their last 14 matches since the 2003 World Cup final. The defeat also heralded England's worst run in the championship since 1987. Ireland last won the title", then the Five Nations, in 1985, but 20 years on they share top spot in the table on maximum points with Wales. And Eddie O'Sullivan's side banished the ghosts of 2003 when England were rampant 42-6 victors in claiming the Grand Slam at Lansdowne Road. In front of a supercharged home crowd on a dry but blustery day in Dublin, Ireland tore into the white-shirted visitors from the kick-off and made their intentions clear when O'Gara landed a fourth-minute drop-goal. England took their time to settle but their first real venture into Ireland's half produced a simple score for Corry. The number eight picked up the ball from the back of a ruck and found an absence of green jerseys between himself and the Irish line, racing 25 yards to touch down. England fly-half Charlie Hodgson nailed the conversion from out on the left, but almost immediately O'Gara, winning his 50th cap, an

swered with two penalties in quick succession. England were awarded a penalty off their own on the halfway line after 20 minutes, and Hodgson, the villain at Twickenham, coolly bisected the posts. The first quarter was marked by periods of tactical kicking, but it was Ireland who were showing more willingness to spread the ball wide to their eager and inventive backs. A series of probes led by the talismanic O'Driscoll, back from hamstring injury, resulted in a penalty but Ireland chose to kick for touch. From the line-out, the ball was recycled back to O'Gara, who stroked his second drop-goal, this time off the right upright. As the interval approached, wing Josh Lewsey was the catalyst for England's most promising attack. The Wasps star raced up his touchline and Hodgson's cross-kick put in Mark Cueto for an apparent score, but the Sale wing was ruled to have started in front of the kicker. England began the second half well and had Ireland pinned in their own half. But another English indiscretion on a rare Irish break-out awarded O'Gara a kick at goal, which he missed. England's pressure continued, and a wave of attacks saw centre Jamie Noon dragged down yards from the line before Hodgson landed a drop-goal. The lead was shortlived, however. Ireland raced upfield, deft handling from the backs, including a clever dummy from Geordan Murphy on Hodgson, ending with O'Driscoll going over in the right corner and touching down close to the posts. O'Gara missed a penalty which would have put Ireland nine points clear, and the home crowd breathed a sigh of relief when Hodgson's cross-kick was fumbled by lock Ben Kay near the line. Anticipation of a home win sent the noise level sky-high, but O'Gara missed another chance to seal the game with a wayward drop-goal attempt. Inside the last 10 minutes, England poured forward, spurred on by scrum-half Matt Dawson, who replaced Leicester's Harry Ellis. But despite one near miss with the pack over the line - not checked on the TV replay by referee Jonathan Kaplan - England were unable to pull off a face-saving win. Ireland next face France at Lansdowne Road in two weeks' time before the potential title decider against Wales in Cardiff. England are still to meet Italy at Twickenham, in what is now a wooden spoon decider, and Scotland. G Murphy; G Dempsey, B O'Driscoll, S Horgan, D Hickie; R O'Gara, P Stringer; R Corrigan, S Byrne, J Hayes; M O'Kelly, P O'Connell; S Easterby, J O'Connor, A Foley. F Sheahan, M Horan, D O'Callaghan, E Miller, G Easterby, D Humphreys, K Maggs. J Robinson (capt); M Cueto, J Noon, O Barkley, J Lewsey; C Hodgson, H Ellis; G Rowntree, S Thompson, M Stevens; D Grevcock, B Kay; J Worsley, L Moody, M Corry. A Titterrell, D Bell, S Borthwick, A Hazell, M Dawson, A Goode, O Smith.

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"sport 406.txt Fuming Robinson blasts officials England coach Andy Robinson said he was ""livid"" after his side were denied two tries in Sunday's 19-13 Six Nations loss to Ireland in Dublin. Mark Cueto's first-half effort was ruled out for offside before the referee spurned TV replays when England crashed over in the dying minutes. ""[I'm] absolutely spitting. I'm livid. There's two tries we've been cost"", Robinson told BBC Sport. We've got to go back to technology. I don't know why we didn't." South African referee Jonathan Kaplan ruled that Cueto was ahead of Charlie Hodgson when the fly-half hoisted his cross-field kick for the Sale wing to gather. Kaplan then declined the chance to consult the fourth official when Josh Lewsey took the ball over the Irish line under a pile of bodies for what could have been the game-winning try. ""I think Mark Cueto scored a perfectly legal try and I think he should have gone to the video referee on Josh Lewsey", said Robinson. It is how we use the technology. It is there," and it should be used. ""I am still trying to work out the Cueto try. I have looked at both," and they both looked tries. ""We are very disappointed", and this will hurt," there is no doubt about that. ""We are u

pset now", " but the referee is in charge and he has called it his way and we have got to be able to cope with that. ""We did everything we could have done to win the game. I am very proud of my players and", with a couple of decisions," this could have been a very famous victory. ""I thought we dominated. Matt Stevens had an awesome game at tighthead prop", while the likes of Charlie Hodgson, " Martin Corry and Lewis Moody all came through well. ""Josh Lewsey was awesome", and every one of the forwards stood up out there. Given the pressure we were under," credit must go to all the players. ""We have done everything but win a game of rugby", " but Ireland are a good side. They defended magnificently and they've got every chance of winning this Six Nations." England have lost their first three matches in this year's Six Nations and four out of their six games since Robinson took over from Sir Clive Woodward in September.

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"sport 407.txt Scotland 18-10 Italy Six Chris Paterson penalties gave Scotland victory in a dour but clinical encounter against Italy at Murrayfield. Coach Matt Williams' side were outmuscled and outplayed in a tense first half but led 6-3 at the break. Paterson slotted four more second-half penalties and Scotland were denied a try when wing Sean Lamont's touchdown was ruled out for a forward pass. A late Andrea Masi try was small consolation for Italy", chasing their first away win in the Six Nations. Scotland came out on top of the early exchanges and took a quick 3-0 lead through the boot of full-back Paterson. But the more powerful Azzurri pack eventually rumbled into life. A series of drives into Scottish territory set up a penalty attempt, missed by full-back Roland De Marigny, and a wayward drop-goal effort from Luciano Orquera. Scotland defended the initial thrusts but on 20 minutes Italy, after coming up yards short of the line, equalised through a De Marigny penalty. Italy were off ered another penalty when Scottish flanker Simon Taylor was offside but the left-footed De Marigny pushed his kick wide. Scotland finally made the most of a rare foray into the Italian half and snatched three points from Paterson when an Italian forward handled the ball in a ruck. As the half wore on, both sides squandered promising spells of momentum with sloppy penalties, and the period fizzled out with Scotland numerically, if not psychologically, on top. Italy's De Marigny narrowly missed a chance to level the scores again shortly after the break but his long-range kick shaved the right upright. And Scotland capitalised with a third Paterson penalty on 50 minutes. Williams' side seemed to have found a spark from somewhere and, after a couple of probing attacks, Paterson was able to slot another three points to widen the gap. With the pendulum of possession swinging towards Scotland, Lamont thought he had wriggled over in the left corner after 65 minutes but play was recalled for a marginal forward pass from Paterson. Another Paterson penalty on 70 minutes kept the pressure on the witting visitors. But John Kirwan's men had the last laugh when Gordon Ross' attempted clearance was charged down and Masi pounced for the try, converted by De Marigny. : C Paterson; S Webster, A Craig, H Southwell, S Lamont; D Parks, C Cusiter; T Smith, G Bulloch (capt), G Kerr; S Grimes, S Murray; S Taylor, J Petrie, A Hogg. R Russell, B Douglas, N Hines, J Dunbar, M Blair, G Ross, B Hinshelwood. R de Marigny; Mirco Bergamasco, C Stoica, A Masi, L Nitoglia; L Orquera, A Troncon; A Lo Cicero, F Ongaro, M Castrogiovanni; S Dellape, M Bortolami (capt); A Persico, D Dal Maso, S Parisse. G Intoppa, S Perugini, CA del Fava, S Orlando, P Griffen, R Pedrazzi, KP Robertson.

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"sport 408.txt Bortolami predicts dour contest Italy skipper Marco Bortolami believes Saturday's Six Nations contest against Scotland wi

ll be a scrappy encounter. With both sides looking for their first win of the championship"," the third-round game at Murrayfield has been billed as a wood spoon decider. And Bortolami feels the Edinburgh contest could end up being a bruising battle of the packs. ""It will not be a pretty game because both teams are desperate to gain their first win"," said the lock forward. Italy have only recorded three wins since they joined the Six Nations in 2000, but two of those have come against Scotland. This year, Italy opened up with a stubborn display against Ireland but ended up losing 28-17. However, they were thoroughly outplayed by an impressive Welsh side in Rome last time out. Now the Italians travel to Edinburgh hoping to claim their first away win in the Six Nations. Scotland played extremely well against France in Paris but not so well when Ireland came to Edinburgh"," said Bortolami. We are still very disappointed with our last game against Wales in Rome and we are thoroughly determined to right the wrongs. ""As a nation"," our quest is to be respected as a team worthy of a place in this tournament and we can only do this by winning games.""  
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,"sport 409.txt O'Connell rejects Lions rumours Ireland and Munster lock Paul O'Connell has dismissed media reports linking him to the captaincy of the Lions tour to New Zealand this summer. O'Connell is rumoured to be among the front-runners for the job"," but says he is totally focused on Sunday's Six Nations crunch clash with England. ""I honestly don't think about these reports", he told BBC Sport. The Lions thing is all speculation and newspaper talk," nothing more. I just ignore it and get on with my job."" He added: ""The only thing that annoys me after reading some reports is what the opposition locks think. ""I can just imagine them saying 'I'm going to show this guy what's what about second row play'. That's the one thing that makes me cringe."" O'Connell", who made a try-scoring international debut against Wales two years ago," is enjoying his meteoric rise into rugby's shop window - but refuses to be drawn on the Lions. ""I have spoken to Sir Clive Woodward a few times", but not for very long, certainly nothing about summer holidays," he joked. He also said he remains wary of wounded England's abilities coming into Sunday's game after two straight defeats, dismissing predictions of a certain Irish victory. It's very dangerous to think that. This England team has so much experience and skill. You do not become a bad team overnight. ""They have two world class game-breakers in Josh Lewsey and Jason Robinson"," while Charlie Hodgson is just ready to click into place." He insisted Ireland will not make the mistake of being over-confident. ""That's not going to happen in our squad. No Ireland team lining up to play England will ever fall into that trap", he said. Every time we play England we know what a big task it is. Look at what they did to us two years ago. I remember that game all too well," and it was not a good feeling. ""I came on as a replacement and we were losing 13-6", and ended up getting hammered 42-6," so I know what can happen when England come to Dublin. ""They could so easily have been coming to Dublin with two wins and staring a Grand Slam in the face as well.""  
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,"sport 410.txt Taylor poised for Scotland return Simon Taylor has been named in the Scotland squad for Saturday's Six Nations clash with Italy. The 25-year-old number eight made a scoring return for Edinburgh at the weekend - his first game in a year for the capital side. Taylor suffered knee ligament damage playing against Ireland in Dublin in the 2004 Six Nations championship. ""Simon is one of Scotland's truly world class players so it is a huge

bonus", said team-mate Chris Paterson. He brings a whole new dimension to us," especially in defence and his ability to slow the opposition ball down could be key against Italy if he is involved. "" Taylor has turned out for English side Saracens in recent weeks during a short-term loan to improve his fitness. Edinburgh were not in action during the first two weeks of this season's Six Nations. So Taylor played the last 20 minutes of Saracens' win over Northampton and then 40 minutes in a friendly against South African Super 12 side The Cats. Scotland coach Matt Williams is due to name his match-day 22 on Thursday. Both Scotland and Italy have lost their opening two Six Nations games and", just like last season's encounter which Italy won, this weekend's game could turn out to be a battle to avoid the wooden spoon. - M Blair (Edinburgh), A Craig (Glasgow), C Cusiter (Borders), S Danielli (Borders), M Di Rollo (Edinburgh), A Henderson (Glasgow), B Hinshelwood (Worcester), R Lamont (Glasgow), S Lamont (Glasgow), D Parks (Glasgow), C Paterson (Edinburgh), G Ross (Leeds), H Southwell (Edinburgh), S Webster (Edinburgh) - R Beattie (Northampton), G Bulloch (Glasgow, captain), B Douglas (Borders), J Dunbar (Leeds), I Fullarton (Saracens), S Grimes (Newcastle), N Hines (Edinburgh), A Hogg (Edinburgh), G Kerr (Leeds), N Lloyd (Saracens), S Murray (Edinburgh), J Petrie (Glasgow), R Russell (London Irish), C Smith (Edinburgh), T Smith (Northampton), S Taylor (Edinburgh), J White (Sale).

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"sport 411.txt Vickery upbeat about arm injury England prop Phil Vickery is staying positive despite a broken arm ruling him out of the RBS Six Nations. The 28-year-old fractured the radius in his right forearm during Gloucester's 17-16 win over Bath on Saturday. He will undergo an operation on Monday and is expected to be out for at least six weeks. He said: ""This isn't an injury that will stop me from working hard on the fitness elements and being around the lads." " He added: ""I've got the operation this afternoon and I could be back doing fitness work after a week." " "As frustrating as it is," " I've got to be positive." " After the game", Vickery spoke with Bath prop David Barnes," who also broke his arm recently. ""I had a chat with David Barnes and it looks like a similar injury to him", " he said. He said he had the operation and he was back running after a week. ""There's no doubt that I'm going to get involved and be around this place as soon as I can after the operation." " Gloucester director of rugby Nigel Melville said: ""Phil has broken his radius", " which is the large bone in his forearm. ""I don't really know how it happened", " but Phil will definitely be out of action for at least six weeks. ""I feel very sorry for him", as he has been in great shape. He really needed 80 minutes of rugby this weekend, and then this happened. Mentally," it must be very hard for him." "

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"sport 412.txt Dominici backs lacklustre France Wing Christophe Dominici says France can claim another Six Nations Grand Slam despite two lacklustre wins so far against Scotland and England. The champions only just saw off the Scots in Paris", " then needed England to self-destruct in last week's 18-17 win. ""The English played better than us but lost", whereas we are still in the race for the Grand Slam, said Dominici. We know our display was not perfect, but we can still win the Grand Slam," along with Ireland and Wales." " France ", Ireland and Wales all remain unbeaten after two rounds of this year's RBS Six Nations, with the two Celtic nations playing by far the more impressive rugby. France take on Wales at the Stade de France on 26 February and Ireland in Dublin on 12 March. But although France have yet to click," Dominici says that they can still win the hard way as long as scrum-half Dimitri Yachvili conti

nues in his goalkicking form. ""If we have an efficient kicker on whom we can rely on", a solid defence and a team who play for their lives, we can achieve something, Dominici added. I said at the start of the competition that the winners would be clearer from the third matches," and that's exactly what is going to happen."" France coach Bernard Laporte will announce his starting line-up next Tuesday for the match against Wales. Wing Jimmy Marlu is definitely out with the knee injury sustained at Twickenham", which is likely to sideline him for the rest of the tournament. Inspirational flanker Serge Betsen is a doubt with a thigh injury, but number eight Imanol Harinordoquy has shaken off his shoulder injury. In the backs, centre Yannick Jauzion and winger Aurelien Rougerie are all back in contention after injury, while Brive back Julien Laharrague has received his first call-up as a replacement for Pepito Elhorga.

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"sport 413.txt Llewellyn plans Wales retirement Wales record cap holder Gareth Llewellyn will retire from Test rugby at the end of the Six Nations. The veteran lock", who is 36 at the end of February, told BBC Wales Scrum V that it is time for him to bring down the curtain on his 92-cap Wales career. Llewellyn is on a one-season deal with French club side Narbonne," but said he may consider retiring from all rugby. ""I don't know what I'll do next year", whether to carry on playing or make a change in my career, Llewellyn said. Narbonne are really keen for me to stay on for next year, so I've got to decide whether to stay on there or maybe go somewhere else," but ultimately coaching is where I'd like to end up. ""I've done all the coaching awards and everything you can do in that respect", so it's just hopefully getting a chance somewhere here." Fellow locks Robert Sidoli and Brent Cockbain", who both scored tries in Saturday's Six Nations win in Italy, are Wales coach Mike Ruddock's preferred starters in the second row. With the resurgence of the Dragons' Ian Gough and the adaptability of lock-cum-flanker Jon Thomas on the bench," Llewellyn has not yet made a match-day squad this Six Nations campaign. But the former Neath and Ospreys player is still targetting one last outing in the red shirt. ""If I do get on the field then brilliant", although the boys are doing really well and I'm very pleased for them," Llewellyn added. We've had some really tough years in Wales and the players have been through a hell of a lot. ""Sometimes the easiest thing would have been to throw the towel in and walk away", but a few of us dug in there and it's really nice to see some of the boys getting the rewards now. ""I was going to retire at the end of the last Six Nations", I'd even told some of the boys in the squad about it. ""But Mike (Ruddock) asked me to carry on for another season", which I've done, still part of the squad," still trying to help them out as much as I can." Llewellyn made his Wales debut in 1989 against New Zealand as a 20-year-old", having caught the selectors' eyes in the All Blacks' tour match against Neath. The 6ft 6in player has not looked back since," going on to break Neil Jenkins' Wales cap record on 12 June 2004 in the 50-44 loss in Argentina. ""There's been lots of highs - winning the Six Nations in '94", beating England in '93, I've been on some great tours and seen some fantastic countries, Llewellyn said. But I think the best thing of all for me was the time I spent with the players," I've met some great guys in rugby and made some great friends. ""It'll be a bit strange on international days having to find somewhere to watch Wales play", but at least I might have time to get my golf handicap down!"" Llewellyn captained Neath for seven seasons", while being an integral part of the Neath-Swansea Ospreys regional side's first season. But with the Ospreys building for the future, Llewellyn was eventually forced to look to France for employment - digging in his heels during contract negotiations to insist he must be allowed to play for Wales.

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"sport 414.txt England 17-18 France England suffered an eighth defeat in 11 Tests as scrum-half Dimitri Yachvili booted France to victory at Twickenham. Two converted tries from Olly Barkley and Josh Lewsey helped the world champions to a 17-6 half-time lead. But Charlie Hodgson and Barkley missed six penalties between them", while Yachvili landed six for France to put the visitors in front. England could have won the game with three minutes left, but Hodgson pushed an easy drop goal opportunity wide. It was a dismal defeat for England, coming hard on the heels of an opening Six Nations loss in Wales. They should have put the game well beyond France's reach, but remarkably remained scoreless for the entire second half. A scrappy opening quarter saw both sides betray the lack of confidence engendered by poor opening displays against Wales and Scotland respectively. Hodgson had an early opportunity to settle English nerves but pushed a straightforward penalty attempt wide. But a probing kick from France centre Damien Traille saw Mark Cueto penalised for holding on to the ball in the tackle, Yachvili giving France the lead with a kick from wide out. France twice turned over England ball at the breakdown early on as the home side struggled to generate forward momentum, one Ben Kay charge apart. A spell of tit-for-tat kicking emphasised the caution on both sides, until England refused a possible three points to kick a penalty to the corner, only to botch the subsequent line-out. But England made the breakthrough after 19 minutes, when a faltering move off the back of a scrum led to the opening try. Jamie Noon took a short pass from Barkley and ran a good angle to plough through Yann Delaigue's flimsy tackle before sending his centre partner through to score at the posts. Hodgson converted and added a penalty after one of several French infringements on the floor for a 10-3 lead. The fly-half failed to dispense punishment though with a scuffed attempt after France full-back Pepito Elhorga, scragged by Lewsey, threw the ball into touch. Barkley also missed two longer-range efforts as the first half drew to a close, but by then England had scored a second converted try. After a series of phases lock Danny Grewcock ran hard at the French defence and off-loaded out of Sylvain Marconnet's tackle to Lewsey. The industrious wing cut back in on an angle and handed off hooker Sebastien Bruno to sprint over. After a dire opening to the second half, France threw on three forward replacements in an attempt to rectify the situation, wing Jimmy Marlu having already departed injured. Yachvili nibbled away at the lead with a third penalty after 51 minutes. And when Lewis Moody was twice penalised - for handling in a ruck and then straying offside - the scrum-half's unerring left boot cut the deficit to two points. Barkley then missed his third long-range effort to increase the tension. And after seeing another attempt drop just short, Yachvili put France ahead with his sixth penalty with 11 minutes left. England sent on Ben Cohen and Matt Dawson, and after Barkley's kick saw Christophe Dominici take the ball over his own line, the stage was set for a victory platform. But even after a poor scrummage, Hodgson had the chance to seal victory but pushed his drop-goal attempt wide. England threw everything at the French in the final frantic moments, but the visitors held on for their first win at Twickenham since 1997. J Robinson (capt); M Cueto, J Noon, O Barkley, J Lewsey; C Hodgson, H Ellis; G Rountree, S Thompson, P Vickery; D Grewcock, B Kay; J Worsley, L Moody, M Corry. A Titterrell, A Sheridan, S Borthwick, A Hazell, M Dawson, H Paul, B Cohen. P Elhorga; C Dominici, B Liebenberg, D Traille, J Marlu; Y Delaigue, D Yachvili; S Marconnet, S Bruno, N Mas; F Pelous (capt), J Thion, S Betsen, J Bonnaire, S Chabal. W Servat, J Milloud, G Lamboley, Y Nyanga, P Mignoni, F Michalak, J-P Grandclaude. Paddy O'Brien (New Zealand)

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"/" "sport 415.txt Wilkinson to miss Ireland match England will have to take on Ireland in the Six Nations without captain and goal-kicker Jonny Wilkinson", according to his Newcastle boss Rob Andrew. Wilkinson - who had targeted the 27 February match for his international comeback - has been missed by England," not least for his goal-kicking. ""Jonny's not fit yet", Falcons chief Andrew told BBC Radio Five Live. He won't be fit for Dublin, there's no doubt about that," but he might be fit for Scotland and Italy." The 25-year-old has not played for England since the 2003 World Cup final after a succession of injuries. England", who have lost three Six Nations games in a row," wasted a 17-6 half-time lead in their 18-17 defeat to France. Goal-kickers Charlie Hodgson and Olly Barkley missed six penalty attempts and a drop-goal between them. ""They've probably got two of the best English kickers in the Premiership in Hodgson and Barkley", added Andrew, a former England fly-half and goal-kicker. They're both pretty good kickers. Charlie is a good kicker week-in", week-out. ""But it's all about pressure and unfortunately England are just not handling the pressure at the moment." Andrew also blamed England's poor run of recent results on a lack of leadership in the side following several high-profile retirements and injuries. ""They just didn't have that leadership that would have seen them through. Martin Johnson", Lawrence Dallaglio and Jonny are obviously huge losses and leadership is so important in those situations," he said. I think it is really difficult for Jason Robinson to lead the side effectively from full-back." Meanwhile", former England full-back Dusty Hare put England's mistakes down to a lack of mental toughness. ""Jonny Wilkinson has proved himself a cool customer with around an 80% kicking success rate", Hare told BBC Radio Five Live. But natural-born toughness comes into it as well as all the practice you do. ""You have to be able to shut out all the outside elements and concentrate on putting the ball between the posts." Hodgson", who has an excellent kicking record with club side Sale Sharks," has introduced crowd noise into his practice routine of late. ""The top golfers don't hit the fairway every time", and it is the same with goal-kicking, Hare added. You need that mental toughness as well to put the ball over," but great goal-kickers like Jonny Wilkinson come along very rarely."

"/" "sport 416.txt Italy 8-38 Wales Wales secured their first away win in the RBS Six Nations for nearly four years with a six-try victory in Rome. Tries from Jonathan Thomas", Tom Shanklin and Martyn Williams gave the visitors a 19-5 half-time advantage. Luciano Orquera did reply with one for Italy but second-half efforts from Brent Cockbain, Shane Williams and Robert Sidoli sealed victory. Fly-half Stephen Jones added four conversions as Wales maintained their superb start to this year's tournament. Starting full of confidence after their victory over England, the visitors scored the opening try after just four minutes. Diminutive wing Shane Williams fielded a kick ahead and danced past the onrushing Andrea Masi and Aaron Persico into the Italian half. His pass to Tom Shanklin appeared forward but when the centre was held up short, the ball was switched left and Michael Owen's long cut-out pass gave the lurking Thomas an easy run-in. Stephen Jones, who retained the kicking duties despite Gavin Henson's heroics against England, slotted an excellent conversion from wide out. Wales twice threatened further scores but failed to find the crucial pass, and Italy hit back out of the blue in the 11th minute. Henson, sporting gold boots rather than the silver variety that did for England, beat two players with ease out on the left touchline. But his attempted chip ahead was charged down by Orquera, who snaffled the loose ball and hared away from halfway to score in

the right corner. With the Welsh line-out stuttering and Italy twice turning the visitors' scrum, the home side's forward power brought them back into it. But a clever high kick from Henson almost brought a try for Hal Luscombe when Roland de Marigny and Ludovico Nitoglia made a hash of claiming it as the ball bounced into touch. Wales regained control with a second try in the 21st minute, Henson lobbing up a high kick to the left corner where Shanklin jumped higher than Nitoglia to dot down his 15th Test try. Jones was unable to convert and De Marigny then hit the upright with a penalty attempt for Italy. Henson was also narrowly short with a long-range effort at goal, but Wales ended the half with a vital third score to give themselves some breathing space. Henson sent Luscombe streaking away and when he off-loaded to Martyn Williams, the flanker showed his nous to ground the ball against the padding of the post, Jones adding the conversion. Italy, who lost flanker Mauro Bergamasco with a head knock before half-time, built up a head of steam on the resumption. De Marigny landed a penalty to make it 19-8 and a Nitoglia break through the middle threatened a try only for the move to break down with a knock-on. But Wales put the outcome beyond doubt with two superb tries in four minutes before the hour. Their fourth after 53 minutes was sparked by another mazy run from Shane Williams, who beat several players with ease, and finished with a powerful angled run from lock Cockbain. Before Italy could recover from that blow, a strong surge from Gareth Thomas and great off-loads from Martyn Williams and replacement Kevin Morgan saw Shane Williams scamper over. With Jones converting both for a 33-8 lead, Wales had the luxury of sending on five more replacements for the final quarter. The icing on the cake came with a sixth try after more superb support work, Shane Williams and Ceri Sweeney combining to send Sidoli over in the left corner. The only downside for Wales was a hamstring injury suffered by Luscombe. But after back-to-back wins at the start of the tournament for the first time in 11 years, they will travel to Paris in a fortnight looking like genuine contenders.

R de Marigny; Mirco Bergamasco, W Pozzebon, A Masi, L Nitoglia; L Orquera, A Troncon; A Lo Cicero, F Ongaro, M Castrogiovanni, S Dellape, M Bortolami (capt), A Persico, Mauro Bergamasco, S Parisse. G Intoppa, S Perugini, CA del Fava, D dal Maso, P Griffen, M Barbini, KP Robertson. G Thomas (capt); H Luscombe, T Shanklin, G Henson, S Williams; S Jones, D Peel; G Jenkins, M Davies, A Jones; B Cockbain, R Sidoli; J Thomas, M Williams, M Owen. R McBryde, J Yapp, I Gough, R Sowden-Taylor, G Cooper, C Sweeney, K Morgan. Andrew Cole (Australia).

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"sport 417.txt D'Arcy injury adds to Ireland woe Gordon D'Arcy has been ruled out of the Ireland team for Saturday's Six Nations clash against Scotland in Murrayfield. Like skipper Brian O'Driscoll", D'Arcy failed to recover from a hamstring injury. The side will now be led by Munster lock Paul O'Connell. Shane Horgan switches from wing to centre where he will be joined by Ulster's Kevin Maggs. Girvan Dempsey comes into the team to take the right wing spot while Gavin Duffy is called up to the replacements. "We gave Gordon a chance but it didn't work out," said Ireland coach Eddie O'Sullivan. "In terms of the risk element, it was a sensible precaution. He should be fine for the next game but we do not want to tempt fate." Maggs, who will win his 67th cap, was the obvious replacement at centre while Shane Horgan was always likely to be moved from the wing. The only other change to the Ireland side from last weekend's win in Rome sees Wasps flanker Johnny O'Connor replacing Denis Leamy. O'Connor will be winning his third cap after making his debut in the victory over South Africa last November. : Murphy, Dempsey, Horgan, Maggs, Hickie, O'Gara, Stringer, Corrigan, Byrne, Hayes, O'Kelly, O'Connell, capt, S Easterby, O'Connor, Foley. : Sheahan, Horan, O'Callaghan, Miller, G Easterby, Humphreys, Duf

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"sport 418.txt O'Driscoll out of Scotland game Ireland captain Brian O'Driscoll has been ruled out of Saturday's RBS Six Nations clash against Scotland. O'Driscoll was originally named in the starting line-up but has failed to recover from the hamstring injury he picked up in the win over Italy. His replacement will be named after training on Friday morning. Fellow centre Gordon D'Arcy is also struggling with a hamstring injury and he will undergo a fitness test on Friday to see if he can play. Kevin Maggs would be an obvious replacement at centre while Shane Horgan could also be moved from wing. Ulster wing Tommy Bowe could also be asked to travel with the squad to Scotland as a precautionary measure. The only other change to the Ireland side sees Wasps flanker Johnny O'Connor replacing Denis Leamy. O'Connor will be winning his third cap after making his debut in the victory over South Africa last November. : Murphy", Horgan, TBC, D'Arcy, Hickie, O'Gara, Stringer, Corrigan, Byrne, Hayes, O'Kelly, O'Connell, S Easterby, O'Connor, Foley. : Sheahan, Horan, O'Callaghan, Miller, G Easterby, Humphreys, Dempsey.

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"sport 419.txt Tindall aiming to earn Lions spot Bath and England centre Mike Tindall believes he can make this summer's Lions tour", despite missing most of the season through injury. The World Cup winner has been out of action since December, having damaged both his shoulder and his foot. But Tindall, who recently signed for Bath's west-country rivals Gloucester," told Rugby Special he would be fit in time for the tour to New Zealand. ""I'm aiming to be fit by 18 April and hope I can play from then", he said. I've spoken to Sir Clive Woodward and he understands the situation," so I just hope that I can get on the tour." The 26-year-old will face stiff competition for those centre places from Brian O'Driscoll", Gordon D'Arcy and Gavin Henson, and is aware that competition is intense. But after missing out on the 2001 tour to Australia with a knee injury," Tindall says he will be happy just to have an opportunity to wear the red shirt. ""I'm quite laid back about it to be honest - it's quite hard for me to expect to be pushing for a Test spot", he said. But after what's happened this season at least Clive knows I'll be 100% fresh!"" - For the full interview with Mike Tindall tune into this Sunday's Rugby Special", 2340 on BBC Two

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"sport 420.txt O'Connor aims to grab opportunity Johnny O'Connor is determined to make a big impression when he makes his RBS Six Nations debut for Ireland against Scotland on Saturday. The Wasps flanker replaces Denis Leamy but O'Connor knows that the Munster man will be pushing hard for a recall for the following game against England. ""It's a 'horses for courses' selection really", said O'Connor. There's a lot of competition here and I can't just drag my heels around if I don't get picked." It looks a definite head-to-head battle between himself and 23-year-old Leamy - three stone heavier than O'Connor - for the number seven role against the world champions. Nonetheless," all O'Connor is currently concerned about is making an impression while winning his third cap. ""Missing the Italian game was disappointing certainly", but you can't dwell on these things - it's part and parcel of rugby. ""Denis has been playing really well and deserved his opportunity. ""It's a good situation to be in if there are good players around you", pushing for a place in the side." O'Connor", who celebrated his 25th birthday on Wednesday," was touted by

Wasps director of rugby Warren Gatland as a possible 2005 Lions Test openside as far back as last September. And his reputation as a breakdown scavenger and heavy hitter has seen him come to the forefront of O'Sullivan's mind for the Scottish tussle. O'Connor added: ""It will be interesting to see how situations on the deck is reffed," with the new laws having come in. ""Obviously the breakdown is a big part of what I do on the pitch so I'm hoping to hold some influence there against what is a very solid Scottish pack."" O'Connor will be winning his third cap after making his debut in the victory over South Africa last November.

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"sport 421.txt Henman overcomes rival Rusedski Tim Henman saved a match point before fighting back to defeat British rival Greg Rusedski 4-6 7-6 (8-6) 6-4 at the Dubai Tennis Championships on Tuesday. World number 46 Rusedski broke in the ninth game to take a tight opening set. Rusedski had match point at 6-5 in the second set tie-break after Henman double-faulted", but missed his chance and Henman rallied to clinch the set. The British number one then showed his superior strength to take the decider and earn his sixth win over Rusedski. Serve was held by both players with few alarms until the seventh game of the final set, when Rusedski's wild volley gave Henman a vital break. A furious Rusedski slammed his racket onto the ground in disgust and was warned by the umpire. Henman, seeded three, then held his serve comfortably thanks to four serve-and-volley winners to take a clear 5-3 lead. Rusedski won his service game but Henman took the first of his three match points with a service winner to secure his place in the second round at Dubai for the first time in three years. It was the first match between the pair for three years - Henman last lost to Rusedski six years ago - and lasted two hours and 40 minutes. The pair are now likely to only face each other on court as rivals - rather than as team-mates - after Henman decided to retire from Davis Cup tennis leaving Rusedski to lead the team out against Israel on 4-6 March. Henman, who now faces Russian Igor Andreev in the last 16," admitted afterwards it was difficult coming up against his compatriot on a fast surface. ""You just take it point by point when you're fighting to stay in the match"," he said. I had to keep playing aggressively and competing to get a chance. ""I now have to recover in time for the next match because the body doesn't recover as quick as it used to," especially after two hours and 40 minutes."

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"sport 422.txt Safin slumps to shock Dubai loss Marat Safin suffered a shock loss to unseeded Nicolas Kiefer in round one of the Dubai Tennis Championships. Playing his first match since winning the Australian Open", Safin showed some good touches but was beaten 7-6 (7-2) 6-4 by the in-form Kiefer. The German got on top in the first-set tie-break, striking a sweet forehand to win the first point against serve. And he maintained the momentum early in the second set, breaking the Russian with the help of an inspired volley. Spain's Feliciano Lopez lined up a second round clash with Andre Agassi by beating Thailand's Paradorn Srichaphan. Lopez, who lost in three sets to Roger Federer in last year's final, won 6-2 3-6 6-3. Former champion Fabrice Santoro of France was beaten 6-3 6-0 by sixth seeded Russian Nikolay Davydenko. There were also wins for two other Russians, Igor Andreev and seventh seed Mikhail Youzhny.

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"sport 423.txt Ferrero eyes return to top form Former world number one Juan Carlos Ferrero insists he can get back to his best despite a

tough start to 2005. The 2003 French Open champion has slipped to 64 in the world after a year of illness and injuries in 2004", "but is confident that his form will return. ""I don't know when it is going to happen", Ferrero told BBC Sport. But I have a lot of confidence in me that I will be the same Juan Carlos as I was before," and very soon. I feel 100% again mentally." The 25-year-old Spaniard joins a top field for the ABN AMRO World Tennis Tournament in Rotterdam this week as he looks to add to just two wins in 2005. He opens against Rainer Schuettler and potentially faces fourth seed David Nalbandian in the second round. ""Because I'm no longer seeded it's tougher", "Ferrero admitted. I had to play against Joachim Johansson in the first round last week in Marseille. ""In the past when I was a top seed I would have played a match like that in the quarters or semi-finals. ""This is the big difference but I have to do it to get higher in the rankings." Despite this", Ferrero insists he is feeling positive after chicken pox and a rib injury destroyed last season. ""Physically I am 100% since December of last year", "said Ferrero. I was working very hard before the Davis Cup final to prepare and I've felt 100% from then until now. ""The difficult moments were when I knew that I had the chicken pox and that it would take two or three months to recover. ""I had to start from zero again physically because the virus left me at zero per cent. ""When I started to come back I had my rib broken when I fell on court and that was another two months out. Those five months were pretty difficult for me." Among the low points of a difficult year for Ferrero was the decision of Spain captain Jordi Arrese to drop him for the Davis Cup final against the USA. ""It was difficult because I had been playing well for the whole year and the coaches told me that I would play", "said Ferrero. But then I had some problems with my hand two days before the Friday matches so they decided to choose Nadal instead. ""It was difficult for me not to be in the Friday matches but I had to understand. ""Inside me I wanted to play but this was the decision of the captain and they had to make it." "

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"sport 424.txt Roddick into San Jose final Andy Roddick will play Cyril Saulnier in the final of the SAP Open in San Jose on Sunday. The American top seed and defending champion overcame Germany's Tommy Haas", the third seed, 7-6 (7-3) 6-3. And Saulnier survived an injury scare in his semi-final with seventh-seeded Austrian Jurgen Melzer. The Frenchman twisted his ankle early in the second set but overcame Melzer, who was left fuming over a series of line calls, 6-7 (3-7) 6-3 6-3. ""I was feeling horrible earlier in the week", "Roddick said. I thought tonight was another step in the right direction. ""On my returns", I was standing in more and I'm getting a little more depth, "even if I don't hit a perfect return." Roddick won the last four points of the first-set tie-break before being broken at the start of the second set. But he broke straight back and then broke Haas again to lead 4-2. ""It's extremely frustrating when you have chances against a top-five player and don't do anything with them", "admitted Haas. I rushed a few backhands and he took advantage." Saulnier will move into the world's top 50 for the first time after his passage through to the final. ""It's taken a lot of work and a lot of fighting in my mind", "he revealed. Sometimes I didn't believe I could get to a final and now I am here. I've stayed mentally strong. ""I'm on the way. I'll keep fighting and work a lot and I'll be up there." "

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"sport 425.txt Federer claims Dubai crown World number one Roger Federer added the Dubai Championship trophy to his long list of successes - but not before he was given a test by Ivan Ljubicic. Top seed Federer loo

ked to be on course for a easy victory when he thumped the eighth seed 6-1 in t he first set. But Ljubicic", who beat Tim Henman in the last eight, dug deep to secure the second set after a tense tiebreak. Swiss star Federer was not about to lose his cool, though, turning on the style to win the deciding set 6-3. The match was a re-run of last week's final at the World Indoor Tournament in Rotte rdam, where Federer triumphed," but not until Ljubicic had stretched him for fi ve sets. ""I really wanted to get off to a good start this time", and I did, an d I could really play with confidence while he still looking for his rhythm, Fe derer said. That took me all the way through to 6-1 3-1 0-30 on his serve and I almost ran away with it. But he came back," and that was a good effort on his side." Ljubicic was at a loss to explain his poor showing in the first set.

"I didn't start badly", but then suddenly I felt like my racket was loose and the balls were flying a little bit too much. And with Roger, if you relax for a second it just goes very quick, he said. After those first three games it was n o match at all. I don't know, it was really weird. I was playing really well th e whole year," and then suddenly I found myself in trouble just to put the ball in the court."" But despite his defeat"," the world number 14 was pleased with his overall performance. ""I had a chance in the third"," and for me it's reall y positive to twice in two weeks have a chance against Roger to win the match. ""It's an absolutely great boost to my confidence that I'm up there and belong with top-class players."

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"sport 426.txt Young debut cut short by Ginepri Fifteen-y ear-old Donald Young's first appearance in an ATP tennis tournament proved brie f as the teenager went out in round one of the San Jose Open. Young shot to th e top of the junior world rankings when he won the boys' singles at January's A ustralian Open. But the wildcard entry was dispatched by fellow American Robby Ginepri in straight sets", 6-2 6-2," in California. Despite that he was happy w ith his Tour debut. ""It was fun. I had my chances", but they didn't come throu gh," he said. Young, who beat two players ranked in the top 200 when he was jus t 14, was only 2-1 down in the first set before losing 10 of the next 13 games. And Ginepri - six years older than the youngest player to ever win a junior sla m and top the global standings - admitted he was impressed. He's very talente d"," said Ginepri. He's got a long future ahead of him. ""Being left-handed"," he was very quick around the court. ""His serve is a little deceptive. He came into the net and volleyed better than I thought."" Earlier", South Korean Hyun g-Taik Lee defeated American Jan-Michael Gambill 6-3 7-6 (7-4). American Kevin Kim defeated Jan Hernych of the Czech Republic 7-5 6-3, Canadian qualifier Fran k Dancevic downed American Jeff Morrison 4-6 7-6 (7-3) 6-0, and Denmark's Kenne th Carlsen beat Irakli Labadze of the Republic of Georgia 6-7 (4-7) 6-2 6-3. To p seed Andy Roddick launches his defence of the title on Wednesday against qual ifier Paul Goldstein. Second seed Andre Agassi opens his campaign on Tuesday ag ainst wildcard Bobby Reynolds, last year's US collegiate champion. Agassi has w on the San Jose five times, but his run of three straight titles ended last yea r when he fell to Mardy Fish in the semi-finals. Fish went on to lose to Roddic k in the final.

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"sport 427.txt Melzer shocks Agassi Second seed Andre Aga ssi suffered a comprehensive defeat by Jurgen Melzer in the quarter-finals of t he SAP Open. Agassi was often bamboozled by the Austrian's drop shots in San J ose"," losing 6-3 6-1. Defending champion and top seed Andy Roddick rallied to beat Sweden's Thomas Enqvist 3-6 7-6 (8-6) 7-5. But unseeded Cyril Saulnier bea

t the fourth seed Vincent Spadea 6-2 6-4 and Tommy Haas overcame eighth seed Max Mirnyi 6-7 (2-7) 7-6 (7-3) 6-2. Melzer has now beaten Agassi in two of their three meetings. ""I had a good game plan and I executed it perfectly", he said. It's always tough to come out to play Andre. ""I didn't want him to play his game. He makes you run like a dog all over the court." And Agassi", who was more than matched for power by his opponent's two-handed backhand," said Melzer was an example of several players on the tour willing to take their chances against him. ""A lot more guys are capable of it now", said the American. He played much better than me. That's what he did both times. ""I had opportunities to loosen myself up", Agassi added. But I didn't convert on the big points.""

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"sport 428.txt Federer forced to dig deep Top seed Roger Federer had to save two match points before squeezing past Juan Carlos Ferrero at the Dubai Open. The world number one took two hours 15 minutes to earn his 4-6 6-3 7-6 victory", saving match points at 6-4 in the tiebreak before claiming it 8-6. Federer made a number of unforced errors early on, allowing Ferrero to take advantage and claim the first set. But the Swiss star hit back to reach the quarter-finals," where he will face seventh seed Russian Mikhail Youzhny. The Russian beat Germany's Rainer Schuettler 7-5 6-4. Federer was not unduly worried despite being taken to three sets for the third consecutive match. The world number one was forced to go the distance against Ivan Ljubicic in the Rotterdam final and against Ivo Minar in the first round in Dubai. ""I definitely had a slow start again and to come back every time is quite an effort", he said. I haven't been playing well," but I've been coming through. I'm winning the crucial points and that shows I'm on top of my game when I have to be.""

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"sport 429.txt Nadal marches on in Mexico Rafael Nadal continued his run of fine form to beat Guillermo Canas and reach the Mexican Open semis in Acapulco. Eighth seed Nadal", who picked up his second ATP title when he beat Alberto Martin in last week's Brazil Open, saw off the Argentine third seed 7-5 6-3. He now meets Argentine wild card Mariano Puerta, who followed up his win over top seed Carlos Moya by overcoming Spain's Felix Mantilla, 6-4 3-6 7-6. Czech fifth seed Czech Jiri Novak was eliminated 7-5 6-1 by Agustin Calleri. The unseeded Argentine, who won the tournament two years ago, now plays Spain's Albert Montanes. Montanes advanced to his first semi-final of the year with a 4-6 6-3 6-4 triumph over sixth-seeded Italian Filippo Volandri. Argentina's Agustin Calleri beat fourth seed Jiri Novak 7-5 6-1 in a battle of former champions at the Mexican Open. Calleri won his only ATP title in Acapulco two years ago while Novak won the singles and doubles titles in 1998. Calleri will face Albert Montanes in the semi-finals after the Spaniard ousted sixth seed Filippo Volandri of Italy 4-6 6-3 6-4. Argentine wild card Mariano Puerta continued his improbable run, outlasting Felix Mantilla 6-4 3-6 7-6.

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"sport 430.txt Hantuchova in Dubai last eight Daniela Hantuchova moved into the quarter-finals of the Dubai Open", after beating Elene Likhovtseva of Russia 7-5 6-4, and now faces Serena Williams. Australian Open champion Williams survived an early scare to beat Russia's Elena Bovina 1-6 6-1 6-4. World number one Lindsay Davenport and Anastasia Myskina also progressed. Davenport defeated China's Jie Zheng 6-2 7-5, while French Open champion Myskina sailed through after her opponent Marion Bartoli retired hurt. American Daven

port will now face fellow former Wimbledon champion, Conchita Martinez of Spain, who ousted seventh-seeded Nathalie Dechy of France 6-1 6-2. Myskina will face eighth-seed Patty Schnyder from Switzerland, who defeated China's Li Na 6-3 7-6 (10-8). The other quarter final pits wild card Sania Mirza of India against Jelena Jankovic of Serbia and Montenegro, who both won on Tuesday. Before her meeting with Martinez, "Davenport believes there is some room for improvement in her game. ""I started well and finished well", but played some so-so games in the middle, she said. Williams was also far from content. I don't know what I was doing there," she said. It was really windy and I hadn't played in the wind. All my shots were going out of here." But Hantuchova is in upbeat mood ahead of her clash with the younger Williams sister", who was handed a first-round bye. ""I feel I have an advantage (over Serena) because I have already played two matches on these courts", she said. It is a difficult court to play on. Very fast and sometimes you feel you have no control over the ball."

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"sport 431.txt Parmar ruled out of Davis Cup tie A knee injury has forced Arvind Parmar out of Great Britain's Davis Cup tie in Israel and left Alex Bogdanovic in line to take the second singles place. Parmar picked up the injury last week and has failed to recover in time for the Europe/Africa Zone I tie", which begins in Tel Aviv on Friday. Bogdanovic looks set to take the second singles place alongside Greg Rusedski. GB captain Jeremy Bates could use 17-year-old Andrew Murray and David Sherwood in the doubles rubber. Bogdanovic and Murray both pulled out of tournaments last week through injury but are expected to be fit. Jamie Delgado and Lee Childs have been called into the squad in Tel Aviv as designated hitters for team practice but Bates has no plans to call either of them into his squad at present. The unheralded Sherwood was the surprise inclusion when the squad was announced last week," and Bates said: ""David has earned his place in this squad on the merit of his form and results over the last 12 months." The 6ft 4in Sherwood is ranked 264th in the world and the LTA have high hopes for him after Futures tournament wins in Wrexham and Edinburgh. The Sheffield-born right-hander", aged 24, also reached another final in Plaisir, France," a week after making the semi-final in Mulhouse. Bates is glad to have Rusedski available after Tim Henman's retirement from Davis Cup tennis. ""His wealth of experience is invaluable", particularly to the younger players and I know he will lead by example," Bates said. We are looking forward to the tie. The squad are all in excellent form."

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"sport 432.txt Davenport hits out at Wimbledon World number one Lindsay Davenport has criticised Wimbledon over the issue of equal prize money for women. Reacting to a disputed comment by All England Club chairman Tim Phillips", the American said: ""I think it is highly insulting if prize money is taken away. ""Somebody", I think it was Mr Phillips," said they won't have money for flowers at Wimbledon. That's insulting." An All England club spokesperson denied Phillips made the remark", insisting: ""He definitely didn't say it." The statement added: ""It was said by someone else and was a humorous aside at the end of a radio interview when the conversation had moved to talking about the Wimbledon grounds." Davenport was speaking following the announcement that this week's Dubai Duty Free event will join the US and Australian Opens in offering equal prize money for women. ""You hear about women playing only three sets while men play five", said Davenport. And the best women are never going to beat the best men. ""But it's a different game you go to watch with the women - it doesn't make it better or worse. ""Hopefully we will be able to change

e people's minds. "" Serena Williams", who is also in Dubai," added: ""I'm obviously for equal prize money. ""Women's tennis is exciting. Men's tennis is exciting as well", " but the women have it right now. ""If you are bringing in the spectators you should be able to reap what everyone else is able to reap. ""

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"sport 433.txt Dogged Federer claims Dubai crown World number one Roger Federer added the Dubai Championship trophy to his long list of successes - but not before he was given a test by Ivan Ljubicic. Top seed Federer looked to be on course for an easy victory when he thumped the eighth seed 6-1 in the first set. But Ljubicic", who beat Tim Henman in the last eight, dug deep to secure the second set after a tense tiebreak. Swiss star Federer was not about to lose his cool, though, turning on the style to win the deciding set 6-3. The match was a re-run of last week's final at the World Indoor Tournament in Rotterdam, where Federer triumphed," but not until Ljubicic had stretched him all the way. ""I really wanted to get off to a good start this time", and I did, and I could really play with confidence while he still looking for his rhythm, Federer said. That took me all the way through to 6-1 3-1 0-30 on his serve and I almost ran away with it. But he came back," and that was a good effort on his side." " Ljubicic was at a loss to explain his poor showing in the first set. ""I didn't start badly", but then suddenly I felt like my racket was loose and the balls were flying a little bit too much. And with Roger, if you relax for a second it just goes very quick, he said. After those first three games it was no match at all. I don't know, it was really weird. I was playing really well the whole year," and then suddenly I found myself in trouble just to put the ball in the court." " But despite his defeat"," the world number 14 was pleased with his overall performance. ""I had a chance in the third", " and for me it's really positive to twice in two weeks have a chance against Roger to win the match. ""It's an absolutely great boost to my confidence that I'm up there and belong with top-class players. ""

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"sport 434.txt Henman hopes ended in Dubai Third seed Tim Henman slumped to a straight sets defeat in his rain-interrupted Dubai Open quarter-final against Ivan Ljubicic. The Croatian eighth seed booked his place in the last four with a 7-5 6-4 victory over the British number one. Henman had looked on course to level the match after going 2-0 up in the second set", but his progress was halted as the rain intervened again. Ljubicic hit back after the break to seal a fourth straight win over Henman. Earlier in the day, Spanish fifth seed Tommy Robredo secured his semi-final place when he beat Nicolas Kiefer of Germany 6-4 6-4. Afterwards," Henman was left cursing the weather and the umpire after seven breaks for rain during the match. ""It was incredibly frustrating", " Henman said. It's raining and the umpire doesn't take control. ""He kept telling us to play till the end of the game. But if it's raining", " you come off - the score's irrelevant. ""It couldn't be more frustrating as I was very happy with my form until now. You don't expect this in the desert. ""

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," sport 435.txt Mirza shocks Kuznetsova Sania Mirza continued her remarkable rise with victory over US Open champion Svetlana Kuznetsova at the Dubai Championships on Tuesday. The 18-year-old Indian", who is already a huge star in her home country, won 6-4 6-2 in front of a delirious crowd. It was Mirza's sixth straight victory following her first WTA tournament win in Hy

derabad last month. Earlier," Daniela Hantuchova built on her improving form with a 7-6 6-2 win over sixth seed Alicia Molik. Mirza needed attention to an ankle injury after the second game against Kuznetsova. She quickly slipped 4-0 down but staged a dramatic comeback that thrilled the large Indian contingent in the crowd. ""I really didn't expect that after my ankle turn", " said Mirza. I played a great match and I think (the crowd) did it again. I knew that I had to play an all-round game and that's what happened. ""I did everything well but I wasn't missing the ball - I don't know how that happened." Mirza plays Silvia Farina Elia or Jelena Jankovic next. Hantuchova has risen from 31 in the world at the turn of the year to number 22", " having reached the quarter-finals and semi-finals at her last two events. ""It was such a tough first-round match and I am glad to come through", " said Hantuchova. She was serving so well. I just decided to hang in there and keep fighting." The Slovakian will meet Elena Likhovtseva in the second round after the Russian struggled past Tunisian wild card Selima Sfar 2-6 6-2 7-6. Likhovtseva needed nine match points before seeing off Sfar", who got a point penalty for swearing in the third set. Seventh seed Nathalie Dechy and Elena Bovina were among other first-round winners on Tuesday.

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"sport 436.txt Hantuchova in Dubai last eight Daniela Hantuchova moved into the quarter-finals of the Dubai Open", after beating Elene Likhovtseva of Russia 7-5 6-4, and now faces Serena Williams. Australian Open champion Williams survived an early scare to beat Russia's Elena Bovina 1-6 6-1 6-4. World number one Lindsay Davenport and Anastasia Myskina also progressed. Davenport defeated China's Jie Zheng 6-2 7-5, while French Open champion Myskina sailed through after her opponent Marion Bartoli retired hurt. American Davenport will now face fellow former Wimbledon champion, Conchita Martinez of Spain, who ousted seventh-seeded Nathalie Dechy of France 6-1 6-2. Myskina will face eighth-seed Patty Schnyder from Switzerland, who defeated China's Li Na 6-3 7-6 (10-8). The other quarter final pits wild card Sania Mirza of India against Jelena Jankovic of Serbia and Montenegro, who both won on Tuesday. Before her meeting with Martinez," Davenport believes there is some room for improvement in her game. ""I started well and finished well", but played some so-so games in the middle, she said. Williams was also far from content. I don't know what I was doing there," she said. It was really windy and I hadn't played in the wind. All my shots were going out of here." But Hantuchova is in upbeat mood ahead of her clash with the younger Williams sister", " who was handed a first-round bye. ""I feel I have an advantage (over Serena) because I have already played two matches on these courts", " she said. It is a difficult court to play on. Very fast and sometimes you feel you have no control over the ball."

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"sport 437.txt Murray to make Cup history Andrew Murray will become Britain's youngest-ever Davis Cup player after it was confirmed he will play in the doubles against Israel on Saturday. The 17-year-old will play alongside fellow debutant David Sherwood against Israel's Jonathan Erlich and Andy Ram. Murray will eclipse the record set by Roger Becker back in 1952. Greg Rusedski takes Tim Henman's place as first choice in the singles", while Alex Bogdanovic will play in the second singles clash. Rusedski will take on former world number 30 Harel Levy and Bogdanovic - who has previously played in two singles rubbers against Australia - will face Noam Okun. Murray is the brightest young hope in British tennis, after winning the US Open junior title last year and the BBC Young Sports Personality of the Year. British number one Tim Henman, who announced his Davis Cup retirement earlier this year," believes Britain

can win the tie in Tel Aviv. ""It's going to be as really tough match. Israel have some really good players - and their doubles pair of Andy Ram and Jonathan Erlich are among the top eight in the world - but I fancy our chances", " he said. But Henman urged Bogdanovic, who has had run-ins with British tennis officials in the past, to seize his chance. Alex is a quality player - he's young but he's got to keep pushing forward. ""He's got to be stronger", " he's got a lot of ability but he's got to be more disciplined mentally and physically and if he does that he's got a good chance.""

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"sport 438.txt Davenport hits out at Wimbledon World number one Lindsay Davenport has criticised Wimbledon over the issue of equal prize money for women. Reacting to a disputed comment by All England Club chairman Tim Phillips", " the American said: ""I think it is highly insulting if prize money is taken away. ""Somebody", I think it was Mr Phillips," said they won't have money for flowers at Wimbledon. That's insulting." An All England club spokesperson denied Phillips made the remark", " insisting: ""He definitely didn't say it." The statement added: ""It was said by someone else and was a humorous aside at the end of a radio interview when the conversation had moved to talking about the Wimbledon grounds." Davenport was speaking following the announcement that this week's Dubai Duty Free event will join the US and Australian Opens in offering equal prize money for women. ""You hear about women playing only three sets while men play five", " said Daveport. And the best women are never going to beat the best men. ""But it's a different game you go to watch with the women - it doesn't make it better or worse. ""Hopefully we will be able to change people's minds." Serena Williams", who is also in Dubai," added: ""I'm obviously for equal prize money. ""Women's tennis is exciting. Men's tennis is exciting as well", " but the women have it right now. ""If you are bringing in the spectators you should be able to reap what everyone else is able to reap.""

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"sport 439.txt Venus stunned by Farina Elia Venus Williams suffered a first-round defeat for the first time in four years at the Dubai Championships. Sylvia Farina Elia", who had lost all nine of her previous meetings with the American fifth seed, won 7-5 7-6 (8-6). Former Wimbledon champion Conchita Martinez and India's Sania Mirza, the oldest and youngest players in the draw, also reached the second round. Martinez, 32, beat Shinobu Asagoe 6-4 6-4 and 18-year-old Mirza beat Jelena Kostanic 6-7 (7-2) 6-4 6-1. Mirza, the first Indian woman to win a WTA Tour title this month on home ground at Hyderabad, " will now face US Open champion Svetlana Kuznetsova. But she is remaining confident. ""She (Kuznetsova) is a great player", " she said. But everyone is beatable and I am looking forward to a great match." Williams though blamed her defeat by Farina Elia on injuries. ""Blisters were a factor", but mostly my stomach wasn't that great, she said. I did it in the last tournament in the semi-finals," and I was serving at 40% in the final. ""The first time I served again was Sunday and there wasn't a lot I could do out there. When your serve isn't good it throws the rest of your game off too." She will wait to see how she recovers before deciding whether to take part in the Nasdaq-100 Open in Miami", starting on 21 March.

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"sport 440.txt Martinez sees off Vinci challenge Veteran Spaniard Conchita Martinez came from a set down to beat Italian Roberta Vinci at the Qatar Open in Doha. The 1994 Wimbledon champion won 5-7 6-0 6-2 to earn

a second round meeting with French Open champion Anastasia Myskina. Fifth seed Patty Schnyder also had a battle as she needed three sets to beat China's Na Li 7-5 3-6 7-5. Slovakian Daniela Hantuchova beat Bulgarian Magdaleena Maleeva 4-6 6-4 6-3 to set up a second round clash with Russian Elena Bovina. The veteran Martinez found herself in trouble early on against Vinci with the Italian clinching the set thanks to breaks in the third and 11th games. But Vinci's game fell to pieces after that and Martinez swept her aside with some crisp cross-court returns and deft volleys. In the day's other matches", Japan's Ai Sugiyama defeated Australian Samantha Stosur 6-2 6-3 while Australian Nicole Pratt beat Tunisian Selima Sfar 7-5 6-2 and will next face compatriot Alicia Molik.

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"sport 441.txt Serena becomes world number two Serena Williams has moved up five places to second in the world rankings after her Australian Open win. Williams won her first Grand Slam title since 2003 with victory over Lindsay Davenport", the world number one. Men's champion Marat Safin remains fourth in the ATP rankings while beaten finalist Lleyton Hewitt replaces Andy Roddick as world number two. Roger Federer retains top spot, but Safin has overtaken Hewitt to become the new leader of the Champions Race. Alicia Molik, who lost a three-set thriller against Davenport in the quarter-finals, is in the women's top 10 for the first time in her career. Her rise means Australia have a player in the top 10 of the men's and women's rankings for the first time in 21 years. And Britain's Elena Baltacha, who qualified and then reached the third round, has risen to 120 in the world - a leap of 65 places and her highest ranking yet.

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"sport 442.txt Hingis to make unexpected return Martina Hingis makes her return to competitive tennis after two years out of the game at the Volvo Women's Open in Pattaya", Thailand," on Tuesday. She faces German Marlene Weingartner in the first round. ""As a competitor and athlete", I always want to win. I hope my body will hold up," said Hingis. You miss being out there in a Grand Slam final and not competing. It's a big difference between playing and commenting for TV. I miss it a lot."" The former world number one was 22 when she retired after having surgery on both ankles", and her last WTA event was in Filderstadt, Germany, in October 2002, when she lost to Elena Dementieva. Only last year she insisted that a comeback was unlikely," but speaking in Thailand Hingis admitted: ""I said that because I didn't know what would happen with my body."" Her appearance will also benefit charities in the region and the Swiss star will donate her prize money.

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"sport 443.txt Clijsters set for February return Tennis star Kim Clijsters will make her return from a career-threatening injury at the Antwerp WTA event in February. ""Kim had considered returning to action in Paris on 7 February", a statement on her website said. She's decided against this so that she does not risk the final phase of her recovery. If all goes well," Kim will make her return on February 15."" The 21-year-old has not played since last October after aggravating a wrist injury at the Belgian Open. Back then", a doctor treating the Belgian feared that her career may be over," with the player having already endured an operation earlier in the season to cure her wrist problem. ""I hope she comes back", but I'm pessimistic," said Bruno Willems. Clijsters was also due to marry fellow tennis star Lleyton Hewitt in February but

the pair split for private reasons"" back in October.

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"sport 444.txt Hewitt falls to Dent Lleyton Hewitt suffered a shock defeat to Taylor Dent in the quarter-finals of the Australian Hardcourt Championships in Adelaide on Friday. The top seed was a strong favourite for the title but went down 7-6 (7-4) 6-3 to the American. Dent will face Juan Ignacio Chela next after the fourth seed was too strong for Jurgen Melzer. Olivier Rochus beat third seed Nicolas Kiefer 6-7 (4-7) 7-6 (8-6) 7-5 and will take on second seed Joachim Johansson. The Swede reached the last four by beating compatriot Thomas Enqvist 6-3 4-6 6-1. ""I felt like I was striking the ball much better", said Johansson. I felt like I had a lot of break chances, I didn't take care of them all," but I broke him four times and he only broke me once. ""I felt that was the key to get up in the set early.""  
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"sport 445.txt Angry Williams rejects criticism Serena Williams has angrily rejected claims that she and sister Venus are a declining force in tennis. The sisters ended last year without a Grand Slam title for the first time since 1998. But Serena denied their challenge was fading", " saying: ""That's not fair - I'm tired of not saying anything. ""We've been practising hard. We've had serious injuries. I've had surgery and after", " I got to the Wimbledon final. I don't know many who have done that." " While Serena is through to the Australian Open semi-finals", Venus went out in the fourth round," meaning she has not gone further than the last eight in her last five Grand Slam appearances. But Serena added: ""Venus had a severe strain in her stomach. I actually had the same injury", " but I didn't tear it the way she did. ""If I would have torn it", " I wouldn't have been here. ""She played a player (Alicia Molik) that just played out of her mind and Venus made some errors that she probably shouldn't have made." " Serena also said people tended to forget the impact the 2003 murder of sister Yetunde Price had had on the family. ""To top it off", we have a very, very, very, very close family" " Serena continued. ""To be in some situation that we've been placed in in the past little over a year", " it's not easy to come out and just perform at your best when you realize there are so many things that are so important. ""So", no, " we're not declining. We're here. I don't have to win this tournament to prove anything. I know that I'm out here and I know that I'm one of the best players out here.""  
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"sport 446.txt Davenport dismantles young rival Top seed Lindsay Davenport booked her place in the last 16 of the Australian Open with a convincing 6-2 6-4 win over Nicole Vaidisova of the Czech Republic. The American had too much power for her 15-year-old opponent", breaking twice in the first set and once in the second. The German-born Vaidisova rallied well at times but was unable to find a way back after falling behind 3-2 in the opening set. Davenport, who closed out with an ace," plays Karolina Sprem in the next round. ""I was fully expecting a tough opponent and was able to play well enough to get through it", said Davenport. I think she hits some great shots. She made some errors but probably some inexperience played a role in that. But she's so young and obviously has a big game and has many," many years to improve on that." " Sprem", the Croatian 13th seed, saw off Russia's Elena Likhovtseva 6-3 6-2. Former world number one powered her way into the fourth round with a straight sets win over Anna Smashnova. The 27th seed from Israel stuck with Williams until

3-3 in the first set before it became one-way traffic. The American made 26 unforced errors but was still good enough to romp through the contest in exactly an hour. She reeled off nine straight games to finish a 6-3 6-0 winner. remains on course to become the first Australian to win her home title since Chris O'Neil in 1978. The 10th seed equalled her best performance at a Grand Slam event when she beat unseeded Russian Nadia Petrova 6-3 6-2 to reach the fourth round. After a tough first set," Molik grew in confidence and won in just 56 minutes. She will now meet Venus Williams. ""Bring it on", said the 23-year-old. I played pretty well and it was nice to get through in straight sets." "We were destined to meet", I guess," Williams said referring to her match with Molik. It will be a huge match for her in Australia. I can tell she's probably very motivated by that so I need to get out there and play well." beat Slovakia's Daniela Hantuchova in a rollercoaster match. Dementieva came through 7-5 5-7 6-4", becoming the seventh Russian woman to reach the last 16 in Melbourne. The match lasted almost three hours and featured 13 service breaks, including three in the final set when Dementieva held her nerve to seal the win. She now faces after the Swiss 12th seed beat American Abigail Spears 7-6 6-3. French Open champion received a free ride into the last 16 after Lisa Raymond was forced to withdraw. Raymond, the 25th seeded American, was ruled out after sustaining a left abdominal muscle tear in the doubles. Myskina, the third seed," now plays France's who beat Francesca Schiavone of Italy 6-3 6-3. ""I'm extremely disappointed because I couldn't have asked to play better in my first two matches", Raymond said.

sport 447.txt Serena ends Sania Mirza's dream Sania Mirza, the first Indian woman to reach the third round of a Grand Slam tennis event, has lost to women's favourite Serena Williams. The 18-year-old Mirza, who got a wild card entry into the Australian Open in Melbourne, lost to Williams 1-6,4-6 in the third round. Williams took just 56 minutes to defeat Mirza and sail into the fourth round. The only other Indian woman to win a match at a Grand Slam is Nirupama Vaidyanathan. Vaidyanathan made it to the second round of the Australian Open in 1998. Playing the biggest match of her life, Mirza made little impact on Williams in the early stages of the game. But the teenager showed more confidence in the second set and engaged the seventh-seeded Williams in some well contested rallies. Mirza, a junior Wimbledon doubles title winner, became the first Indian woman to reach the third round of a grand slam tennis event when she beat Hungarian Petra Mandula on Wednesday. I'm really excited. I was confident but I didn't think it was going to be that easy", Mirza said after her second round win. My aim was to win a round here. When I did that I was so relieved," there was no pressure." Tennis is not a particularly popular sport in India", but a number of Indians watched the live telecast of the match between Mirza and Williams. Mirza, who lives in the southern Indian city of Hyderabad known for producing a host of top Indian cricketers," turned professional two years ago. She says she was considered too small when she went for her first tennis classes as a six-year-old girl. ""Then finally [the coach] called my parents up and said 'the way she hits the ball", I've never seen a six-year-old hit a ball like that', Mirza told the Associated Press.

sport 448.txt Kuznetsova 'failed a drugs test' US Open champion Svetlana Kuznetsova has tested positive for a banned drug, according to Belgian authorities. Belgian sports minister Claude Eerdekens said that the Russian world number five tested positive for the stimulant ephedrine on 19 December. Kuznetsova was playing in an exhibition event in Charleroi at the time. Eerdekkens said: There is a problem. Ephedrine was discovered. She remains innocent until proved guilty. She can ask for it to be tested again." The situation remains unclear as the tournament was not commissioned by the World Anti-Doping

Agency (Wada)", the International Tennis Federation (ITF) or the Women's Tennis Association (WTA). The test was carried out by regional Belgian authorities and Kuznetsova has not yet been able to have a B sample tested. Speaking at the Australian Open on Monday, before Eerdekkens identified her," Kuznetsova said: ""I'm not worried. I'm not using anything to push myself. ""I have not been notified of any positive test",, and I think it is unfair that it's come out the way it did." Eerdekkens said that confirmation of the findings was sent last Friday to the player's address in Spain",, as well as to the Belgian prosecutors' office and the Belgian and Russian tennis federations. He conceded Kuznetsova might have taken a medicine which contained the banned substance. ""We have simply stated a fact",, he said. It is for the federation concerned to impose the disciplinary measures after a procedure that respects the defence. ""Either the ephedrine was taken to improve her performance or it is because she took some medicine legitimately to cure an infection." However",, Kuznetsova's naming was condemned by Russian tennis chief Shamil Tarpishchev. ""First of all", this Belgian sports minister has broken every ethical rule in the book by naming a player without any proof of wrongdoing, without any basic evidence, Tarpishchev said. We all know the basic principle in doping cases. If there is a positive sample, then they should notify the International Tennis Federation (ITF) as well as the national federation within three days, he said. This is not the case here. As of today we have not received any statement from the doping officials," nor did the ITF. ""Today I called the ITF headquarters and they told me they know nothing about it. ""If WADA (the World Anti-Doping Agency) was behind the testing",, then we would also have known something by now. ""Otherwise",, all these looks to me as pure fiction and fabrication of the facts.""

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"sport 449.txt What now for British tennis? Tim Henman's decision to quit Davis Cup tennis has left the British team with a gargantuan void to fill. The world number seven is tied for fourth among his countrymen for wins in the history of the tournament (he has 36 from his 50 rubbers). And Great Britain's last Davis Cup win without Henman came against Slovenia as far back as 1996. Worse could follow", according to former British team member Chris Bailey. Bailey told BBC Sport: ""After Tim's announcement", I doubt Greg Rusedski will be that far behind him." But without their top two", where does that leave British ambitions in the sport's premier team event? Captain Jeremy Bates has singled out Alex Bogdanovic and Andrew Murray as potential replacements. The Yugoslavian-born Bogdanovic, though, is 184 places below Henman in the world rankings and has played just two cup ties - winning one and losing the other. Murray, on the other hand," is 407th in the current ATP entry list and yet to make his cup debut. But Bailey does see some hope for the future. He said: ""Now we've dropped down to the Euro-Africa zone", the time was right for him to step down and let the young guys come to the fore." Britain's next opponents", Israel, are hardly likely to be quaking in their boots ahead of the 4-6 March match against a likely trio of Bogdanovic," Murray and the 187th-ranked Arvind Parmar. Bailey said: ""It will be tough for GB to move up", but there comes a time when our young players have to step up. This was always going to be inevitable with Tim and Greg's growing years. ""I'm confident about the future. I wouldn't lay money on us getting back into the world group next year",, but I'd imagine in five years time we'll be competing for the major honours." Of those lining up to replace Henman", the 17-year-old Murray, with four Futures titles under his belt last year," looks the best long-term bet. ""Murray is the one that looks likeliest to take over Tim's mantle", said Bailey. He has an enormous amount of self-confidence," judging by what he's said in the past." Bogdanovic",

three years Murray's senior, has had a more troubled time under Britain's Davis Cup umbrella. While Murray has been marked out as Britain's golden boy," Bogdanovic was warned by the Lawn Tennis Association for a lack of drive at the end of 2003. And Bailey said: ""Despite that", Alex is clearly talented as well," while Arvind is another contender. ""They're among the guys who have experienced the intensity of Davis Cup tennis - whether as players or on the sidelines. ""The LTA has always done an exceptional job of ensuring that. ""Now they'll finally get to play regularly in the cauldron of the cup. And I'm confident that will springboard Team GB to greater success.""  
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"sport 450.txt Hewitt overcomes wobble in Sydney Lleyton  
Hewitt gave himself the perfect preparation for next week's Australian Open with victory over Ivo Minar in the final of the Sydney International. The defending champion brushed aside the Czech qualifier 7-5 6-0. The Australian world number three strolled to the first five games of the match but was shocked as Minar won the next five. The top seed was rattled but recovered to close out the set and raced to victory in exactly an hour. ""It was a strange match . . . momentum swings", said Hewitt. I felt like I came out of the blocks extremely well," but then he loosened up a bit. ""When he got back to 5-5", I had to try to settle down and take it up a notch," and I was able to do that.""" Hewitt has now lifted the Sydney title four times in the last six years. ""It just keeps getting better and better every year", " Hewitt said. I've only played this tournament four times and I've won it four times.""" Hewitt went into the final as a short-priced favourite to clinch his 24th career title after dropping only one set all week. He is set to meet Frenchman Arnaud Clement in the first round of the Australian Open. Minar", ranked 158th in the world," was forced to pull out of the Australian Open qualifying draw to play in his first ATP final. ""For me", this was a big success," said the 20-year-old. I was so nervous last night I couldn't sleep. I've never played a top-10 player before. ""I wanted to play qualifying in Melbourne", " but it's Saturday and I'm still here. But this is a main draw and I need the points and the money.""" Alicia Molik takes on Samantha Stosur in an all-Australian women's final later on Saturday.

"sport 451.txt Moya fights back for Indian title Carlos Moya became the first man to successfully defend the Chennai Open title by beating four-times finalist Paradorn Srichaphan 3-6 6-4 7-6 (7/5). The Spaniard then donated his £28",000 prize money to relief efforts for the victims of the Asian tsunami. The final was close throughout, with Thai second seed Srichaphan - the 2003 winner - closing out the first set. But Moya took the second set," before bouncing back from 5-2 down in the decider to force and win a tie-break. Moya confirmed afterwards: ""I'm donating my prize money from this tournament for the tsunami victims", hoping it makes some difference to their lives. His contribution follows pledges by four other players to donate their prize money from the tournament, which went ahead after the 26 December disaster which has so far claimed at least 150,000 lives. Srichapan said he would donate an unspecified amount for relief work in Thailand, where more than 5,000 people were killed. The ATP has announced that it would contribute the US\$25,000 tournament fee to Unicef's emergency relief fund in Tamil Nadu. The ATP Tour's sponsor, Mercedes, said it would also contribute, increasing the ATP donation to US\$40,000,  
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"sport 452.txt Rochus shocks Coria in Auckland Top seed G

uillermo Coria went out of the Heineken Open in Auckland on Thursday with a surprise loss to Olivier Rochus of Belgium. Coria lost the semi-final 6-4 6-4 to Rochus", who goes on to face Czech Jan Hernych," a 6-4 7-5 winner over Jose Acasuso of Argentina. Fifth seed Fernando Gonzalez eased past American Robby Ginepri 6-3 6-4. The Chilean will meet sixth seed Juan Ignacio Chela next after the Argentine beat Potito Starace 6-1 7-6 (7-5). Rochus made the semi-finals at the Australian hardcourt championships in Adelaide last week and is naturally delighted with his form. ""It's been two unbelievable weeks for me", he said. Today I knew I had nothing to lose. If I beat him great, if I lost," I would be losing to a top-10 player."" Coria conceded that Rochus ""played just too good", and added: When you give your best out there you can't be too sad.""

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"sport 453.txt Johansson takes Adelaide victory Second seed Joachim Johansson won his second career title with a 7-5 6-3 win over Taylor Dent at the Australian hardcourt championships in Adelaide. The Swede was made to graft", American Dent surviving three break points in the fifth game of the match. But Johansson got the breakthrough with a sublime backhand return winner and won the second set with more ease. His first tournament win was at Memphis in 2004, helping him leap from 113th in the world rankings to number 11. Afterwards, Dent said he rated US Open semi-finalist Johansson as a top contender at the Australian Open," which starts on 17 January. ""I believe men's tennis is all about holding serve and if he's playing like that on his own serve I don't see how guys are going to break him", said Dent. Johansson was more restrained in his assessment: I have to improve my serve if I'm going to go all the way in Melbourne.""

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"sport 454.txt Hingis hints at playing comeback Martina Hingis has admitted that she might consider a competitive return to tennis if an appearance in Thailand later this month goes well. The former world number one will play at the Volvo Women's Open in Pattaya", which starts on 31 January," as part of her charity work in the region. ""The tournament is a test", she said. I don't know how my body will react. ""I support several charities in Thailand. I'm also playing to see where I am."" Speaking to Le Matin", the 24-year-old Swiss added: ""At Pattaya there will not be as many people and the players are ranked between the 30th and 95th in the world."" Hingis was 22 when she retired after having surgery on both ankles", and her last WTA event was in Fildesstadt, Germany, in October 2002, when she lost to Elena Dementieva.

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"sport 455.txt Slovakia seal Hopman Cup success Slovakia clinched the Hopman Cup for the second time by beating Argentina 3-0 in Saturday's final in Perth. Daniela Hantuchova put the third seeds ahead", recovering from a terrible start to beat Gisela Dulko 1-6 6-4 6-4. Dominik Hrbaty, who had not lost a set in his three singles matches in the group stages," then upset world number seven Guillermo Coria 6-4 6-1. Hantuchova and Hrbaty then won the mixed doubles after Coria was forced to withdraw because of a sore back. Slovakia's win made up for last year's final defeat to the United States. ""I would like to congratulate Daniela", Hrbaty said. I was so nervous watching her today," I almost had a heart attack. ""I also feel a little sorry for Guillermo because I get very excited whenever I play for my country. I show lots of emotions and played such good tennis."" World number 31 Hantuchova", ranked two places above

e Dulko, looked nervous as she dropped the first four games of the match. Dulko, who had lost all three of her singles matches in the group stages," grew in confidence and took the opening set in just 27 minutes. But Hantuchova hit back to take the next two and the match. ""I was so nervous because I really wanted to win for the team and for Dominik as he played so well all week",, she said. I didn't think I was playing my best but I just tried to hang in there and fight hard for every point for my country."" Slovakia won the Cup on their first appearance in 1998 when Karol Kucera and Karina Habsudova beat France.

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sport 456.txt Dementieva prevails in Hong Kong Elena Dem  
entieva swept aside defending champion Venus Williams 6-3 6-2 to win Hong Kong's Champions Challenge event. The Russian", ranked sixth in the world, broke Williams three times in the first set," while losing her service once. Williams saved three championship points before losing the match at the Victoria Park tennis court. ""It's really a great start to the year no matter whether it's an exhibition or not. I was trying to play my best and I really did it",, said Dementieva. This will give me all the confidence before the Grand Slams. I was trying so hard to win this tournament." Williams",24," was disappointed with her display. ""She played some nice points", but it was mostly me committing unforced errors - four or five errors in each game," she said. Before the match, organizers auctioned off rackets belonging to the players, raising £115,000 for victims of the tsunami disaster.

sport 457.txt Injury sidelines Philippoussis Mark Philipp  
oussis withdrew from the Sydney International tennis tournament as expected on Sunday after suffering a groin injury during the Hopman Cup. His participation in the Australian Open, which begins on 17 January in Melbourne, also remains in doubt. Defending women's champion Justine Henin-Hardenne is also out of the Sydney event because of a knee injury. In the only main draw men's or women's singles match on Sunday, Nathalie Dechy beat American Lisa Raymond 7-5 6-3. Number one men's seed Lleyton Hewitt begins his quest for a fourth Sydney title on Tuesday when he plays Karol Beck. Lindsay Davenport, top seed in the women's draw, has been handed a first-round bye and plays France's Dechy in the second round on Tuesday.

sport 458.txt Hewitt falls to Dent in Adelaide Lleyton He  
witt suffered a shock defeat to Taylor Dent in the quarter-finals of the Australian Hardcourt Championships in Adelaide on Friday. The top seed was a strong favourite for the title but went down 7-6 (7-4) 6-3 to the American. Dent will face Juan Ignacio Chela next after the fourth seed was too strong for Jurgen Melzer. Olivier Rochus beat third seed Nicolas Kiefer 6-7 (4-7) 7-6 (8-6) 7-5 and will take on second seed Joachim Johansson. The Swede reached the last four by beating compatriot Thomas Enqvist 6-3 4-6 6-1. I felt like I was striking the ball much better", said Johansson. I felt like I had a lot of break chances, I didn't take care of them all," but I broke him four times and he only broke me once. ""I felt that was the key to get up in the set early." Hewitt played down his defeat and insisted he is focused solely on the Australian Open",, which starts on 17 January. ""When you've been number one in the world for a couple of years and won a couple of slams", you look at the big picture and what motivates you," said Hewitt. That's the Grand Slams and Melbourne's as big for me as any of the four. Even if I don't win Sydney next week it's no big deal.""

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sport 459.txt Federer breezes into semi-finals Roger Fed  
erer reached the last four of the Qatar Open with an easy 6-1 6-2 win over seve

nth seed Feliciano Lopez. The Swiss world number one reeled off a series winners to outclass the Spaniard and set up a semi-final match against Russian Nikolay Davydenko. Federer", who lost in the quarter-final in his last Qatar appearance in 2003," was happy with his form. ""I think I played better than against Greg Rusedski and I am happy I am playing so well"," said the top seed. Lopez showed glimpses of resolve early in the second set when he held his first service game and came close to breaking Federer. But the Swiss saved a break point and promptly broke serve in the following game to seize control. Davydenko, meanwhile, upset French third seed Sebastien Grosjean 2-6 6-3 6-2. Fabrice Santoro completed a miserable day for France when he was forced to retire when 6-2 3-0 down to Albert Costa. Spaniard Costa will next face Croatian Ivan Ljubicic after the sixth seed beat Rafael Nadal 6-2 6-7 (3/7) 6-3.

sport 460.txt Davenport puts retirement on hold Lindsay Davenport has put any talk of retirement on hold after having a largely injury-free 2004 campaign. The 28-year-old world number one had said that she would quit at the end of last year, but after a successful season she has had a change of heart. Finally I felt I put myself in a position to try and win Grand Slams again"," said Davenport. It would be tough to walk away when I feel like I can contend so there's no point in hanging it up quite yet." Davenport has won three Grand Slams", the 2000 Australian Open," Wimbledon in 1999 and the 1998 US Open. Her career has been hit by a series of injuries but last year she started hitting top form and won seven titles. She was due to take part in this week's Hopman Cup in Perth but decided she wanted to rest her knee. ""I just really wanted to make sure my right knee was going to be able to really withstand all the rigours of the whole year coming up", she said.

sport 461.txt Rusedski angry over supplements Greg Rusedski has criticised the governing body of men's tennis for not releasing contamination-free supplements in time for the new season. Rusedski said: I tried to order some but didn't receive any and I haven't got any yet. ""You would think they would have been available in December as it can take two months for the body to respond. ""This event comes in the hottest period of the year", so you would hope the stuff would be available for it." The British number two escaped a possible ban last year when he persuaded a tribunal that a positive doping test was the result of contaminated ATP supplements. In response", the ATP struck a deal with pharmaceutical company GlaxoSmithKline to provide contamination-free drinks and nutritional bars for the men's tour. David Higdon, Vice President of the ATP," admitted: ""I agree with Greg. ""I would have loved to have had these things available as soon as possible but it's a lot of work to make sure they have gone through rigorous testing. ""The reality is though that the first two weeks of the tour are spread far and wide and part of the distribution agreement we had with GSK has an education component. ""We weren't going to just drop these products out there without having a talk with the players about understanding how to use them. ""The first chance we will get to do that is at the players meeting on the Saturday before the Australian Open." And Rusedski", who takes on Roger Federer at the Qatar Open later on Wednesday," conceded that the imminent changes will be beneficial. ""The good thing is that there is now a 10 0% guarantee", so hopefully all this will never happen again," said Rusedski. Hopefully after the Australian Open we won't have to discuss this any more."

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"sport 462.txt Navratilova hits out at critics Martina Navratilova has defended her decision to prolong her tennis career at the age of 48. Navratilova", who made a comeback after retiring in 1994," will play doubles and mixed doubles events in 2005. ""Women's tennis is really strong", she s

aid, dismissing suggestions that the fact she could still win reflected badly on the women's game. All I can say is I'm that damn good. I'm sorry but I really have to blow my own horn here. I'm still that good." Navratilova has won three Grand Slam mixed doubles titles since she came out of retirement. And she was so encouraged by her form that she decided to resume playing singles", winning two of her seven matches. She was knocked out in the first round of the French Open but reached the second round at Wimbledon. Navratilova will partner Nathalie Dechy in the doubles event at the Uncle Toby's Hardcourts tournament on Australia's Gold Coast, which begins on Sunday. She will then link up with Daniela Hantuchova for the Australian Open doubles," and play in the mixed doubles with Leander Paes. ""I might be playing some singles events this season", depending on the surface," she added.

sport 463.txt Prodigy Monfils blows away Gaudio French prodigy Gael Monfils underlined his huge promise by beating French Open champion Gaston Gaudio 6-4 7-6 (7-4) in the first round of the Qatar Open. The 18-year-old wild card won three of the four junior Grand Slam events last year, including Wimbledon. Fabrice Santoro, the 2000 champion, beat Sweden's Thomas Johansson 6-4 6-2 but fourth seed Mikhail Youzhny lost 6-3 7-6 (7-3) to Rafael Nadal. Roger Federer plays Greg Rusedski in the second round on Wednesday. Monfils, who was given a wildcard into the tournament, said: This is my first win over a top 10 player and I am delighted. ""I play my best tennis when I am fired up on the court and the reason I won today was because I was able to play my natural", attacking game," he said. Of course I was a bit tired in the second set. But I was confident I could survive had there been a third set."

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"sport 464.txt Connors boost for British tennis Former world number one Jimmy Connors is planning a long-term relationship with the Lawn Tennis Association to help unearth the next Tim Henman. The American spent three days at the LTA's annual Elite Performance winter camp in La Manga earlier this week. ""Britain has the right attitude", said Connors. The more involved I can be with the LTA," the better. ""A short-term arrangement is just confusing. The kids will ask: 'What am I doing there?'" LTA chief executive", John Crowther," added: ""The relationship that Jimmy's already started to develop with the coaches and the players has said to us that we'd like some more of it. ""We want to use Jimmy for a number of weeks a year and we hope this is the beginning of a good long-term relationship."" The camp played host to more than 30 leading senior and junior players", including Greg Rusedski," Arvind Parmar and Anne Keothavong. ""La Manga is an amazing site to take a bunch of kids who want to be the best", said Connors, speaking at Queen's Club in London. What impressed me most was not only the coaches but the way the kids went about their workouts and the feeling they put into every practice they had. ""It was interesting to me to see kids of 15",16,17, with that desire and passion," and that can only be brought about by the coaches surrounding them. ""Instilling the importance of work and practice is something you can't buy. ""They know what's been given to them and all they have to do is give back the effort", and every minute of practice they were doing that." Speaking from La Manga", LTA performance director David Felgate told BBC Sport: ""Jimmy was fantastic with the players and the coaches", and very humble considering what he's achieved. ""He worked through the coaches and hopefully it will grow and he'll get to have more of an individual relationship with some of the players and get to know them. ""He made it clear from the word go he didn't want it to be short-term. This is a 52-week-a-year job for me", it's my life and my passion and it's the same with the coaches. ""He respects that but he wants to be involved and have real input. And why

would he stake his reputation on something that's not going to be successful?"" Connors has also agreed to commentate for the BBC at next year's Wimbledon Championships. He will work during the second week of the tournament.

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"sport 465.txt Henin-Hardenne beaten on comeback Justine Henin-Hardenne lost to Elena Dementieva in a comeback exhibition match in Belgium on Sunday for her second defeat in two days. And the Belgian", who has slipped to eighth in the world after struggling with a virus," faces a tough Australian Open title defence next month. ""I will be heading to Australia with a lot of question marks over me", I know that," she said. But I think there'll be less pressure than last time even if I am champion."" Henin-Hardenne was speaking after a 6-2 5-7 6-2 loss to world number six Dementieva in Charleroi", Belgium, on Sunday. The previous day," the Olympic champion went down 6-2 7-5 to France's Nathalie Dechy. ""I have to be positive", I still have a few weeks, she said. My body has to get accustomed again to the stress," the rhythm." Henin-Hardenne slid down the world rankings in the second half of 2004 after contracting the illness in April. After an initial lay-off", she was forced off the circuit for a second time after being knocked out of the French Open in the second round. A comeback at the US Open after a three-month absence ended when she crashed out at the fourth-round stage. But despite her problems, she still won five of the nine official tournaments she entered in 2004 and won Olympic gold in Athens," an achievement which saw her named Belgian sportswoman of the year on Friday. ""Physically", it's obvious that I hit rock bottom," said the 22-year-old, who will make her comeback in the Sydney International from 10-16 January. Since April", with the exception of the Olympics," I have not done much. ""All the successes I had prior to that were mainly due to the work I put in on building up my fitness. ""Now it's time to get back to putting in 200% effort and I think I am capable of doing that.""

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"sport 466.txt Moya clinches Cup for Spain Spain won the Davis Cup for the second time in their history when Carlos Moya beat the USA's Andy Roddick in the fourth rubber in Seville. Moya won 6-2 7-6 (7-1) 7-6 (7-5) to give the hosts an unassailable 3-1 lead with only one singles rubber remaining. Roddick battled hard and had chances in the second set", but Moya's clay-court expertise proved the difference. Mardy Fish beat Tommy Robredo 7-6 (8-6) 6-2 in the final dead rubber to cut Spain's winning margin to 3-2. Spain's only other Davis Cup title came in 2000, when they beat Australia in Barcelona. This time they chose to play the final in Seville and the city's Olympic Stadium was revamped to allow for a record crowd for a competitive tennis event of 27,000 spectators. And the home fans gave vociferous support to their players, with 18-year-old Nadal and Moya winning both Friday's singles rubbers. American twins Mike and Bob Bryan gave the visitors hope with victory over Juan Carlos Ferrero and Tommy Robredo in Saturday's doubles. But it remained an uphill task for a US team far happier on hard courts than clay," and 1998 French Open champion Moya had too much for world number two Roddick. ""This has been incredible - the moment I've been waiting for for years", said Moya, who missed out in 2000 through injury. I've prepared myself for this day. I knew that playing on clay I would have my chances to win. ""The Davis Cup is my dream. I can't ask for more. There is nothing bigger than what I've lived today."" Moya stormed into a 4-0 lead on his way to taking the first set against Roddick and recovered immediately from dropping serve in the second. The match came down to two tie-breaks and Moya dominated both", clinching victory on his third match point. Wild celebratio

ns followed, with an emotional Moya congratulated by his team-mates, including Nadal," who at 18 years and 187 days becomes the youngest ever victor in Davis Cup history. ""I think we put up a better fight here than in Paris two years ago", said Roddick, who was on the US team which lost to France in the 2002 semi-finals at Roland Garros. They were just better than us this weekend. I have nothing to be ashamed of", "I gave it my all. ""I am not going to walk out of here with my head down", "that's for sure. ""There's no miracle answer. We have to improve.""

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"sport 467.txt Capriati to miss Melbourne Jennifer Capriati has become the third leading lady to withdraw from the Australian Open because of injury. The organisers of the first grand slam of 2005", which begins on 17 January, said the American has a problem with her right shoulder. It comes as a blow to the women's draw as last year's champion, Justin Henin-Hardenne, and runner-up, Kim Clijsters, will also be absent. Capriati is a two-time champion in Melbourne with wins in 2001 and 2002. She is believed to have picked up the injury at the Advanta Championships at Philadelphia in November and had to pull out of an exhibition match with Wimbledon champion Maria Sharapova on 17 December. Capriati also decided against competing in the Australian Open warm-up event, the Sydney International.

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"sport 468.txt Classy Henman makes winning start Tim Henman opened his 2005 campaign with a 6-1 7-5 victory over Argentine David Nalbandian at the Kooyong Classic exhibition tournament on Wednesday. The British number one will next play Roger Federer at the Australian Open warm-up event on Friday. The world number one beat Gaston Gaudio 5-7 6-1 6-4", before Andre Agassi saw off Chilean Olympic gold medalist Nicolas Massu 6-1 7-6 (7-4). Andy Roddick beat Ivan Ljubicic, who replaced Paradorn Srichaphan, 6-1 6-4. Henman made an impressive start to the year," only faltering against Nalbandian when serving for the match at 5-4. But the Briton regained his composure to win the next two games for only his second win in six matches against the Argentine. ""It's a great start to the year - just what I was looking for", Henman told his website. Over the years I've found David very difficult to play against. ""He returns serve very well and he's deceptively effective from the baseline", so sometimes it can be difficult to execute my gameplan well enough against him to get the right result. ""Beating somebody of his stature is always good for the confidence and it bodes well at the beginning of the year." Henman also revealed the extent of the back problems he suffered in the off-season. ""I'm not the most flexible and at the end of the year I was pretty exhausted and wanted to have a couple of weeks where I didn't do anything", said Henman. When I started training again it really," really seized up. As much as I enjoyed the two weeks off I don't think it's so productive." Federer dropped a tight first set against 2004 French Open champion Gaudio", but was content with his game. ""It was about getting used to the surface", he said. The conditions are much quicker than Doha, my timing was OK," but I could have served better. ""All in all I'm happy with the match", and I won it - that's a good sign. Now I have a day off and hopefully play better the next match." Agassi was delighted with victory over Massu in his first match for over two months. ""I felt pretty good", said the American. I liked the way the match played out and, maybe excluding a few second serve returns," I felt like I was doing most things pretty darn well for the first match."

"/" "sport 469.txt Moya emotional after Davis Cup win Carlos  
Moya described Spain's Davis Cup victory as the highlight of his career after he beat Andy Roddick to end the USA's challenge in Seville. Moya made up for missing Spain's 2000 victory through injury by beating Roddick 6-2 7-6 (7-1) 7-6 (7-5) to give the hosts an unassailable 3-1 lead. ""I have woken up so many nights dreaming of this day", said Moya. All my energy has been focused on today. ""What I have lived today I do not think I will live again." Spain's only other Davis Cup title came two years ago in Valencia", when they beat Australia. And Moya, nicknamed Charly," admitted: ""The Davis Cup is my dream and I was a bit nervous at the outset. ""Some people have said that I am obsessed but I think that it is better this way. It helps me reach my goals if I am obsessed. ""It's really incredible - to get the winning point is really something." Spanish captain Jordi Arrese said: ""Charly played a great game. It was his opportunity and he hasn't let us down. ""He had lost three times to Roddick", and this was his day to beat him. ""He had been waiting years to be in this position." Spain's victory was also remarkable for the performance of Rafael Nadal", who beat Roddick in the opening singles. Aged 18 years and 185 days," the Mallorcan became the youngest player to win the Davis Cup. ""What a great way to finish the year", said Nadal afterwards. US coach Patrick McEnroe wants Roddick and the rest of his team to play more tennis on clay and hone their skills on the surface. I think it will help these guys even on slow hard courts to learn how to mix things up a little bit and to play a little bit smarter and tactically better." "Obviously it's unrealistic to say that we're going to just start playing constantly on clay", with the schedule. ""But certainly I think we can put the work in at the appropriate time and play a couple more events and play against these guys who are the best on this stuff", said McEnroe. Roddick was left frustrated after losing both his singles on the slow clay of Seville's Olympic Stadium. It's just tough because I felt like I was in it the whole time against one of the top three clay-courters in the world," said the American. I had my chances and just didn't convert them. The bottom line is they were just better than us this weekend. ""They came out", took care of business and they beat us. It's as simple as that."

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"sport 471.txt Capriati out of Australian Open Jennifer C  
apriati has become the third leading lady to withdraw from the Australian Open because of injury. The organisers of the first grand slam of 2005", which begins on 17 January, said the American has a problem with her right shoulder. It comes as a blow to the women's draw as last year's champion, Justine Henin-Hardenne, and runner-up, Kim Clijsters, will also be absent. Capriati is a two-time champion in Melbourne with wins in 2001 and 2002. She is believed to have picked up the injury at the Advanta Championships at Philadelphia in November and had to pull out of an exhibition match with Wimbledon champion Maria Sharapova on 17 December. Capriati also decided against competing in the Australian Open warm-up event, the Sydney International.

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"sport 472.txt Bryan twins keep US hopes alive The United States kept the Davis Cup final alive with victory in Saturday's doubles rubber", leaving Spain 2-1 ahead going into the final day. Masters Cup champions Mike and Bob Bryan thrashed Juan Carlos Ferrero and Tommy Robredo 6-0 6-3 6-2 in front of a partisan crowd in Seville. Victory would have given Spain the title but they were outclassed. In Sunday's reverse singles," Carlos Moya takes on Andy Roddick before Rafael Nadal faces Mardy Fish. ""It feels good", but it's not going to be as good if we don't win two tomorrow, said Mike Bryan. It feels good to give those guys another shot," and Spain has to go to sleep on that." Bob Bryan added: ""I'm really confident in Andy winning that first match", and then anything can happen." Spain coach Jordi Arrese chose to rest 18-year-old Nadal in the doubles after his epic singles win over Roddick on Friday. He was replaced by former world number one Ferrero", but the Spanish pair were out of their depth against one of the world's best doubles teams. The 26-year-old Bryan twins have won all four of their Davis Cup matches this year. And they quickly silenced the huge crowd at the Olympic Stadium, racing through the opening set to love. The Spaniards then twice surrendered breaks of serve at the start of the second before the Bryans broke to go 5-3 ahead and served out. When Robredo dropped serve in the opening game of the third set the match was all but over, and the unflappable Bryan brothers powered on to an impressive win. Ferrero, who was upset to be dropped for Friday's singles," hinted at further dissatisfaction after the defeat. ""It was a difficult game against the best doubles players", he said. They have everything calculated and we had very little to do. ""I was a bit surprised that I was named to play the doubles match because I hardly play doubles." Arrese said: ""Juan Carlos hasn't played at all badly. He played the right way but the Bryans are great doubles players.""

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"sport 473.txt Faultless Federer has no equal Roger Federer - nice bloke", fantastic tennis player - the ultimate sportsman. When Lleyton Hewitt shook his hand after getting another thrashing, a third in as many months," the Australian said; ""You're the best."" How right he is. The stats speak for themselves: 11 titles from 11 finals during 2004 - three of them Grand Slams - and 13 final victories in a row going back to Vienna 2003. That's an open-era record. Hewitt", at times in Houston, showed form which easily matched his Grand Slam-winning efforts of 2001 and 2002. But he was outplayed. Twice. Hewitt, along with Andy Roddick and Marat Safin, is sure to be prominent during 2005. But realistically, all three will be fighting for the world number two ranking. According to all those players and even Federer himself, "the Swiss star is in a different league. ""Right now I feel that a little bit", he told BBC Sport. I've dominated all the top ten players. They say nice things about me because I have beaten them all. I am dominating the game right now and I hope it continues!"" The number one player in the world is also the main man for promoting the sport off court. He has just been voted", by the International Tennis Writers," as the best ""Ambassador for Tennis"" on the ATP Tour. He has time for everyone. Every match", from first round to final, is followed by a series of press interviews in three languages; English, French and Swiss-German. After a major win, there are extra requests, obligations and interviews, all seen through to the end with courtesy and, most importantly," good humour. ""You guys are funny", I have a good time with you guys," he said, genuinely happy to talk into yet another tape recorder. I see you pretty much every day on the tour so to give away an hour for interviews is really no problem for me. ""If I can promote tennis and the sport then that is good for me. People say thanks back and that is nice." What a refreshing attitude from someone who could easily dominate the sports pages for a decade. It sums up his modest personality. Shortly after collecting a Waterford Crystal trophy", a Mercedes convertible and a tasty cheque for \$1.5m," Federer addressed the Houston crowd and concluded by saying ""thanks for having me"". Now he just needs to find a way of winning the French Open", the one Grand Slam to so far elude him.

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"sport 474.txt Mauresmo opens with victory in LA Amelie Mauresmo and Maria Sharapova won their opening matches at the Tour Championships in Los Angeles. France's Mauresmo routed Vera Zvonareva 6-1 6-0", while Wimbledon champion Sharapova was a 6-1 6-4 winner over fellow Russian Svetlana Kuznetsova. American Serena Williams also won," edging Russian Elena Dementieva 7-6 7-5 for her second victory of the event. The event is split into two groups of four with the top two from each advancing to the semi-finals. Mauresmo's win was her ninth in a row as she tries to overtake Lindsay Davenport for the number one spot. Mauresmo spent five weeks at number one after the US Open before injury ushered Davenport back in front. ""Since then", I feel very confident on court and my game is there. I want to get the ranking back," but it's very different than before I was number one. ""It was an obsession", but now I take it in a relaxed way." Mauresmo completed her first match in the season-ending championship in 54 minutes as Russia's Zvonareva struggled to return her serve and failed to achieve a single break point. ""She got mad a little bit and I played some great tennis", said Mauresmo, who was runner-up to Kim Clijsters in last year's final. Zvonareva has lost both her games so far, having crashed 6-2 6-4 Kuznetsova in the Staples Centre on Wednesday. Sometimes not everything works", she said. It was lots of pressure. Maybe that is why I couldn't do 100%. B

ut I was fighting." "Sharapova", who lost 6-2 6-2 to Kuznetsova in Beijing in September," said: "In Beijing", "she was coming off such a big winning streak [14 matches] and she was unstoppable. "This time", it was important to start off well and put some pressure on her." The tournament debutant added: "I love it here. The atmosphere is great. "To be here where the Lakers play", you just feel that excitement. I love basketball." Williams admitted she is still some way off her best form but remained positive after two wins in two days. "It's hard to go out there and get it right but I'm fighting and I'm hoping", said Williams. What makes me happy is the effort. I had a really good effort today. "I'm trying to add new dimensions to my game."

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"sport 475.txt Agassi fear for Melbourne Andre Agassi's involvement in the Australian Open was put in doubt after he pulled out of the Kooyong Classic with a hip injury. Agassi was serving at 5-6 down in the first set to fellow American Andy Roddick when he decided to bring a premature end to the match. "My hip was cramping and I just could not continue", said the 34-year-old. Agassi, who has won the Australian Open four times, will have an MRI scan to discover the extent of the damage. He said the problem was not the same as the hip injury which forced him to miss Wimbledon last year. The good news is that it didn't just tear", it was tightening up and that can be your body protecting itself, which is hopefully more of the issue, he added. That wasn't comfortable out there at all," what I was feeling. "I have to wait and see what I'm dealing with - it's a pretty scary feeling out there when something doesn't feel right and is getting worse. "It's very disappointing and I'll have to do my best to deal with it. Time will shortly tell if it (the Australian Open) is a possibility or not. "I was not counting on this being the end of the day for me. "Maybe in a few days I'll have a much better sense of what my hopes will be."

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"sport 476.txt Henman to face Saulnier test British number one Tim Henman will face France's Cyril Saulnier in the first round of next week's Australian Open. Greg Rusedski", the British number two, is in the same quarter of the draw and could face Andy Roddick in the second round if he beats Swede Jonas Bjorkman. Local favourite Lleyton Hewitt will meet France's Arnaud Clement, while defending champion and world number one Roger Federer faces Fabrice Santoro. Women's top seed Lindsay Davenport drew Spanish veteran Conchita Martinez. Henman came from two sets down to defeat Saulnier in the first round of the French Open last year, so he knows he faces a tough test in Melbourne. The seventh seed, who has never gone beyond the quarter-finals in the year's first major and is lined up to meet Roddick in the last eight," is looking forward to the match. "He's a tough player on any surface", he's got a lot of ability," he said. We had a really tight one in Paris that went my way so I'm going to need to play well from the outset because he's a dangerous competitor." Switzerland's Federer", seeded one, is the hot favourite having won three of the four grand slam titles in 2004. He has beaten Santoro in five of their seven previous encounters," but is taking nothing for granted. "It's a tricky match", Federer said. I played him at the US Open and won quite comfortably then. But you never know, if the rhythm is a bit off," he can keep you guessing and make it difficult. "The most important thing", though," is to get used to playing five-set matches and winning them." The 23-year-old could meet four-time champion Andre Agassi in the quarter-finals before meeting Russian Marat Safin", the player he

beat in last year's final. Eighth-seeded American Agassi is set to play a qualifier in round one if he can shake off a hip injury which ruled him out of the Kooyong Classic. Second seed Andy Roddick will open his campaign against Irakli Labadze of Georgia. The American could meet Rusedski in the second round, seventh seed Henman in the quarter-finals and Hewitt in the last four. Hewitt is hoping to become the first Australian man to win the event since Mark Edmondson in 1976. The 23-year-old has never been beyond round four in eight attempts at Melbourne Park but has at least secured the opposite half of the draw to Federer, who beat him in the Australian Open, Wimbledon and US Open last year. Safin, seeded four, opens his campaign against a qualifier with 16th seed Tommy Haas, the player he beat in the semi-finals in 2002, a possible fourth-round opponent. In the women's draw, Davenport could encounter eighth-seeded Venus Williams in the quarter-finals and third-ranked Anastasia Myskina, the French Open champion, in the semi-finals. Bronchitis ruled Davenport, the 2000 Australian Open champion, out of her Sydney quarter-final on Thursday. Venus Williams, who lost to younger sister Serena in the Melbourne final two years ago, opens against Eleni Daniilidou of Greece. Serena Williams, who won her fourth consecutive grand slam at the 2003 Australian Open, was drawn in the bottom quarter with second seed Amelie Mauresmo, a runner-up in 1999. Serena will open against another Frenchwoman Camille Pin, while Mauresmo plays Australia's Samantha Stosur. Wimbledon champion Maria Sharapova, seeded fourth, drew a qualifier in the first round but could meet fellow Russian Svetlana Kuznetsova, the US Open winner, in the last eight 1 Roger Federer (Switzerland) 2 Andy Roddick (US) 3 Lleyton Hewitt (Australia) 4 Marat Safin (Russia) 5 Carlos Moya (Spain) 6 Guillermo Coria (Argentina) 7 Tim Henman (Britain) 8 Andre Agassi (US) 9 David Nalbandian (Argentina) 10 Gaston Gaudio (Argentina) 11 Joachim Johansson (Sweden) 12 Guillermo Canas (Argentina) 13 Tommy Robredo (Spain) 14 Sebastien Grosjean (France) 15 Mikhail Youzhny (Russia) 16 Tommy Haas (Germany) 17 Andrei Pavel (Romania) 18 Nicolas Massu (Chile) 19 Vincent Spadea (US) 20 Dominik Hrbaty (Slovakia) 21 Nicolas Kiefer (Germany) 22 Ivan Ljubicic (Croatia) 23 Fernando Gonzalez (Chile) 24 Feliciano Lopez (Spain) 25 Juan Ignacio Chela (Argentina) 26 Nikolay Davydenko (Russia) 27 Paradorn Srichaphan (Thailand) 28 Mario Ancic (Croatia) 29 Taylor Dent (US) 30 Thomas Johansson (Sweden) 31 Juan Carlos Ferrero (Spain) 32 Jurgen Melzer (Austria) 1 Lindsay Davenport (US) 2 Amelie Mauresmo (France) 3 Anastasia Myskina (Russia) 4 Maria Sharapova (Russia) 5 Svetlana Kuznetsova (Russia) 6 Elena Dementieva (Russia) 7 Serena Williams (US) 8 Venus Williams (US) 9 Vera Zvonareva (Russia) 10 Alicia Molik (Australia) 11 Nadia Petrova (Russia) 12 Patty Schnyder (Switzerland) 13 Karolina Sprem (Croatia) 14 Francesca Schiavone (Italy) 15 Silvia Farina Elia (Italy) 16 Ai Sugiyama (Japan) 17 Fabiola Zuluaga (Colombia) 18 Elena Likhovtseva (Russia) 19 Nathalie Dechy (France) 20 Tatiana Golovin (France) 21 Amy Frazier (US) 22 Magdalena Maleeva (Bulgaria) 23 Jelena Jankovic (Serbia and Montenegro) 24 Mary Pierce (France) 25 Lisa Raymond (US) 26 Daniela Hantuchova (Slovakia) 27 Anna Smashnova (Israel) 28 Shinobu Asagoe (Japan) 29 Gisela Dulko (Argentina) 30 Flavia Pennetta (Italy) 31 Jelena Kostanic (Croatia) 32 Iveta Benesova (Czech Republic)

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"sport 477.txt Moya suffers shock loss Fifth seed Carlos Moya was the first big name to fall at the Australian Open as he went down to fellow Spaniard Guillermo Garcia-Lopez on Monday. Moya began the year with victory at the Chennai Open but looked out of sorts from the start in the Melbourne heat. Garcia-Lopez", ranked 106 in the world," dominated from the outset and withstood a third-set rally from Moya to hang on for a 7-5 6-3 3-6 6-3 victory. T

he 21-year-old plays Kevin Kim or Lee Hyuung-Taik in the second round. Garcia-Lopez was delighted with the victory in only his third ever Grand Slam match.

"I think this was the most important win of my life as Carlos is one of the best players in the world", he said. This has given me a lot of confidence. Now I feel I can beat all these players." Moya said: "I was playing well before I came here. It was the perfect preparation but something was wrong today." Four-time champion Andre Agassi began what could be his last Australian Open with a convincing win over German qualifier Dieter Kindlmann. The 34-year-old American, who had been struggling with a hip injury earlier in the week, stormed to a 6-4 6-3 6-0 win. Agassi will play France's Olivier Patience or Germany's Rainer Schuettler - the man he beat in the 2003 final - in the next round. "No one was more concerned (about the injury) than myself", said eighth seed Agassi. "I'd worked hard to be down here and ready. But the last few days, I've pushed through the injury and it seemed to do pretty good." In other matches, world junior champion Gael Monfils made use of his wild card with a magnificent 1-6 6-3 6-4 7-6 (8-6) win over American Robby Ginepri. The 2002 champion Thomas Johansson fought back to beat Peter Luczak 7-6 (7-5) 4-6 6-3 4-6 6-0, and French Open champion Gaston Gaudio beat Justin Gimelstob 7-6 (7-3) 6-4 6-3. Seeds Dominik Hrbaty, Ivan Ljubicic and Mario Ancic made comfortable progress, but former French Open champion Albert Costa lost to Bjorn Phau.

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"sport 478.txt Clijsters hope on Aussie Open Kim Clijsters has denied reports that she has pulled out of January's Australian Open because of her persistent wrist injury. Open chief Paul McNamee had said: "Kim's wrist obviously isn't going to be rehabilitated." But her spokesman insisted she had simply delayed submitting her entry. "The doctors are assessing her injury on a weekly basis and if there is no risk she could play. But if there's the least risk she will stay away." Despite being absent from the WTA entry list for the tournament, which begins on 17 January, Clijsters would be certain to get a wild card if she requested one. Clijsters is still ranked 22nd in the world despite only playing a handful of matches last season. The Belgian had an operation on her left wrist early in the season but injured it again on her return to the tour. Meanwhile, Jelena Dokic, who used to compete for Australia, has opted out of the first Grand Slam of the season. Dokic has not played in the Australian Open since 2001 when she lost in the first round. But the 21-year-old would have had to rely on a wild card next season because her ranking has tumbled to 127th. Four-time champion Monica Seles, who has not played since last year's French Open, is another absentee because of an injured left foot.

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"sport 479.txt Clijsters could play Aussie Open Kim Clijsters has denied reports that she has pulled out of January's Australian Open because of her persistent wrist injury. Open chief Paul McNamee had said: "Kim's wrist obviously isn't going to be rehabilitated." But her spokesman insisted she had simply delayed submitting her entry. "The doctors are assessing her injury on a weekly basis and if there is no risk she could play. But if there's the least risk she will stay away." Despite being absent from the WTA entry list for the tournament, which begins on 17 January, Clijsters would be certain to get a wild card if she requested one. Clijsters is still ranked 22nd in the world despite only playing a handful of matches last season. The Belgian had an operation on her left wrist early in the season but injured it again on her return to the tour. Meanwhile, Jelena Dokic, who used to compete for Australia, has opted out of the first Grand Slam of the season. Dokic has not played in the

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"sport 480.txt Edgy Agassi struggles past Dent Andre Agassi put in an erratic display before edging into the fourth round of the Australian Open with victory over Taylor Dent. The 34-year-old American", seeded eighth, made a poor start, dropping serve early on and later needing two chances to serve out the set. Having secured the lead, Agassi still failed to take control as both players forced a succession of breaks. But Agassi won the tie-break before wrapping up a 7-5 7-6 (7-3) 6-1 win. Fourth seed survived an injury scare as he battled past Mario Ancic 6-4 3-6 6-3 6-4. The Russian turned his right ankle in the third game of the fourth set and called for treatment immediately. But he showed no sign of the problem when he returned to the court to wrap up victory in two hours 45 minutes. Ancic, Wimbledon semi-finalist in 2004," looked set to push Safin all the way when he took the second set but Safin raised his game to sink the Croatian. Safin said he was trying to keep his temper under control at this year's tournament. The Russian hit himself on the head repeatedly in one second-set outburst but was otherwise largely calm in his victory. ""I try to stay calm because if you go crazy against players like Ancic", you might never come back because he's a tough opponent," he said. I'm a little bit calmer than I was before because I'd had enough."" The Russian added that he was not worried by his ankle injury. ""I have had a lot of problems with that ankle before - it will be OK", he said. 's route to the fourth round was made easy when opponent Jarkko Nieminen was forced to retire from their match. The top seed and defending champion was leading 6-3 5-2 when Nieminen pulled out with an abdominal injury. Federer had been in patchy form until then - mixing 19 unforced errors with 19 winners. The world number one will play Cypriot next after the former world junior champion beat Tommy Robredo 7-6 (7-2) 6-4 6-1. Federer admitted he was under extra pressure after extending his winning streak to a career-best 24. They are so used to me winning, but it's not that simple, he said. I had a feeling this could be a tough match. I had a bad start but I bounced back. I always want to play better than I am," but I thought I was pretty OK." French Open champion is out of the tournament after a five-set defeat by Dominik Hrbaty. Hrbaty defeated the 10th seed 7-6 (7-5) 6-7 (8-10) 6-7 (3-7) 6-1 6-3 in a match lasting four hours and 21 minutes. The pair traded 16 service breaks during an exhausting baseline battle", with Hrbaty taking a decisive advantage in the eighth game of the final set. Hrbaty will now play 2002 champion , who outlasted American Kevin Kim 3-6 6-2 6-7 6-2 6-2.

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"sport 481.txt Roddick splits from coach Gilbert Andy Roddick has ended an 18-month association with coach Brad Gilbert which yielded the US Open title and saw the American become world number one. Roddick released a statement through the SFX Sports Group with the news but did not give a reason for the split. ""The decision to not re-hire Brad Gilbert for the 2005 season is based on what I think is best for my game at this time", said Roddick. Any more on this situation's a private matter between coach and player."" Roddick won 121 of his 147 matches while working with Gilbert", and said he had enjoyed their time together. He won his first Grand Slam event at Flushing Meadows last year, and finished 2003 on top of the ATP Tour rankings. But Roddick slipped to second this year behind Roger Federer, who became the first man since 1988 to

win three Majors in a season. Federer, who has not had a coach since he split from Peter Lundgren at the end of last year," beat Roddick to win the Wimbledon title and in two other tournament finals. Roddick hired Gilbert after deciding to part from coach Tarik Benhabiles in the wake of his first-round exit at the 2003 French Open. He went on to win the US Open and four other titles for the year. He has won four events this season. ""I have enjoyed all of my time with Andy"," Gilbert said on his personal website. He has been a great student of the game during the time that we worked together and I am very proud of the results that were achieved. ""While I believe that there is still a great deal of work to be done", " Andy clearly does not feel that way.""

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"sport 482.txt Roddick in talks over new coach Andy Roddick is reportedly close to confirming US Davis Cup assistant Dean Goldfine as his new coach. Roddick ended his 18-month partnership with Brad Gilbert on Monday", " and Goldfine admits talks have taken place. ""We had a really good conversation and we're on the same page in terms of what I expect from a player in commitment and what he wants", " said Goldfine. The reading I got from him is that I would have a lot of the qualities he's looking for in a coach." Speaking to told South Florida's Sun-Sentinel newspaper", " Goldfine added: ""That being said", from his standpoint, which is smart," he wants to cover all his bases. ""I think Andy wants a long-term relationship and wants to make sure it's the right fit... the best fit." Goldfine", 39, has worked with Todd Martin and Roddick's close friend Mardy Fish, and was an assistant coach with the US Olympic team. Martin is the other name to have been linked to the vacant post alongside Roddick.

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"sport 483.txt Hewitt survives Nalbandian epic Home favourite Lleyton Hewitt came through a dramatic five-set battle with Argentine David Nalbandian to reach the Australian Open semi-finals. Hewitt looked to be cruising to victory after racing into a two-set lead. But Nalbandian broke his serve three times in both of the next two sets to set up a nailbiting decider. Hewitt eventually grabbed the vital break in the 17th game and served out to win 6-3 6-2 1-6 3-6 10-8 and set up a meeting with Andy Roddick. The winner of that match will face either Roger Federer or Marat Safin in the final. Ninth seed Nalbandian had never come back from two sets down to win a match", " and there was no indication he would do so as Hewitt dominated the first two sets. The Argentine had stoked up the temperature ahead of the match by saying Hewitt's exuberant on-court celebrations were ""not very good for the sport"". And he had words with Hewitt during one change of ends in the second set when the Australian appeared to brush shoulders with him as they went to their chairs. The balance of power changed completely in the third set as Hewitt allowed his level to dip", " and he double-faulted twice as Nalbandian broke on the way to taking the fourth set. But the tiring third seed showed incredible reserves of strength to force the break despite being outplayed for much of the final set and three times coming within two points of defeat. He then produced a love service game to finish off the match in four hours and five minutes. ""I just kept hanging in there. It was always tough serving second in the fifth set", " said Hewitt, who had never reached the last four at his home Grand Slam. I told myself to give everything and in the end it paid off once again. ""It's a long way from holding that trophy up there but I'm hanging in there. ""Only four guys left that can win and we're the top four in the world. It's set up for a pretty good showdown in the semis and finals.""

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"sport 484.txt Sydney return for Henin-Hardenne Olympic c  
hampion Justine Henin-Hardenne will return to action in January's Sydney Intern  
ational tournament. The Belgian has not competed since losing her top world ra  
nking at the US Open in September", where she was beaten in the fourth round by  
Nadia Petrova. She took time out to shake off a virus but will defend her title  
s in Sydney and at the Australian Open. Women's world number one Lindsay Davenp  
ort and French Open champion Anastasia Myskina will also compete. In the men's  
event, world number three Lleyton Hewitt returns to defend his title, along wit  
h runner-up Carlos Moya. Moya, Spain's Davis Cup final hero in their recent win  
over the US," had to retire with an ankle injury in the first set of the final.  
Tournament director Craig Watson said: ""I had a message relayed to me from him  
after Spain's Davis Cup victory", saying he was looking forward to trying to ma  
ke up for his disappointment in the (2004) final. The tournament will take plac  
e from 9-15 January.

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"sport 485.txt Koubek suspended after drugs test Stefan K  
oubek says he has been banned for three months by the International Tennis Fede  
ration (ITF) after testing positive for a banned substance. The world number 6  
0 failed a routine drugs test at this year's French Open but now plans to lodge  
an appeal. Koubek believes an injection given to him by an Austrian doctor to t  
reat a wrist injury is to blame for producing traces of the substance in his sy  
stem. ""I have acted correctly", the 27-year-old Austrian said in a statement.  
Koubek, who defeated Britain's Greg Rusedski in the decisive rubber of the Davi  
s Cup in September, is now set to miss the start of the season. He said, A thre  
e-month ban would mean that I not only will miss the Australian Open", but als  
o the Davis Cup in Australia.""  
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"sport 486.txt Hewitt fights back to reach final Lleyton  
Hewitt kept his dream of an Australian Open title alive with a four-set win ove  
r Andy Roddick in Friday's second semi-final. The home favourite will face Mar  
at Safin in Sunday's final after coming through 3-6 7-6 (7-3) 7-6 (7-4) 6-1. He  
witt fought back from a set down and trailed in both tie-breaks but would not b  
e denied", thrilling the Melbourne crowd with a typically battling effort. He i  
s aiming to be the first Australian winner since Mark Edmondson in 1976. Hewitt  
is the first Australian to make the final since Pat Cash lost to Mats Wilander  
in 1988, but faces a huge challenge against Safin - the conqueror of Roger Fede  
rer. After needing five sets in his last two matches there was reason to think  
Hewitt might struggle for fitness. He certainly made a sluggish start, dropping  
his opening service game, and Roddick dominated with his huge serve as he took  
the first set. After 12 tense games in the second, the key moment came when He  
witt raised his game in the tie-break to overturn an early mini-break. That ene  
rgised the crowd but Roddick was not finished and raced 4-1 clear in the crucia  
l third before Hewitt pegged him back and forced another tie-break. Again Roddi  
ck broke first and again Hewitt fought back, taking the lead with a superb back  
hand pass. The Australian was not to be denied and a disheartened Roddick made  
little impact in the fourth set as Hewitt raced to victory," sending the Melbou  
rne crowd wild and ensuring the final will be a huge occasion. ""It's awesom  
e", said Hewitt. I started preparing for this tournament nine months ago.

""I've done a lot of hard yards to get here. ""I've always said I'd do anything to get in the first night final at the Australian Open. Now I've got my chance." "Roddick was furious with himself for failing to take advantage of leads in both tie-breaks. ""I'm usually pretty money in those",," said Roddick. Either one of those would have given me a distinct advantage. ""I'm mad",," I felt I was in there with a shot. He put himself in position to win big points. I donated a little more than I would have wanted." "And the American played down the influence of one spectator who appeared to contribute to a double fault by shouting during Roddick's service action. ""It just took one jackass to shout out",," said Roddick, adding that the crowd overall was very respectful"".

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"sport 487.txt Officials respond in court row Australian tennis' top official has defended the Australian Open courts at Melbourne Park after criticism of the playing surface by Lleyton Hewitt. Hewitt said he had had a ""gutful"" of trying to persuade them to make the surface faster but Tennis Australia's Geoff Pollard rejected his comments. ""We did ask for it to be made faster than last year and",, to my knowledge, it is faster," he said. We spent a substantial amount of money on modifications to make it faster." "Hewitt",, who has not got past the fourth round at Melbourne in seven attempts, had earlier said the surface was not worthy of such a prestigious tournament. But he said he would play on whatever surface he had to in order to have a chance of winning. The tournament starts on 17 January," and Pollard said the surface had been speeded up since last year's tournament following complaints by several Australian players. But he refused to accept that the Melbourne surface may have had a bearing on Hewitt's performances over the years. ""Lleyton's proving how versatile he is on all surfaces",," he said. It is faster than last year and that'll be faster than the one Lleyton beat Roger Federer on in the Davis Cup in 2003." "

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"sport 488.txt Williams battles to Aussie title Serena Williams staged a remarkable recovery to beat Lindsay Davenport and win her second Australian Open title. The 2003 champion claimed her seventh Grand Slam title",, and her first since Wimbledon in 2003, 2-6 6-3 6-0. Williams had looked close to quitting with a rib injury when she left the court for treatment after five games. She quickly dropped the first set but from 3-3 in the second found another gear as Davenport's game collapsed, allowing Williams to take the title. Williams later explained her injury problem," saying it was the result of lunging for a ball early in the first set. ""Lindsay had me on the run out wide on my backhand and my back went but eventually I was able to come back",, thank goodness," she said. Davenport paid tribute to Williams, saying: She's had a tough couple of years and she's come back like a champion." "The 23-year-old former world number one was in desperate trouble in the early stages as the injury hampered her service action. Davenport took advantage to race through the opening set and held six break points in game five of the second. ""I kept thinking to myself 'I'm not losing this game",, said Williams afterwards. 'I don't care if my arm falls off," I'm not losing this game'. And I guess that's what happened. ""I didn't want to lose that particular game because it would have given her a lot of momentum",, and a lot of confidence." "Despite letting the break points slip away Davenport looked comfortable enough at 3-3",, but from 40-0 up she just folded. Williams won nine consecutive points for the set and powered through the decider as a lacklustre Davenport looked to have run out of energy after a gruelling two weeks. ""I felt like I was playing well and in control pretty much

h of the match", said Davenport. Then I just had that horrible lapse, I think serving up 40-0," and made a few errors and opened up the door for her and she just kept going through it. ""At the end I think I was a little bit fatigued but she took advantage of it and kept going - she's a great frontrunner when she gets going.""  
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"sport 489.txt Safin cool on Wimbledon Newly-crowned Australian Open champion Marat Safin has ruled out any chance of winning Wimbledon in the future. After losing in round one last year", Safin said he had ""given up"" on Wimbledon and winning his second Grand Slam title has not changed his mind. ""I'll play", but with no expectations. I feel like I can't waste my time, my energy on that surface, he said. Some people, they cannot play on clay. Some people, they cannot play on a hard court. Me," I can't play on grass."" However", Safin is hopeful that winning the Australian Open will give him the belief he needs to win more Grand Slam titles. ""It's a relief for me. Two grand slams", it's already something. But with this one I worked really hard for it, he said. Basically," I would love to win a couple more. I think I have a chance if I continue this way. ""If (coach) Peter Lundgren will stick around with me and wants to work with me for a bit longer", I think I can make it." The 25-year-old shocked Pete Sampras in the 2000 US Open final to win his first major title but then lost in two Australian Open finals. Safin admitted he had begun to doubt whether he would win another Grand Slam. ""I didn't expect that (to win the 2000 US Open) - it was against Sampras", I wasn't the favourite so I had no pressure whatsoever, he said. After the first final that I didn't win against Thomas Johansson (in 2002)," I couldn't see myself winning the Grand Slams anymore. ""I was once in the semi-finals of the French Open", but I didn't believe I can win it. ""I just couldn't handle the pressure. You need to believe in yourself", and I didn't." And after losing the first set 6-1 to Lleyton Hewitt in Sunday's final", Safin said he began to doubt himself again. ""I am 25. I'm playing against Hewitt. At least you have to have the opportunity to win it", at least have a chance, he said. It's like you go there and you lose first set 6-1," then you start to think: 'This is not my day. The way I'm playing is ridiculous.' ""But then you start to really be a little bit more selfish and try to find a way out of there. ""And I found it. I was like really much I was much happier than in 2000", that's for sure," because I get over it.""  
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"sport 490.txt Safin plays down Wimbledon hopes Newly-crowned Australian Open champion Marat Safin has ruled out any chance of winning Wimbledon in the future. After losing in round one last year", Safin said he had ""given up"" on Wimbledon and winning his second Grand Slam title has not changed his mind. ""I'll play", but with no expectations. I feel like I can't waste my time, my energy on that surface, he said. Some people, they cannot play on clay. Some people, they cannot play on a hard court. Me," I can't play on grass."" However", Safin is hopeful that winning the Australian Open will give him the belief he needs to win more Grand Slam titles. ""It's a relief for me. Two grand slams", it's already something. But with this one I worked really hard for it, he said. Basically," I would love to win a couple more. I think I have a chance if I continue this way. ""If (coach) Peter Lundgren will stick around with me and wants to work with me for a bit longer", I think I can make it." The 25-year-old shocked Pete Sampras in the 2000 US Open final to win his first major title but then lost in two Australian Open finals. Safin admitted he had begun to doubt whether he would win another Grand Slam. ""I didn't expect that

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"sport 491.txt Nadal puts Spain 2-0 up Result: Nadal 6-7  
(6/8) 6-2 7-6 (8/6) 6-2 Roddick Spain's Rafael Nadal beats Andy Roddick of the USA in the second singles match rubber of the 2004 Davis Cup final in Seville. Spain lead 1-0 after Carlos Moya beat Mardy Fish in straight sets in the opening match of the tie. Nadal holds his nerve and the crowd goes wild as Spain go 2-0 up in the tie. Roddick holds serve to force Nadal to serve for the match but the American surely cannot turn things around now. Nadal works Roddick around the court on two consecutive points to earn two break points. One is enough", the Spaniard secures the double-break and Roddick is now teetering on the edge. Roddick is trying to gee himself up but the clay surface is taking its toll on his game and he is looking tired. Nadal wins the game to love. Nadal steps up the pressure to break and Spain have the early initiative in the fourth set. Nadal also holds convincingly as both players feel their way into the fourth set. Roddick shrugs off the disappointment of losing the third-set tiebreak and breezes through his first service game of the fourth set. Nadal earns the first mini-break in the tiebreak as the match enters its fourth hour. A couple of stunning points follow, one where Nadal chases down a Roddick shot and turns into a passing winner. Then Roddick produces some amazing defence at the net to take the score to 4-4. Roddick has two serves for the set but double-faults to take the score to 5-5. Nadal saves a Roddick set point then earns his own with a drive volley - and a crosscourt passing winner sends the crowd wild. Nadal tries to up his aggression and he passes Roddick down the line to go 15-40 and two set points up. Roddick saves the first with a desperate lunge volley and smacks a volley winner across the court to take the score back to deuce before securing the game. The set will go to another tiebreak. Nadal enjoys another straightforward hold and Roddick must once again serve to stay in the set. Roddick again holds on, despite some brilliant shot-making from his opponent. Nadal races through his service game to put the pressure straight back onto Roddick. Roddick hangs in on his serve to level matters but Nadal is making him fight for every point. Nadal could be suffering a disappointment hangover from the previous game as he goes 0-30 down and then has to save a break point after a tremendous rally in which he is forced into some brilliant defence. But it pays off and the Spaniard edges ahead in the set. Roddick's serve is not firing as ferociously as usual and has to rely on his sheer competitive determination to stay in the set. Three times, Nadal forces a break point and three times the world number two hangs in. And Roddick's grit pays off as he manages to hold. Roddick still looks a bit sluggish but he attacks the net and is rewarded with a break point, which Nadal saves with a good first serve and the Spaniard goes on to hold. There is a disruption in play as Roddick is upset about something in the c

rowd. The Spanish captain gets involved as does the match referee but it is unclear what the problem is. One thing for certain is that the crowd are roused in to support of Nadal and they go wild when Roddick loses the next point and goes break point down. Roddick saves the break point and then bangs down his ninth ace before clinching the game with a service winner. The game passes the two-hour mark as Nadal holds serve to edge ahead in the third set. Now Roddick has to defend a break point and he produces a characteristic ace to save it. It is immediately followed by another and he holds with a little dinked half-volley winner. Roddick is looking a little leaden-footed but does carve out a break point for himself. But he plays it poorly and Nadal avoids the danger. Roddick has gone off the boil and again struggles. He fails to get down properly for a low forehand volley and gives Nadal three break points. The American blasts an ace to save one but follows up with a double fault and the rubber is level. Nadal edges towards taking the second set with a comfortable hold. Two good serves put Roddick 30-0 up but he then makes a couple of errors to find himself 30-40 down. He saves the break point with an ace and then manages to hold. Roddick's level has dropped while Nadal is on a hot streak. The Spaniard includes a superb crosscourt winner off the back foot as he races through his service game without dropping a point. Roddick double-faults twice and Nadal takes full advantage of the break point offered, powering a passing winner past Roddick. Nadal wins another tight game. Neither player has dipped from the high standard of play in the first set. Nadal puts the American under pressure and Roddick saves a break point with a superb stop volley before going on to hold. Nadal puts the disappointment of losing the first-set tiebreak to claim the opening game in the second. Roddick double-faults to concede the first mini-break and then Nadal loops a crosscourt winner to seize advantage in the tiebreak. He lets one slip but wins his next serve to earn three set points. But Roddick saves them and then earns one himself. Nadal comes up with a down-the-line winner but then nets tamely on Roddick's next set point. Nadal's nerve is tested as he tries to force a tiebreak. Both players come up with some scintillating tennis and the Spaniard has several chances to clinch the game before finally doing so when Roddick drives wide. A pulsating game sees Nadal racing round the court retrieving and refusing to give Roddick any easy points. The point of the match so far involves Roddick's slam-dunk smash being returned by Nadal before Roddick finally manages to end the rally. On the very next point, Nadal blasts a forehand service return from right of court that passes Roddick and even the American is forced to applaud. But Roddick comes up with two big serves to polish off the game. Nadal outplays Roddick to reach 40-0 but the American fights back to 40-30 before Nadal's powerful crosscourt forehand winner secures the game. The crowd are getting very involved, cheering between Roddick's first and second serves. But the American comes through to hold and edge ahead in the set. Nadal manages to hold again despite Roddick piling the pressure on his serve. The Spaniard wins the game courtesy of another lucky net cord. Roddick double faults but manages to keep his composure. A well-placed serve is unreturnable and Roddick holds. A powerful ace down the middle gives Nadal a simple love service game - the first time he has held serve so far in the match. If Roddick didn't know before, he knows now that he is in a real contest. Another superb game as Nadal breaks to once again lift the roof. He produces some fine groundstrokes to leave Roddick chasing shadows. Four of the first five games have seen a break of serve. Despite the disappointment of losing his serve, Roddick is not phased and storms into a 40-15 lead when the umpire leaves his seat to confirm a close line-call. Nadal takes the next point but Roddick breaks again with a sharp volley at the net. Roddick's advantage is short lived as Nadal breaks back immediately. A fortunate net cord helps the Spaniard on his way and when Roddick fires a forehand

d cross court shot wide to lose his serve, Nadal pumps his fist in celebration. The American is pumped up for this clash and takes on Nadal's serve from the start. Nadal's drop shot is agonisingly called out and Roddick claims the vital first break. After Moya's win in the opening rubber, a raucous Seville crowd is buoyed by Nadal's impressive start which sees him race into a 30-0 lead. However Roddick fights back to hold his serve.

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"sport 492.txt Henman & Murray claim LTA awards Tim Henman was named player of the year for 2004 by the Lawn Tennis Association at Wimledon on Monday. The Briton was recognised for the best year of his career", which saw him reach the semis at the French and US Opens. Scotland's Andrew Murray was named young player of the year after winning the US Open juniors, as well as a Futures event in Italy. And world number one Peter Norfolk won disabled player of the year after claiming his third US Open crown. Great Britain's under 14 boys won the team of the year prize for their victory at the World Junior Tennis event in August. Henman will start his 2005 campaign at the Kooyong event on 12 January in a field that includes Roger Federer, Andy Roddick and Andre Agassi. And the Briton is optimistic of surpassing his best effort of a fourth-round place at the Australian Open," which begins the following week. ""I've often felt that the conditions suit my game in Melbourne so I'd love to be able to start next year by doing well at the Australian Open", Henman told his website. That's why I've changed my schedule slightly by committing to play in the Kooyong Classic. ""I'll be able to acclimatise while practising before the event and then will be guaranteed matches against the best players in the world. ""I think that will give me the best possible chance of doing well at the Australian Open.""

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"sport 493.txt Connors' rallying cry for British tennis  
""Do you have it in your heart? How much guts do you have? How much do you hate to lose?"" These are the questions Jimmy Connors will be asking of Britain's brightest tennis hopes in the months", and possibly years," to come. The American legend swept into London on Thursday to announce a ""long-term"" relationship with the Lawn Tennis Association after spending three days at the Elite Performance winter camp in La Manga. And the man who epitomised the phrase 'will to win' before Lleyton Hewitt was even born is clear about the qualities he hopes to convey. ""You know", everybody hits the ball well and there's a very fine line between number one and number 100, said Connors. I was that fine line for a long time. But if I can help," I want to be part of teaching kids how to win." Connors is not the first great name to offer his services to the LTA - his long-time rival John McEnroe has repeatedly done the same. But Connors is at pains to point out that his interest goes well beyond any publicity stunt", and he gave a glowing recommendation to the work of LTA performance director David Felgate and his team. ""Britain has a different attitude", the right attitude, in taking the game forward and finding the next Wimbledon champion," said Connors. That's something you don't find every day. Everybody talks a good game but not everybody puts that into effect. ""The impression I came away with after just seeing David and the other coaches for three days was one like I've never seen before", especially over here. ""This is not going to happen overnight", there are no miracle workers," but you're going in the right direction." The 52-year-old's enthusiasm for the work going on in this country is in marked contrast to his relationship with tennis officials back in America. ""I've had discussions

with the USTA (United States Tennis Association) over a number of years", "he said. That's where it (my input) ended." Connors is a straight-talker and will be equally blunt and honest in his dealings with the LTA and the cream of Britain's young players. ""If they're chosen", they've got to produce, he said. If not, someone will come and take their place. There's only one number one spot and it's lonely up there," but it's got the best view." In the year that has seen Andrew Murray emerge as Britain's great new hope", Connors rejected suggestions that the Scot might be put under too much pressure too soon. ""Tim Henman has a whole country on his shoulder", said Connors. I don't know that pressure," but if you like that it can be a certain push to get on to the next level. ""Someone's going to have to come and take over from him (Henman). If I was Andrew Murray", "I'd embrace that. That's what we play for." Despite the emphasis on hard work", training and preparation," Connors does admit that the desire required of a champion has to come from within. ""The passion I had", I don't know if you can find that," he admitted. I was also nuts. I say that because there was nothing better for me than to compete on the tennis court. ""It was the most important thing in the world for me", and to do that something's got to be not right with you. There was nothing better for me ever than to play tennis in front of 25,000 people. ""What I had when I played tennis is what I am. You have to have that", "you can't be moulded."

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"sport 494.txt Roche 'turns down Federer offer' Australia  
n tennis coach Tony Roche has turned down an approach from Roger Federer to be the world number one's new full-time coach", say reports. Melbourne's Herald-Sun said Roche, troubled by a hip complaint, did not want to travel full-time again. However, Roche is happy to work with the Swiss star on a casual basis and is helping him prepare for next month's defence of his Australian Open crown. Federer has been without a coach since splitting with Peter Lundgren in 2003. Roche, a former Davis Cup player for Australia, won the French Open, reached the Wimbledon and US Open finals and won five Wimbledon doubles titles with John Newcombe. He also coached former number one Ivan Lendl and Pat Rafter to Grand Slam victories and has worked with Australia's Lleyton Hewitt. Some reports claim Federer initially wanted Andre Agassi's Australian coach Darren Cahill, before Agassi confirmed he would play on in 2005. Federer was named Swiss sportsman of the year on Saturday, to add to the BBC overseas sportsman and European Sports Journalists Association awards he has already won.

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"sport 495.txt Federer joins all-time greats The last year has seen one player dominate men's tennis", and one country dominate the women's game. Roger Federer became the first man since Mats Wilander in 1988 to win three Grand Slams in one season. And after Anastasia Myskina became the first Russian woman to win a Grand Slam at the French Open, two more followed at Wimbledon and the US Open. Meanwhile, Briton Tim Henman enjoyed his best year, while Greg Rusedski fought back superbly from adversity. Federer began the year as world number one and holder of the Wimbledon and Masters Cup titles, and set about conquering new ground. The Swiss sounded warning of the dominance to come at the Australian Open. He ripped through the draw before beating Marat Safin in the final. Andy Roddick was the only player to put up any real resistance at Wimbledon, and Federer's performance against Lleyton Hewitt in the US Open final was breathtaking. Federer again got the better of Hewitt in the season-ending Masters Cup. His victory in Houston proved to be his 13th successive win in a final, an Open era record. The only major let-down was a third-round loss to Gus

tavo Kuerten at the French Open, and Roland Garros will be his main target in 2005. There was also a surprise loss to the unheralded Tomas Berdych at the Olympic Games, which saw Chile dominate as Nicolas Massu took the singles and then paired up with Fernando González to win doubles gold. Another major trophy that looks beyond Federer is the Davis Cup, which was won by Spain in a 3-2 home success over the USA in Seville. Roddick struggled on the clay, losing to Rafael Nadal on the opening day before going down to Carlos Moya in the all-important fourth rubber. Henman broke new ground by reaching the semis on clay at the French Open - a stunning effort - and also at the US Open. A quarter-final defeat to Mario Ancic at Wimbledon was disappointing for the limp manner of the Briton's defeat, but he remains optimistic of going further next year. British number two Rusedski endured a rollercoaster year, returning to the circuit after being cleared of a doping offence in March. With his ranking down at 168, many feared the 31-year-old's career was over, but he battled back in the second half of the season to re-enter the top 50. The Russian women finally delivered on their long-recognised promise in 2004, with Myskina, Maria Sharapova and Svetlana Kuznetsova winning Grand Slams, before taking the season-ending Fed Cup. But while the young Russians were on the way up, it was a different story for the Belgians and the Williams sisters. Only veteran Lindsay Davenport held the new wave at bay, a stunning run of form after Wimbledon taking her to number one ahead of Amelie Mauresmo, whose Grand Slam drought goes on. The year started in regulation fashion as Justine Henin-Hardenne beat compatriot Kim Clijsters at the Australian Open. A virus ruined the rest of Henin-Hardenne's year, although she was fit enough to win Olympic gold, but Clijsters had an even more miserable 2004. She suffered a serious wrist injury and then announced the end of her relationship with Lleyton Hewitt, and will be happy to see the year end. In their absence, Myskina thrashed Elena Dementieva in a historic, but woeful, all-Russian final at the French Open. Wimbledon was a more refreshing affair as Sharapova captivated SW19, showing nerves of steel as she battled past Davenport and Serena Williams to take the title. Davenport was a strong favourite for the US Open but, hampered by injury, lost to the powerful and unflappable Kuznetsova in the semis. Kuznetsova went on to give Dementieva another Grand Slam final thrashing, with the latter's wayward serve becoming one of the talking points of the year. With the Russians still improving, the likes of Henin-Hardenne, Clijsters, Davenport, Mauresmo, Venus and Serena will need to be fully fit and motivated in 2005. And it may take their compatriot Safin to challenge Federer on the men's side.

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"sport 496.txt Philippoussis doubt over Open bid Mark Philippoussis is almost certain to miss the Australian Open after suffering a groin injury during the Hopman Cup loss to the Netherlands. The 28-year-old suffered two tears to the adductor muscle and was unable to play in the deciding mixed doubles. He is now unlikely to be fit in time for the Australian Open which begins on 17 January in Melbourne. ""He has to strengthen it enough to cope with repetitive days of tennis", said Hopman Cup doctor Hamish Osborne. It would be very unlikely in my opinion for him to do a five-setter once, let alone two days in a row," inside two weeks. ""The injury is more common in Australian Rules football", and a fit footballer would normally take three to four weeks to recover fully although Mark's injury is slightly different." The Australian has suffered a host of injury problems throughout his career but is still holding out slim hope that he can make the event. ""It's something I'll have to go by feel. I'll start treatment as soon as possible and try to strengthen it without tearing it any more", he said. What doesn't kill you makes you stronger. I know I

can come back from this and that's all that matters. - Former world number two Tommy Haas is also a doubt for the Australian Open after picking up a thigh injury playing for Germany in the Hopman Cup. The 26-year-old had treatment on his left thigh while leading Argentine Guillermo Coria 7-5 2-2. He played one more game, but his movement was hampered and he quit.

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"sport 497.txt Slovakia reach Hopman Cup final Slovakia will play Argentina in the final of the Hopman Cup after beating Group B rivals the Netherlands 3-0. Daniela Hantuchova defeated Michaella Krajicek 6-4 6-2 to give the Slovaks the perfect start before Dutchman Peter Wessels retired against Dominik Hrbaty. Wessels was unable to compete in the mixed doubles but Slovakia had already booked their place in the final for the second year running. Argentina claimed top spot in Group A with three wins from three matches. In the other Group B match", the United States defeated Australia 2-1. Meghann Shaughnessy lost the opening match against Alicia Molik but James Blake levelled the tie with a 6-3 6-4 win over Paul Baccanello, who came in as a replacement for the injured Mark Philippoussis. Blake and Shaughnessy then beat Molik and Baccanello in a tense mixed doubles contest to take the win. Hantuchova, who did not win a Hopman Cup singles match in 2004," has been in good form during this year's event and has won two of her three matches. ""I feel like it's really deserved this time as I've helped Dominik to get through", she said. I think if I keep going the way I have been in the past few matches then I will be okay. ""I was really pleased with my last two singles", even the first one," which was a really high standard. ""You can't ask for a better preparation than to play a few matches here for the Australian Open.""

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"sport 498.txt Dent continues Adelaide progress American Taylor Dent reached the final of the Australian hardcourt event in Adelaide with a crushing 6-1 6-1 win over Argentine Juan Ignacio Chela. Dent will meet Sweden Joachim Johansson on Sunday after the second seed survived a tense tie-break to defeat Belgium's Olivier Rochus 6-1 7-6 (7/5). Johansson", the boyfriend of Lleyton Hewitt's sister Jaslyn," received strong crowd support on Saturday. ""It feels like home for me", because Jaslyn lives here, said Johansson. Rochus was leading 5-4 in the second set tiebreak but his concentration was ruffled by a disputed line call and the match slipped away. It was so close - one mistake like this and the match is over, it's tough. For me, it was clearly out," Rochus said.

sport 499.txt Moya sidesteps Davis Cup in 2005 Carlos Moya has chosen not to help Spain try and defend the Davis Cup crown they won in Seville in November. Moya led Spain to victory over the USA but wants to focus on the Grand Slams in 2005, although insists he will return to the Davis Cup in 2006. After two years of total commitment with the Davis Cup team... I have taken this difficult decision to concentrate on the regular circuit", said Moya. They know that after this season they can count on me again if they so wish." The 1998 French Open champion is determined to make an impact in the major events after spending much of the last eight years in the top 10. ""At the age of 29 I have set some tough goals in my professional career and this season I need to fix my objectives on specific dates and tournaments", he said. Since the Davis Cup in Seville I have been working on my condition as well as technical and medical aspects of my game which will allow me to come into the big events of the year in top form." Moya began 2005 with victory in the Chennai Open on Sunday.

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"sport 500.txt Henman decides to quit Davis Cup Tim Henman has retired from Great Britain's Davis Cup team. The 30-year-old", who made his Davis Cup debut in 1994," is now set to fully focus on the ATP Tour and on winning his first Grand Slam event. ""I've made no secret of the fact that representing Great Britain has always been a top priority for me throughout my career", " Henman told his website. Captain Jeremy Bates has touted Alex Bogdanovic and Andrew Murray as possible replacements for the veteran. Henman added that he was available to help Britain in its bid for Davis Cup success, with the next tie against Israel in March . Although I won't be playing", I would still like to make myself available to both Jeremy and the LTA in the future so that I can draw upon my experience in the hope of trying to help the British players develop their full potential," he added. I've really enjoyed playing in front of the thousands of British fans both home and abroad and would like to thank everyone of them for their unwavering support over the years." " Henman leaves Davis Cup tennis with an impressive record", " having won 36 of his 50 matches. Great Britain captain Jeremy Bates paid tribute to Henman's efforts over the years.

" "Tim has quite simply had a phenomenal Davis Cup career and it has been an absolute privilege to have captained the team with him in it", " said Bates. Tim's magnificent record speaks for itself. While it's a great loss I completely understand and respect his decision to retire from Davis Cup and focus on the Grand Slams and Tour. " " "Looking to the future this decision obviously marks a watershed in British Davis Cup tennis but it is also a huge opportunity for the next generation to make their mark. " "We have a host of talented players coming through and despite losing someone of Tim's calibre", " I remain very optimistic about the future." " Henman made his Davis Cup debut in 1994 against Romania in Manchester. He and partner Bates won their doubles rubber on the middle Saturday of the tie. Britain eventually lost the contest 3-2. Henman and Britain had little luck in Davis Cup matches until 1999 when they qualified for the World Group. Britain drew the USA and lost the tie when Greg Rusedski fell to Jim Courier in the deciding rubber. They made the final stages again", in 2002, but this time lost out to the might of Sweden.

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"sport 501.txt Ivanovic seals Canberra victory Serbia's Ana Ivanovic captured her first WTA title with a straight-sets victory over Hungarian Melinda Czink in the final of the Canberra Classic. The 17-year-old took 83 minutes to take the match 7-5 6-1. Ivanovic beat Czink in the last round of qualifying but the Hungarian made the main draw as a lucky loser after Katarina Srebotnik withdrew injured. Ivanovic said: ""I was really nervous in the beginning", " but I pulled through and didn't do too much wrong." " A junior Wimbledon finalist last year", " she added: ""It's my first WTA title", " and to win it has really given me more energy to practice and improve." " Ivanovic will play 32nd seed Iveta Benesova of the Czech Republic in the first round.said of the Australian Open in Melbourne.

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" "sport 502.txt Minister digs in over doping row The Belgian sports minister at the centre of the Svetlana Kuznetsova doping row says he will not apologise for making allegations against her. Claude Eerdekens claims the US Open champion tested positive for ephedrine at an exhibition event last month. Criticised for making the announcement", " he said: ""I will never apologize

ise. This product is banned and it's up to her to explain why it's there." "Kuznetsova says the stimulant may have been in a cold remedy she took. The Russian said she did nothing wrong by taking the medicine during the event. The Women's Tennis Association cleared Kuznetsova of any offence because the drug is not banned when taken out of competition. Eerdeken said he made the statement in order to protect the other three players that took part in the tournament", Belgian Justine Henin-Hardenne," Nathalie Dechy of France and Russia's Elena Dementieva. But Dechy is fuming that she has been implicated in the row. " "How can you be happy when you see your face on the cover page and talking about doping?" " Dechy said. " "I'm really upset about it and I think the Belgian government did a really bad job about this. " "I think we deserve an apology from the guy. You cannot say anything like this - you cannot say some stuff like this", " saying it's one of these girls. This is terrible." "Dementieva is also angry and says that Dechy and herself are the real victims of the scandal. " "You have no idea what I have been through all these days. It's been too hard on me", she said. The WTA are trying to handle this problem by saying there are three victims, but I see only two victims in this story - me and Nathalie Dechy," who really have nothing to do with this. " "To be honest with you", " I don't feel like I want to talk to Sveta at all. I'm just very upset with the way everything has happened." "

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"sport 503.txt Safin relieved at Aussie recovery Marat Safin admitted he thought he was suffering another Australian Open final nightmare when he lost the opening set to Lleyton Hewitt. The Russian", who lost the 2002 and 2004 finals," fought back brilliantly to win 1-6 6-3 6-4 6-4. " "I was nervous and I couldn't play tennis", " said Safin. He started really well. He wasn't as nervous as I was because I was thinking of the two finals that I played and wasn't successful." " He added: " "You really have to deal with the pressure because normally it never happens but when you come to the final you are so tight because you want to win. " "I tried to play some tennis but I couldn't. He has huge experience", he's won two Grand Slam titles, he's won 24 titles," he's a great player and he deals with pressure." " From 4-1 down in the third set", " Safin played some of his best tennis to reel off seven games and take control of the match. " "In the third set", just all of a sudden, it all turn around completely in a way I couldn't expect, said Safin. Because he made a couple of mistakes, I was a little bit lucky at some point," then the confidence came back and I was back in the game." " And the Russian revealed that the victory", and his semi-final win over world number one Roger Federer," had given him a massive boost for the future. " "You get huge confidence because Roger is a great player", said Safin. Once I beat him, and then Lleyton," it's like you get so much confidence in yourself that you really can play great. " "You can win big titles and you can beat huge players in the finals and semi-finals." "

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"sport 504.txt Veteran Martinez wins Thai title Conchita Martinez won her first title in almost five years with victory over Anna-Lena Groenefeld at the Volvo Women's Open in Pattaya", " Thailand. The 32-year-old Spaniard came through 6-3 3-6 6-3 for her first title since Berlin in 2000. " "It feels really good", " said Martinez, who is playing her last season on the Tour. To come through like that in an important match feels good. " "It's been nearly five years and I didn't think I could do it." " Groenefeld was the more powerful player but could not match her opponent's relentless accuracy. " "It was my first final", a new experience, said the German. I think she played a good match, a

tough match," but I tried to stay in there. I think the whole week was good for me." "

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"sport 505.txt Soderling wins tense Milan final Fifth seed Robin Soderling took the Milan Indoors title with a dramatic win over Radek Stepanek in Sunday's final. The 20-year-old Swede edged the final set tie-break for a 6-3 6-7 (2-7) 7-6 (7-5) victory and his second tour title after winning in Lyon last year. "I'm delighted to have won against such a good opponent in a tournament of this importance", said Soderling. I was really on form," my service was good and I really liked playing on the synthetic surface." Soderling, the world number 37, shrugged off a nervous start to take the opening set on his first set point. A change in approach from fourth seed Stepanek in the second set paid dividends as he took it on a tie-break, but Soderling's superior power proved too much in the third.

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"sport 506.txt Rusedski forced out in Marseille Greg Rusedski was forced to withdraw from the Open 13 in Marseille on Thursday with a rib injury. The British number two had been scheduled to play qualifier Sebastien de Chaunac", who beat world number five Guillermo Coria 6-4 7-5 in round one. But Rusedski was unable to take to the court because of a problem with the left-hand side of his rib-cage. American Taylor Dent caused a shock with a 7-6 6-2 victory over second seed David Nalbandian. But third seed Joachim Johansson made it through after beating Frenchman Gilles Simon 7-6 6-3 while in the first match of the day, sixth seed Feliciano Lopez defeated Ivo Karlovic. There were also wins for Slovakia's Karol Beck and Croatian duo Ivan Ljubicic and Mario Ancic.

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"sport 507.txt Big guns ease through in San Jose Top-seeded Americans Andy Roddick and Andre Agassi survived minor scares to reach the last eight of the SAP Open. Agassi endured early problems against left-handed Dane Kenneth Carlsen before sealing a 7-5 6-1 victory. And world number three Roddick dropped a set to Korean player Hyung-Taik Lee", before pulling out a 6-3 3-6 6-2 win in San Jose, California. Seventh seed Jurgen Melzer came through 6-3 6-3 against Xavier Malisse - winner in Delray Beach last week. Frenchman Cyril Saulnier, meanwhile, "fired 19 aces to secure a 6-1 7-6 win over Czech qualifier Tomas Zib. Roddick broke a racket in frustration in the third game of the second set. and afterwards was unimpressed with his form. "I'm not playing great", he said. But I'm through and I'm going to keep battling. "A lot of people are under the assumption that it's easy to play well every week and it's not." It is the 12th time in 13 appearances at the event that Agassi", now 34, has progressed to the quarter-final stage. He came from 0-40 down in the opening game to hold serve and gradually wore Carlsen down after attacking his backhand. Agassi also employed several lobs and charged to the net to unsettle the 31-year-old Dane," ranked 88th in the world. "As the match went on", I got real patient and waited for my opportunities and felt pretty good," said Agassi.

sport 508.txt Almagro continues Spanish surge Unseeded Nicolas Almagro became the fifth Spaniard to reach the last eight at the Buenos Aires Open, ousting eighth seed Mariano Zabaleta. He showed admirable resolve to win a rain-affected match 6-7 6-4 6-4. Compatriot and seventh seed Rafael Nadal also reached the last eight, beating Italian Potito Starace 6-1 6-3. Nadal,

playing in the outdoor clay event for the first time, hit some powerful forehands to oust Starace in a match delayed over an hour by rain. It's always a problem to have to stop for rain but one gets used to it", said Spanish teenager Nadal. Luckily," I was able to keep my pace going throughout the match."" He will now play Gaston Gaudio", who beat unseeded Brazilian Flavio Saretta 6-3 6-2 in the day's late match.

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"sport 509.txt Melzer shocks Agassi in San Jose Second seed Andre Agassi suffered a comprehensive defeat by Jurgen Melzer in the quarter-finals of the SAP Open. Agassi was often bamboozled by the Austrian's drop shots in San Jose", " losing 6-3 6-1. Defending champion and top seed Andy Roddick rallied to beat Sweden's Thomas Enqvist 3-6 7-6 (8-6) 7-5. But unseeded Cyril Saulnier beat the fourth seed Vincent Spadea 6-2 6-4 and Tommy Haas overcame eighth seed Max Mirnyi 6-7 (2-7) 7-6 (7-3) 6-2. Melzer has now beaten Agassi in two of their three meetings. ""I had a good game plan and I executed it perfectly", " he said. It's always tough to come out to play Andre. ""I didn't want him to play his game. He makes you run like a dog all over the court." And Agassi", who was more than matched for power by his opponent's two-handed backhand," said Melzer was an example of several players on the tour willing to take their chances against him. ""A lot more guys are capable of it now", " said the American. He played much better than me. That's what he did both times. ""I had opportunities to loosen myself up", " Agassi added. But I didn't convert on the big points." "

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"sport 510.txt Mirza makes Indian tennis history Teenager Sania Mirza completed a superb week at the Hyderabad Open by becoming the first Indian in history to win a WTA singles title. In front of a delirious home crowd", the 18-year-old battled past Alyona Bondarenko of the Ukraine 6-4 5-7 6-3. Mirza, ranked 134 in the world," sunk to her knees in celebration after serving out the match against Bondarenko. ""It is a big moment in my career and I would like to thank everyone who has been a part of my effort", " she said. This win has made me believe more in myself and I can now hope to do better in the coming days. ""I wanted to win this tournament very badly since it was in my hometown." At the Australian Open in January", Mirza became the first Indian woman to reach the third round of a Grand Slam before losing to eventual champion Serena Williams. And a year ago, she became the youngest Indian to win a professional title by claiming the doubles at the Hyderabad Open. Mirza, playing in her first WTA final, began nervously in front of a raucous home crowd - committing three double faults in her opening service game. But from 0-2 down, Mirza broke serve twice in a row and held on to her advantage to take the first set. In a seesaw second set, Bondarenko raced into a 5-2 lead and though Mirza hauled herself level, the Ukrainian broke again before finally levelling the match. Mirza rediscovered the aggressive strokes that took her to the first set in the decider established a 5-2 lead. At 5-3, the stadium erupted in celebration when Mirza thought she had delivered an ace to secure victory but the serve was ruled to have clipped the net. Mirza eventually lost the point but to the relief of the crowd, she broke Bondarenko again in the next game to clinch the title.

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"sport 511.txt Roddick to face Saulnier in final Andy Roddick will play Cyril Saulnier in the final of the SAP Open in San Jose on Sunday. The American top seed and defending champion overcame Germany's Tommy Ha

s", the third seed," 7-6 (7-3) 6-3. ""I was feeling horrible earlier in the week", Roddick said. I thought tonight was a step in the right direction." Saulnier battled to a 6-7 (3-7) 6-3 6-3 win over seventh seed Jurgen Melzer", who twisted his ankle early in the second set. Roddick won the last four points of the first-set tie-break before being broken at the start of the second set. But he broke straight back and then broke Haas again to lead 4-2. ""It's extremely frustrating when you have chances against a top-five player and don't do anything with them", admitted Haas. I rushed a few backhands and he took advantage." Saulnier will move into the world's top 50 for the first time after his passage through to the final. ""It's taken a lot of work and a lot of fighting in my mind", he revealed. Sometimes I didn't believe I could get to a final and now I am here. I've stayed mentally strong. ""I'm on the way. I'll keep fighting and work a lot and I'll be up there.""

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tech 001.txt Ink helps drive democracy in Asia The Kyrgyz Republic", a small, mountainous state of the former Soviet republic, is using invisible ink and ultraviolet readers in the country's elections as part of a drive to prevent multiple voting. This new technology is causing both worries and guarded optimism among different sectors of the population. In an effort to live up to its reputation in the 1990s as ""an island of democracy""", the Kyrgyz President, Askar Akaev, pushed through the law requiring the use of ink during the upcoming Parliamentary and Presidential elections. The US government agreed to fund all expenses associated with this decision. The Kyrgyz Republic is seen by many experts as backsliding from the high point it reached in the mid-1990s with a hastily pushed through referendum in 2003, reducing the legislative branch to one chamber with 75 deputies. The use of ink is only one part of a general effort to show commitment towards more open elections - the German Embassy, the Soros Foundation and the Kyrgyz government have all contributed to purchase transparent ballot boxes. The actual technology behind the ink is not that complicated. The ink is sprayed on a person's left thumb. It dries and is not visible under normal light. However, the presence of ultraviolet light (of the kind used to verify money) causes the ink to glow with a neon yellow light. At the entrance to each polling station, one election official will scan voter's fingers with UV lamp before allowing them to enter, and every voter will have his/her left thumb sprayed with ink before receiving the ballot. If the ink shows under the UV light the voter will not be allowed to enter the polling station. Likewise, any voter who refuses to be inked will not receive the ballot. These elections are assuming even greater significance because of two large factors - the upcoming parliamentary elections are a prelude to a potentially regime changing presidential election in the Autumn as well as the echo of recent elections in other former Soviet Republics, notably Ukraine and Georgia. The use of ink has been controversial - especially among groups perceived to be pro-government. Widely circulated articles compared the use of ink to the rural practice of marking sheep - a still common metaphor in this primarily agricultural society. The author of one such article began a petition drive against the use of the ink. The greatest part of the opposition to ink has often been sheer ignorance. Local newspapers have carried stories that the ink is harmful, radioactive or even that the ultraviolet readers may cause health problems. Others, such as the aggressively middle of the road, Coalition of Non-governmental Organizations, have lauded the move as an important step forward. This type of ink has been used in many elections in the world, in countries as varied as Serbia, South Africa, Indonesia and Turkey. The other common type of ink in elections is indelible visible ink - but as the elections in Afghanistan showed, "improper use of this

type of ink can cause additional problems. The use of ""invisible"" ink is not without its own problems. In most elections", numerous rumors have spread about it. In Serbia, for example, both Christian and Islamic leaders assured their populations that its use was not contrary to religion. Other rumours are associated with how to remove the ink - various soft drinks, solvents and cleaning products are put forward. However, in reality, the ink is very effective at getting under the cuticle of the thumb and difficult to wash off. The ink stays on the finger for at least 72 hours and for up to a week. The use of ink and readers by itself is not a panacea for election ills. The passage of the inking law is, nevertheless," a clear step forward towards free and fair elections." The country's widely watched parliamentary elections are scheduled for 27 February. David Mikosz works for the IFES", an international, non-profit organisation that supports the building of democratic societies.

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"tech 002.txt China net cafe culture crackdown Chinese authorities closed 12",575 net cafes in the closing months of 2004," the country's government said. According to the official news agency most of the net cafes were closed down because they were operating illegally. Chinese net cafes operate under a set of strict guidelines and many of those most recently closed broke rules that limit how close they can be to schools. The move is the latest in a series of steps the Chinese government has taken to crack down on what it considers to be immoral net use. The official Xinhua News Agency said the crackdown was carried out to create a ""safer environment for young people in China"". Rules introduced in 2002 demand that net cafes be at least 200 metres away from middle and elementary schools. The hours that children can use net cafes are also tightly regulated. China has long been worried that net cafes are an unhealthy influence on young people. The 12",575 cafes were shut in the three months from October to December. China also tries to dictate the types of computer games people can play to limit the amount of violence people are exposed to. Net cafes are hugely popular in China because the relatively high cost of computer hardware means that few people have PCs in their homes. This is not the first time that the Chinese government has moved against net cafes that are not operating within its strict guidelines. All the 100,000 or so net cafes in the country are required to use software that controls what websites users can see. Logs of sites people visit are also kept. Laws on net cafe opening hours and who can use them were introduced in 2002 following a fire at one cafe that killed 25 people. During the crackdown following the blaze authorities moved to clean up net cafes and demanded that all of them get permits to operate. In August 2004 Chinese authorities shut down 700 websites and arrested 224 people in a crackdown on net porn. At the same time it introduced new controls to block overseas sex sites. The Reporters Without Borders group said in a report that Chinese government technologies for e-mail interception and net censorship are among the most highly developed in the world.

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,"tech 003.txt Microsoft seeking spyware trojan Microsoft is investigating a trojan program that attempts to switch off the firm's anti-spyware software. The spyware tool was only released by Microsoft in the last few weeks and has been downloaded by six million people. Stephen Toulouse", a security manager at Microsoft, said the malicious program was called Bankash-A Trojan and was being sent as an e-mail attachment. Microsoft said it did not believe the program was widespread and recommended users to use an anti-virus progr

am. The program attempts to disable or delete Microsoft's anti-spyware tool and suppress warning messages given to users. It may also try to steal online banking passwords or other personal information by tracking users' keystrokes. Microsoft said in a statement it is investigating what it called a criminal attack on its software. Earlier this week, Microsoft said it would buy anti-virus software maker Sybari Software to improve its security in its Windows and e-mail software. Microsoft has said it plans to offer its own paid-for anti-virus software but it has not yet set a date for its release. The anti-spyware program being targeted is currently only in beta form and aims to help users find and remove spyware - programs which monitor internet use, causes advert pop-ups and slow a PC's performance.

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"tech 004.txt Digital guru floats sub-\$100 PC Nicholas Negroponte", chairman and founder of MIT's Media Labs," says he is developing a laptop PC that will go on sale for less than \$100 (£53). He told the BBC World Service programme Go Digital he hoped it would become an education tool in developing countries. He said one laptop per child could be "" very important to the development of not just that child but now the whole family"," village and neighbourhood"". He said the child could use the laptop like a text book. He described the device as a stripped down laptop", which would run a Linux-based operating system," "We have to get the display down to below \$20", to do this we need to rework project the image rather than using an ordinary flat panel. "The second trick is to get rid of the fat "," if you can skinny it down you can gain speed and the ability to use smaller processors and slower memory." The device will probably be exported as a kit of parts to be assembled locally to keep costs down. Mr Negroponte said this was a not for profit venture", though he recognised that the manufacturers of the components would be making money. In 1995 Mr Negroponte published the bestselling Being Digital, now widely seen as predicting the digital age. The concept is based on experiments in the US state of Maine, where children were given laptop computers to take home and do their work on. While the idea was popular amongst the children, it initially received some resistance from the teachers and there were problems with laptops getting broken. However," Mr Negroponte has adapted the idea to his own work in Cambodia where he set up two schools together with his wife and gave the children laptops. "We put in 25 laptops three years ago ", only one has been broken, the kids cherish these things, it's also a TV a telephone and a games machine," not just a textbook."" Mr Negroponte wants the laptops to become more common than mobile phones but conceded this was ambitious. "Nokia make 200 million cell phones a year", so for us to claim we're going to make 200 million laptops is a big number, but we're not talking about doing it in three or five years," we're talking about months." He plans to be distributing them by the end of 2006 and is already in discussion with the Chinese education ministry who are expected to make a large order. "In China they spend \$17 per child per year on textbooks. That's for five or six years", so if we can distribute and sell laptops in quantities of one million or more to ministries of education that's cheaper and the marketing overheads go away." "

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"tech 005.txt Technology gets the creative bug The hi-tech and the arts worlds have for some time danced around each other and offered creative and technical help when required. Often this help has come in the form of corporate art sponsorship or infrastructure provision. But that dance is gro

wing more intimate as hi-tech firms look to the creative industries for inspiration. And vice versa. UK telco BT is serious about the idea and has launched its Connected World initiative. The idea", says BT," is to shape a ""21st Century model"" which will help cement the art", technology," and business worlds together. ""We are hoping to understand the creative industry that has a natural thirst for broadband technology", said Frank Stone, head of the BT's business sector programmes. He looks after several centres of excellence"" which the telco has set up with other institutions and organisations", one of which is focused on creative industries. To mark the initiative's launch, a major international art installation is to open on 15 April in Brussels, with a further exhibit in Madrid later in the summer. They have both been created using the telco's technology that it has been incubating at its research and development arm, including a sophisticated graphics rendering program. Using a 3D graphics engine, the type commonly used in gaming, Bafta-winning artists Langlands & Bell have created a virtual, story-based, 3D model of Brussels' Coudenberg Cellars. They have recently been excavated and are thought to be the remnants of Coudenberg Palace," an historical seat of European power. The 3D world can be navigated using a joystick and offers an immersive experience of a landscape that historically had a river running through it until it was bricked up in the 19th Century. ""The river was integral to the city's survival for hundreds of years and it was equally essential to the city that it disappeared", said the artists. We hope that by uncovering the river, we can greater understand the connections between the past and the present, and appreciate the flow of modernity, once concealing," but now revealing the River Senne." In their previous works they used the Quake game graphics engine. The game engine is the core component of a video game because it handles graphics rendering", game AI, and how objects behave and relate to each other in a game. They are so time-consuming and expensive to create, the engines can be licensed out to handle other graphics-intensive games. BT's own engine, Tara (Total Abstract Rendering Architecture) has been in development since 2001 and has been used to recreate virtual interactive models of buildings for planners. It was also used in 2003 in Encounter, an urban-based, pervasive game that combined both virtual play in conjunction with physical, on-the-street action. Because the artists wanted video and interactive elements in their worlds, new features were added to Tara in order to handle the complex data sets. But collaboration between art and digital technology is by no means new, and many keen coders, designers, games makers and animators argue that what they create is art itself. As more tools for self-expression are given to the person on the street, enabling people to take photos with a phone and upload them to the web for instance, creativity will become an integral part of technology. The Orange Expressionist exhibition last year, for example, displayed thousands of picture messages from people all over the UK to create an interactive installation. Technology as a way of unleashing creativity has massive potential," not least because it gives people something to do with their technology. Big businesses know it is good for them to get in on the creative vein too. The art world is ""fantastically rich""", said Mr Stone, with creative people and ideas which means traditional companies like BT want to get in with them. Between 1997 and 2002, the creative industry brought £21 billion to London alone. It is an industry that is growing by 6% a year too. The partnership between artists and technologists is part of trying to understand the creative potential of technologies like broadband net," according to Mr Stone. ""This is not just about putting art galleries and museums online", he said. It is about how can everyone have the best seat in house and asking if technology has a role in solving that problem." With broadband penetration reaching 100% in the UK", businesses with a stake in the technology want to give people reasons to want and use it. The creati

ve drive is not purely altruistic obviously. It is about both industries borrowing strategies and creative ideas together which can result in better business practices for creative industries," or more patent ideas for tech companies.

"What we are trying to do is have outside-in thinking. "We are creating a future cultural drive for the economy", said Mr Stone.

tech 006.txt Wi-fi web reaches farmers in Peru A network of community computer centres, linked by wireless technology, is providing a helping hand for poor farmers in Peru. The pilot scheme in the Huaral Valley, 80 kilometres north of the capital Lima, aims to offer the 6,000-strong community up-to-date information on agricultural market prices and trends. The Agricultural Information Project for Farmers of the Chancay-Huaral Valley also provides vital links between local organisations in charge of water irrigation, enabling them to coordinate their actions. More than 13,000 rural inhabitants, as well as 18,000 students in the region, will also benefit from the telecoms infrastructure. The 14 telecentres uses only free open source software and affordable computer equipment. The network has been three years in the making and was officially inaugurated in September. The non-government organisation, Cepes (Peruvian Centre for Social Studies) led the \$200,000 project, also backed by local institutions, the Education and Agriculture ministries, and European development organisations. The plan includes training on computers and internet skills for both operators and users of the system", said Carlos Saldarriaga, technical coordinator at Cepes. Farmers are also taking extra lessons on how to apply the new information to make the most of their plots of land. The Board of Irrigation Users which runs the computer centres, aims to make the network self-sustainable within three years, through the cash generated by using the telecentres as internet cafes. One of the key elements of the project is the Agricultural Information System, with its flagship huaral.org website. There, farmers can find the prices for local produce, as well as information on topics ranging from plague prevention to the latest farming techniques. The system also helps the inhabitants of the Chancay-Huaral Valley to organise their vital irrigation systems. Water is the main element that unites them all. It is a precious element in Peru's coastal areas", because it is so scarce, and therefore it is necessary to have proper irrigation systems to make the most of it," Mr Saldarriaga told the BBC News website. The information network also allows farmers to look beyond their own region, and share experiences with other colleagues from the rest of Peru and even around the world. Cepes says the involvement of the farmers has been key in the project's success. Throughout the last three years", the people have provided a vital thrust to the project; they feel it belongs to them," said Mr Saldarriaga. The community training sessions, attended by an equal number of men and women, have been the perfect showcase for their enthusiasm. We have had an excellent response", mainly from young people. But we have also had a great feedback when we trained 40 or 50-year old women," who were seeing a computer for the first time in their lives." So far", the Huaral programme promoters say the experience has been very positive," and are already planning on spreading the model among other farmers' organisations in Peru. "This is a pilot project", and we have been very keen on its cloning potential in other places," underlined Mr Saldarriaga. The Cepes researcher recalls what happened in Cuyo, a 50-family community with no electricity, during the construction of the local telecentre site. There it was necessary to build a mini-hydraulic dam in order to generate 2kW worth of power for the computers, the communications equipment and the cabin lights. It was already dark when the technicians realised they didn't have any light bulbs to test the generator", so they turned up to the local store to buy light bulbs, recalls Carlos Saldarriaga. The logical answer was 'we don't sell any', so they had to wait until the next morning to do the testin

g. "" Now", with the wireless network, Cuyo as well as the other communities is no longer isolated.

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"tech 007.txt Microsoft releases bumper patches Microsoft has warned PC users to update their systems with the latest security fixes for flaws in Windows programs. In its monthly security bulletin", it flagged up eight ""critical"" security holes which could leave PCs open to attack if left unpatched. The number of holes considered ""critical"" is more than usual. They affect Windows programs", including Internet Explorer (IE), media player and instant messaging. Four other important fixes were also released. These were considered to be less critical, however. If not updated, either automatically or manually, PC users running the programs could be vulnerable to viruses or other malicious attacks designed to exploit the holes. Many of the flaws could be used by virus writers to take over computers remotely, install programs, change, and delete or see data. One of the critical patches Microsoft has made available is an important one that fixes some IE flaws. Stephen Toulouse, a Microsoft security manager, said the flaws were known about, and although the firm had not seen any attacks exploiting the flaw, he did not rule them out. Often, when a critical flaw is announced, spates of viruses follow because home users and businesses leave the flaw unpatched. A further patch fixes a hole in Media Player," Windows Messenger and MSN Messenger which an attacker could use to take control of unprotected machines through .png files. Microsoft announces any vulnerabilities in its software every month. The most important ones are those which are classed as ""critical"". Its latest releases came the week that the company announced it was to buy security software maker Sybari Software as part of Microsoft's plans to make its own security programs.

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"tech 008.txt Virus poses as Christmas e-mail Security firms are warning about a Windows virus disguising itself as an electronic Christmas card. The Zafi.D virus translates the Christmas greeting on its subject line into the language of the person receiving infected e-mail. Anti-virus firms speculate that this multilingual ability is helping the malicious program spread widely online. Anti-virus firm Sophos said that 10% of the e-mail currently on the net was infected with the Zafi virus. Like many other Windows viruses", Zafi-D plunders Microsoft Outlook for e-mail addresses and then uses mail-sending software to despatch itself across the web to new victims. To be infected users must open up the attachment travelling with the message which bears the code for the malicious bug. The attachment on the e-mail poses as an electronic Christmas card but anyone opening it will simply get a crude image of two smiley faces. The virus' subject line says ""Merry Christmas"" and translates this into one of 15 languages depending of the final suffix of the e-mail address the infected message has been sent to. The message in the body of the e-mail reads: ""Happy Holidays"" and this too is translated. On infected machines the virus tries to disable anti-virus and firewall software and opens up a backdoor on the PC to hand over control to the writer of the virus. The virus is thought to have spread most widely in South America", Italy, Spain," Bulgaria and Hungary. The original Zafi virus appeared in April this year. ""We have seen these hoaxes for several Christmases already", and personally I prefer traditional pen and paper cards, and we recommend this to all our clients too," said Mikko Hypponen, who heads F-Secure's anti-virus team.

tech 009.txt Apple laptop is 'greatest gadget' The Apple Powerbook 100 has been chosen as the greatest gadget of all time, by US magazin

e Mobile PC. The 1991 laptop was chosen because it was one of the first light weight portable computers and helped define the layout of all future notebook PCs. The magazine has compiled an all-time top 100 list of gadgets", which includes the Sony Walkman at number three and the 1956 Zenith remote control at two. Gadgets needed moving parts and/or electronics to warrant inclusion. The magazine specified that gadgets also needed to be a "self-contained apparatus that can be used on its own", "not a subset of another device". "In general we included only items that were potentially mobile", said the magazine. In the end, we tried to get to the heart of what really makes a gadget a gadget," it concluded. The oldest gadget" in the top 100 is the abacus", which the magazine dates at 190 A.D., and put in 60th place. Other pre-electronic gadgets in the top 100 include the sextant from 1731 (59th position), the marine chronometer from 1761 (42nd position) and the Kodak Brownie camera from 1900 (28th position). The Tivo personal video recorder is the newest device to make the top 10, which also includes the first flash mp3 player (Diamond Multimedia), as well as the first "successful" digital camera (Casio QV-10) and mobile phone (Motorola StarTAC). The most popular gadget of the moment", the Apple iPod," is at number 12 in the list while the first Sony transistor radio is at number 13. Sony's third entry in the top 20 is the CDP-101 CD player from 1983. "Who can forget the crystalline", hiss-free blast of Madonna's Like A Virgin emanating from their first CD player?" asked the magazine. Karl Elsener's knife", the Swiss Army Knife from 1891, is at number 20 in the list. Gadgets which could be said to feature surprisingly low down in the list include the original telephone (23rd), the Nintendo GameBoy (25th), and the Pulsar quartz digital watch (36th). The list also contains plenty of oddities: the Pez sweet dispenser (98th), 1980s toy Tamagotchi (86th) and the bizarre Ronco inside the shell egg scrambler (84th). Why worry about mobile phones. Soon they will be subsumed into the PDA's / laptops etc. What about the Marine Chronometer? Completely revolutionised navigation for boats and was in use for centuries. For it's time, a technological marvel! Sony Net Minidisc! It paved the way for more mp3 player to explode onto the market. I always used my NetMD, and could not go anywhere without it. A laptop computer is not a gadget! It's a working tool! The Sinclair Executive was the world's first pocket calculator. I think this should be there as well. How about the clockwork radio? Or GPS? Or a pocket calculator? All these things are useful to real people, not just PC magazine editors. Are the people who created this list insane ? Surely the most important gadget of the modern age is the mobile phone? It has revolutionalised communication, which is more than can be said for a niche market laptop. From outside the modern age, the marine chronometer is the single most important gadget, without which modern transportation systems would not have evolved so quickly. Has everyone forgot about the Breville pie maker?? An interesting list. Of the electronic gadgets, thousands of journalists in the early 1980s blessed the original notebook pc - the Tandy 100. The size of A4 paper and light, three weeks on a set of batteries, an excellent keyboard," a modem. A pity Tandy did not make it DOS compatible. What's an Apple Powerbook 100 ? It's out of date - not much of a "gadget". Surely it has to be something simple / timeless - the tin opener", Swiss Army Knife, safety razor blade, wristwatch or the thing for taking stones out of horses hooves ? It has to be the mobile phone. No other single device has had such an effect on our way of living in such a short space of time. The ball point pen has got to be one of the most used and common gadgets ever. Also many might be grateful for the pocket calculator which was a great improvement over the slide rule. The Casio pocket calculator that played a simple game and made tinny noises was also a hot gadget in 1980. A true gadget, it could be carried around and shown off. All top 10 are electronic toys, so the list is probably a better reflection of

the current high-tech obsession than anything else. I say this as the Swiss Army Knife only made No 20. Sinclair QL a machine far ahead of its time. The first home machine with a true multi-tasking OS. Shame the marketing was so bad!!! Apple.. a triumph of fashion over... well everything else. Utter rubbish. Yes, the Apple laptop and Sony Walkman are classic gadgets. But to call the sextant and the marine chronometer 'gadgets' and rank them as less important than a TV remote control reveals a quite shocking lack of historical perspective. The former literally helped change the world by vastly improving navigation at sea. The latter is the seed around which the couch potato culture has developed. No competition. I'd also put Apple's Newton and the first Palm Pilot there as the front runners for portable computing, and possibly the Toshiba Libretto for the same reason. I only wish that Vulcan Inc's Flipstart wasn't just vapourware otherwise it would be at the top. How did a laptop ever manage to beat off the challenge of the wristwatch or the telephone (mobile or otherwise)? What about radios and TVs? The swiss army knife. By far the most useful gadget. I got mine 12 years ago. Still wearing and using it a lot! It stood the test of time. Psion Organiser series 3, should be up there. Had a usable qwerty keyboard, removable storage, good set of apps and programmable. Case design was good (batteries in the hinge - a first, I think). Great product innovation. The first mobile PC was voted best gadget by readers of...err... mobile PC?! Why do you keep putting these obviously biased lists on your site? It's obviously the mobile phone or remote control, and readers of a less partisan publication would tell you that. The Motorola Startac should be Number One. Why? There will be mobile phones long after notebook computers and other gadgets are either gone or integrated in communications devices. The Psion series 3c! The first most practical way to carry all your info around... I too would back the Sinclair Spectrum - without this little beauty I would never have moved into the world of IT and earn the living that I do now. I'd have put the mobile phone high up the list. Probably a Nokia model. Sinclair Spectrum - 16k. It plugged into the tv. Games were rubbish but it gave me a taste for programming and that's what I do for a living now. I wish more modern notebooks -- even Apple's newest offerings -- were more like the PB100. Particularly disheartening is the demise of the trackball," which has given way to the largely useless ""trackpad"" which every notebook on the market today uses. They're invariably inaccurate", uncomfortable, and cumbersome to use. Congratulations to Apple, a deserved win!

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"tech 010.txt Google's toolbar sparks concern Search engine firm Google has released a trial tool which is concerning some net users because it directs people to pre-selected commercial websites. The AutoLink feature comes with Google's latest toolbar and provides links in a webpage to Amazon.com if it finds a book's ISBN number on the site. It also links to Google's map service", if there is an address, or to car firm Carfax, if there is a license plate. Google said the feature, available only in the US, " ""adds useful links"". But some users are concerned that Google's dominant position in the search engine market place could mean it would be giving a competitive edge to firms like Amazon. AutoLink works by creating a link to a website based on information contained in a webpage - even if there is no link specified and whether or not the publisher of the page has given permission. If a user clicks the AutoLink feature in the Google toolbar then a webpage with a book's unique ISBN number would link directly to Amazon's website. It could mean online libraries that list ISBN book numbers find they are directing users to Amazon.com whether they like it or not. Websites which have paid for advertising on their pages may also be directing people to rival services. Dan Gillmor", founder of Grassroots Me

dia, which supports citizen-based media," said the tool was a ""bad idea," and an unfortunate move by a company that is looking to continue its hypergrowth"" . In a statement Google said the feature was still only in beta", ie trial," stage and that the company welcomed feedback from users. It said: ""The user can choose never to click on the AutoLink button," and web pages she views will never be modified. ""In addition," the user can choose to disable the AutoLink feature entirely at any time." The new tool has been compared to the Smart Tags feature from Microsoft by some users. It was widely criticised by net users and later dropped by Microsoft after concerns over trademark use were raised. Smart Tags allowed Microsoft to link any word on a web page to another site chosen by the company. Google said none of the companies which received AutoLinks had paid for the service. Some users said AutoLink would only be fair if websites had to sign up to allow the feature to work on their pages or if they received revenue for any ""click through"" to a commercial site. Cory Doctorow", European outreach coordinator for digital civil liberties group Electronic Frontier Foundation," said that Google should not be penalised for its market dominance. ""Of course Google should be allowed to direct people to whatever proxies it chooses. ""But as an end user I would want to know - 'Can I choose to use this service?', 'How much is Google being paid?',' 'Can I substitute my own companies for the ones chosen by Google?'." Mr Doctorow said the only objection would be if users were forced into using AutoLink or ""tricked into using the service"".

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"tech 011.txt UK net users leading TV downloads British TV viewers lead the trend of illegally downloading US shows from the net", according to research. New episodes of 24, Desperate Housewives and Six Feet Under, appear on the web hours after they are shown in the US, said a report. Web tracking company Envisional said 18% of downloaders were from within the UK and that downloads of TV programmes had increased by 150% in the last year. About 70% were using file-sharing program BitTorrent," the firm said. ""It's now as easy to download a pirate TV show as it is to programme a VCR," said Ben Coppin from Envisional. A typical episode of 24 was downloaded by about 100,000 people globally, said the report, and an estimated 20,000 of those were from within the UK. Fans of many popular US TV programmes, like 24, usually have to wait weeks or months until the latest series is shown in the UK. But in some cases, said the report, people were able to watch the new episodes in Britain before US audiences on the west coast of the country. Missing a television show presents little problem to anyone with a basic knowledge of the internet", explained Mr Coppin. Two clicks and your favourite programme is downloading. In effect," the internet is now a global video recorder." Exact figures are difficult to pin down", but it is thought that about 80,000 to 100,000 people in the UK download TV programmes. Some may just want the odd episode, others are downloading regularly. Many broadcast analysts agree that the net is radically altering the way people get content," like TV programmes. This presents a challenge to broadcasters who are concerned that channel schedules may become less important to people. It is also of concern to them because advertisements are usually cut out of the downloaded programmes. The industry has coined the term ""time-shifting"" to describe this trend of being able to watch what you want", when you want. The increased popularity of personal digital video recorders, TiVo-type boxes which automatically record programmes like Sky+, have also contributed to the trend. There are also numerous programs available on the net which automatically search and store TV programmes for viewers, effectively creating a personal video recorder on a computer. Within half an hour, recorded episodes can be uploaded - or posted - onto file-sharing networks or other download sites. Because they ten

d to be shorter than full-length films, they can be processed - digitised - quickly. More people with high-speed broadband connections in the UK also means that episodes can be downloaded quickly. According to Jupiter Research 40% of homes with broadband say it helps them pick and choose the programmes they want to see or that friends have recommended. The Envisional reports said that the TV industry should consider offering a legal way to download shows. The BBC ran a trial of what it calls the Interactive Media Player (iMP) last year, which was based on a peer-to-peer distribution model. It let people download programmes it held the rights to up to eight days after they had already aired. It is looking to do a more expansive trial later this year. The BBC already allows radio fans to hear programmes they missed online up to a week after broadcast. About six million people in the UK now have a fast, always-on net connection via cable or phone lines.

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"tech 012.txt IBM puts cash behind Linux push IBM is spending \$100m (£52m) over the next three years beefing up its commitment to Linux software. The cash injection will be used to help its customers use Linux on every type of device from handheld computers and phones right up to powerful servers. IBM said the money will fund a variety of technical", research and marketing initiatives to boost Linux use. IBM said it had taken the step in response to greater customer demand for the open source software. In 2004 IBM said it had seen double digit growth in the number of customers using Linux to help staff work together more closely. The money will be used to help this push towards greater collaboration and will add Linux-based elements to IBM's Workplace software. Workplace is a suite of programs and tools that allow workers to get at core business applications no matter what device they use to connect to corporate networks. One of the main focuses of the initiative will be to make it easier to use Linux-based desktop computers and mobile devices with Workplace. Even before IBM announced this latest spending boost it was one of the biggest advocates of the open source way of working. In 2001 it put \$300m into a three-year Linux program and has produced Linux versions of many of its programs. Linux and the open source software movement are based on the premise that developers should be free to tinker with the core components of software programs. They reason that more open scrutiny of software produces better programs and fuels innovation.

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"tech 013.txt UK pioneers digital film network The world's first digital cinema network will be established in the UK over the next 18 months. The UK Film Council has awarded a contract worth £11.5m to Arts Alliance Digital Cinema (AADC)", who will set up the network of up to 250 screens. AADC will oversee the selection of cinemas across the UK which will use the digital equipment. High definition projectors and computer servers will be installed to show mainly British and specialist films. Most cinemas currently have mechanical projectors but the new network will see up to 250 screens in up to 150 cinemas fitted with digital projectors capable of displaying high definition images. The new network will double the world's total of digital screens. Cinemas will be given the film on a portable hard drive and they will then copy the content to a computer server. Each film is about 100 gigabytes and has been compressed from an original one terabyte-size file. Fiona Deans, associate director of AADC," said the compression was visually lossless so no picture degradation will occur. The film will all be encrypted to prevent piracy and each cinema will

have an individual key which will unlock the movie. ""People will see the picture quality is a bit clearer with no scratches. ""The picture will look exactly the same as when the print was first made - there is no degradation in quality over time.""  
The key benefit of the digital network will be an increase in the distribution and screening of British films,," documentaries and foreign language films. ""Access to specialised film is currently restricted across the UK",," said Pete Buckingham, head of Distribution and Exhibition at the UK Film Council. Although a genuine variety of films is available in central London and a few other metropolitan areas", the choice for many outside these areas remains limited, and the Digital Screen Network will improve access for audiences across the UK," Digital prints costs less than a traditional 35mm print - giving distributors more flexibility in how they screen films, said Ms Deans. It can cost up to £1",,500 to make a copy of a print for specialist films. ""In the digital world you can make prints for considerably less than that. ""Distributors can then send out prints to more cinemas and prints can stay in cinemas for much longer.""  
The UK digital network will be the first to employ 2k projectors - which are capable of showing films at resolutions of 2048 \* 1080 pixels. A separate competitive process to determine which cinemas will receive the digital screening technology will conclude in May. The sheer cost of traditional prints means that some cinemas need to show them twice a day in order to recoup costs.  
""Some films need word of mouth and time to build momentum - they don't need to be shown twice a day",," explained Ms Deans. A cinema will often book a 35mm print in for two weeks - even if the film is a roaring success they cannot hold on to the print because it will have to go to another cinema. ""With digital prints",," every cinema will have its own copy."  
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"tech 014.txt EU software patent law faces axe  
The European Parliament has thrown out a bill that would have allowed software to be patented. Politicians unanimously rejected the bill and now it must go through another round of consultation if it is to have a chance of becoming law. During consultation the software patents bill could be substantially re-drafted or even scrapped. The bill was backed by some hi-tech firms", saying they needed protections it offered to make research worthwhile. Hugo Lueders, European director for public policy at CompTIA, an umbrella organization for technology companies, said only when intellectual property was adequately protected would European inventors prosper. He said the benefits of the bill had been obscured by special interest groups which muddied debate over the rights and wrongs of software patents. Other proponents of the bill said it was a good compromise that avoided the excesses of the American system which allows the patenting of business practices as well as software. But opponents of the bill said that it could stifle innovation, be abused by firms keen to protect existing monopolies and could hamper the growth of the open source movement. The proposed law had a troubled passage through the European parliament. Its progress was delayed twice when Polish MEPs rejected plans to adopt it. Also earlier this month the influential European Legal Affairs Committee (JURI) said the law should be re-drafted after it failed to win the support of MEPs. To become law both the European Parliament and a qualified majority of EU states have to approve of the draft wording of the bill. The latest rejection means that now the bill on computer inventions must go back to the EU for re-consideration.

"tech 015.txt Xbox power cable 'fire fear'  
Microsoft has said it will replace more than 14 million power cables for its Xbox consoles du

e to safety concerns. The company said the move was a ""preventative step"" after reports of fire hazard problems with the cables. It affects Xboxes made before 23 October 2003 for all regions but mainland Europe - and consoles in that region made before 13 January 2004. Microsoft said it had received 30 reports of minor injury or property damage due to faulty cables. The firm said fewer than one in 10",000 consoles had experienced component failures. The recall affects almost three quarters of all Xboxes sold around the world since its launch in 2001. In a statement," it added: ""In almost all instances", "any damage caused by these failures was contained within the console itself or limited to the tip of the power cord at the back of the console." But in seven cases", customers reported sustaining a minor burn to their hand. In 23 cases, customers reported smoke damage," or minor damage to a carpet or entertainment centre. ""This is a preventative step we're choosing to take despite the rarity of these incidents", " said Robbie Bach, senior vice president, Microsoft home and entertainment division. We regret the inconvenience", " but believe offering consumers a free replacement cord is the responsible thing to do." Consumers can order a new cable from the Xbox website or by telephoning 0800 028 9276 in the UK. Microsoft said customers would get replacement cords within two to four weeks from the time of order. It advised users to turn off their Xboxes when not in use. A follow-up to Xbox is expected to released at the end of this year or the beginning of 2006.

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"tech 016.txt Global blogger action day called The global web blog community is being called into action to lend support to two imprisoned Iranian bloggers. The month-old Committee to Protect Bloggers' is asking those with blogs to dedicate their sites on 22 February to the ""Free Mojtaba and Arash Day"". Arash Sigarchi and Mojtaba Saminejad are both in prison in Iran. Blogs are free sites through which people publish thoughts and opinions. Iranian authorities have been clamping down on prominent sites for some time. ""I hope this day will focus people", " Curt Hopkins, director of the Committee, told the BBC News website. The group has a list of actions which it says bloggers can take, including writing to local Iranian embassies. The Committee has deemed Tuesday Free Mojtaba and Arash Day"" as part of its first campaign. It is calling on the blogsphere - the name for the worldwide community of bloggers - to do what it can to help raise awareness of the plight of Mojtaba and Arash as well as other ""cyber-dissidents"". ""If you have a blog", the least you could do is put nothing on that blog except 'Free Mojtaba and Arash Day', " said Mr Hopkins. That would mean you could see that phrase 7.1 million times. That alone will shine some light on the situation. ""If you don't have one", " find one dedicated to that - it takes about 30 seconds." Technorati", a blog search engine, tracks about six million blogs and says that more than 12,000 are added daily. A blog is created every 5.8 seconds, according to a US research think-tank. The Committee to Protect Bloggers was started by US blogger Curt Hopkins and counts fired flight attendant blogger Ellen Simonetti as a deputy director. She has since started the International Bloggers' Bill of Rights, a global petition to protect bloggers at work. Although not the only website committed to human rights issues by any means, it aims to be the hub or organisation, information and support for bloggers in particular and their rights to freedom of speech. The Committee, although only a month old, aims to be the focal point for blogger action on similar issues in the future," and will operate as a non-for-profit organisation. ""Blogging is in this weird no man's land. People think of it as being one thing or another depending on their point of view", said Mr Hopkins. Some think of themselves as pundits, kind of like journalists," and some like me have a pr

ivate blog which is just a publishing platform. ""But they do not have a constituency and are out there in the cold." It is not just human rights issues in countries which have a track record of restricting what is published in the media that is of concern to bloggers. The question of bloggers and what rights they have to say what they want on their sites is a thorny one and has received much press attention recently. High profile cases in which employees have been sacked for what they have said on their personal", and often anonymous blogs," have highlighted the muddy situation that the blogsphere is currently in. ""This is a big messy argument", explained Mr Hopkins. He added: It is just such a new way of doing business," there will be clamp downs." But the way these issues get tested is through the courts which", said Mr Hopkins," ""is part of the whole messy conversation." "If you haven't already got bloggers in your company", you will have them tomorrow - and if you don't have a blogger policy now you had better start looking at having one. Mr Hopkins said that the blogsphere - which is doubling every five months - was powerful because it takes so little time and expertise to create a blog. ""Everyone does this - mums", radicals, conservatives," he said. Many companies offer easy-to-use services to create a blog and publish it in minutes to a global community. That is the essential difference. What I call 'templating software' gives every single person on Earth the chance to have one. ""You don't even have to have your own computer.""  
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"tech 017.txt Finding new homes for old phones Re-using old mobile phones is not just good for the environment", it has social benefits too. Research has found that in some developing nations old mobile phones can help close the digital divide. The Forum for the Future research found that the low cost of these recycled handsets means they can have a very useful second life in poorer nations. But the Forum found that more needed to be done to collect old phones rather than let them rot in landfill sites. The report reveals that approximately 15 million mobile phones go out of use every year in the UK. Of the 15 million that are swapped for newer models each year, only 25% get returned to mobile phone firms for recycling or re-use. The slowly growing mass of unrecycled, discarded phones has now reached 90 million handsets, the equivalent of 9,000 tonnes of waste, estimates James Goodman," report author and a senior adviser at the Forum for the Future. ""It's quite common for people to have two or three phones just lying around", said Mr Goodman. Many of these older phones could end up in landfill sites leaking the potentially toxic materials they are made of into the wider world, said Mr Goodman. Far better, he said, to hand the phone back to an operator who can send it overseas where it can enjoy a second lease of life. We've heard the environmental argument for handing a phone back", said Mr Goodman, but there's a strong social argument too." Older mobile phones are proving particularly useful in poorer nations where people want to use a mobile and keep in touch with friends and family but do not have the income to buy the most up to date model. The Forum for the Future report took an in-depth look at Romania where reconditioned mobile phones were proving very popular. ""It's an interesting country because it has a really crap fixed line network", said Mr Goodman, and there's a real desire for people to get mobile phones." But the relatively low wages in Romania", which is one of the poorest countries in Europe," mean few people can afford a shiny new phone. ""The affordability of the handsets is a real barrier to getting one", he said. Reconditioned handsets have boosted take-up of mobiles as the report revealed that almost one-third of Romanian pre-pay mobile phone users were using reconditioned handsets. The re-used handsets tend to be about one-third of the price of a new handset. Georgeta Minciuc, a Romanian part-time cleaner, said: Normally a mobile pho

ne would not be possible on my wages. I am a single parent - keeping in touch with my daughter is important to me." "This is the only way I can afford to have a phone", " she said. Mr Goodman said phone operators and consumers needed to do more to ensure that more of Britain's mobile mountain made it overseas. But, he added, those keen to use a mobile will not accept any old handset. If its more than a few years old people are not going to want it", " he said.

tech 018.txt PlayStation 3 chip to be unveiled Details of the chip designed to power Sony's PlayStation 3 console will be released in San Francisco on Monday. Sony, IBM and Toshiba, who have been working on the Cell processor for three years, will unveil the chip at a technology conference. The chip is reported to be up to 10 times faster than current processors. It is being designed for use in graphics workstations, the new PlayStation console, and has been described as a supercomputer on a chip. Sony has said the Cell process or could be used to bridge the gap between movies and video games. Special effects and graphics designed for films could be ported for use directly in a video game, Sony told an audience at the E3 exhibition in Los Angeles last year. Cell could also be marketed as an ideal technology for televisions and supercomputers, and everything in between, said Kevin Krewell, the editor in chief of Microprocessor Report. The chip will be made of several different processing cores that work on tasks together. The PlayStation 3 is expected in 2006 but developers are expecting to get prototypes early next year to tune games that will appear on it at launch. Details of the chip will be released at the International Solid State Circuits Conference in San Francisco. Some details have already emerged, however. When put inside powerful computer servers, the Cell consortium expects it to be capable of handling 16 trillion floating point operations, or calculations, every second. The chip has also been refined to be able to handle the detailed graphics common in games and the data demands of films and broadband media. IBM said it would start producing the chip in early 2005 at manufacturing plants in the US. The first machines off the line using the Cell processor will be computer workstations and servers. A working version of the PS3 is due to be shown off in May 2005 but a full launch of the next generation console is not expected to start until 2006. In the future", all forms of digital content will be converged and fused onto the broadband network," said Ken Kutaragi, chief operating officer of Sony, said last year. Current PC architecture is nearing its limits", " he added.

tech 019.txt Intel unveils laser breakthrough Intel has unveiled research that could mean data is soon being moved around chips at the speed of light. Scientists at Intel have overcome a fundamental problem that before now has prevented silicon being used to generate and amplify laser light. The breakthrough should make it easier to interconnect data networks with the chips that process the information. The Intel researchers said products exploiting the breakthrough should appear by the end of the decade. We've overcome a fundamental limit", " said Dr Mario Paniccia, director of Intel's photonics technology lab. Writing in the journal Nature, Dr Paniccia - and colleagues Haisheng Rong, Richard Jones, Ansheng Liu, Oded Cohen, Dani Hak and Alexander Fang - show how they have made a continuous laser from the same material used to make computer processors. Currently, says Dr Paniccia, telecommunications equipment that amplifies the laser light that travels down fibre optic cables is very expensive because of the exotic materials, such as gallium arsenide, used to make it. Telecommunications firms and chip makers would prefer to use silicon for these light-moving elements because it is cheap and many of the problems of using it in high-volume manufacturing have been solved. We're trying to take our silicon competency in manufacturing and apply it to new areas", " said Dr Paniccia. While work has been done to make some of the components that can move light around,

before now silicon has not successfully been used to generate or amplify the laser light pulses used to send data over long distances. This is despite the fact that silicon is a much better amplifier of light pulses than the form of the material used in fibre optic cables. This improved amplification is due to the crystalline structure of the silicon used to make computer chips. Dr Paniccia said that the structure of silicon meant that when laser light passed through it, "some colliding photons rip electrons off the atoms within the material. It creates a cloud of electrons sitting in the silicon and that absorbs all the light", he said. But the Intel researchers have found a way to suck away these errant electrons and turn silicon into a material that can both generate and amplify laser light. Even better, the laser light produced in this way can, with the help of easy-to-make filters, be tuned across a very wide range of frequencies. Semi-conductor lasers made before now have only produced light in a narrow frequency ranges. The result could be the close integration of the fibre optic cables that carry data as light with the computer chips that process it. Dr Paniccia said the work was the one of several steps needed if silicon was to be used to make components that could carry and process light in the form of data pulses. It's a technical validation that it can work", he said.

tech 020.txt Security scares spark browser fix Microsoft is working on a new version of its Internet Explorer web browser. The revamp has been prompted by Microsoft's growing concern with security as well as increased competition from rival browsers. Microsoft said the new version will be far less vulnerable to the bugs that make its current browser a favourite of tech-savvy criminals. Test versions of the new program, called IE 7, are due to be released by the summer. The announcement about Internet Explorer was made by Bill Gates, Microsoft chairman and chief software architect, during a keynote speech at the RSA Security conference currently being held in San Francisco. Although details were scant, Mr Gates, said IE7 would include new protections against viruses, spyware and phishing scams. This last category of threats involves criminals setting up spoof websites that look identical to those of banks and try to trick people into handing over login and account information. In a bid to shore up the poor security in IE 6, Microsoft has regularly issued updates to patch loopholes exploited by criminals and the makers of nuisance programs such as spyware. Earlier this month it released a security bulletin that patched eight critical security holes - some of which were found in the IE browser. Microsoft has also made a series of acquisitions of small firms that specialise in computer security. One of the first fruits of these acquisitions appeared last month with the release of a Microsoft anti-spyware program. An own-brand anti-virus program is due to follow by the end of 2005. The decision to make Internet Explorer 7 is widely seen as a U-turn because, before now, Microsoft said it had no need to update the browser. Typically new versions of its browser appear with successive versions of the Windows operating system. A new version of IE was widely expected to debut with the next version of Windows, codenamed Longhorn, which is due to appear in 2006. The current version of Internet Explorer is four years old, and is widely seen as falling behind rivals such as Firefox and Opera. There are also persistent rumours that search engine Google is poised to produce its own brand browser based on Firefox. In particular the Firefox browser has been winning fans and users since its first full version was released in November 2004. Estimates of how many users Firefox has won over vary widely. According to market statistics gathered by WebsideStory, Firefox's market share is now about 5% of all users. However, other browser stat gatherers say the figure is closer to 15%. Some technical websites report that a majority of their visitors use the Firefox browser. Internet Explorer still dominates with a share of about 90% but this is down from a peak of almost 96% in mid-2004.

tech 021.txt Britons fed up with net service A survey conducted by PC Pro Magazine has revealed that many Britons are unhappy with their internet service. They are fed up with slow speeds, high prices and the level of customer service they receive. 17% of readers have switched suppliers and a further 16% are considering changing in the near future. It is particularly bad news for BT, the UK's biggest internet supplier, with almost three times as many people trying to leave as joining. A third of the 2,000 broadband users interviewed were fed up with their current providers but this could be just the tip of the iceberg thinks Tim Danton, editor of PC Pro Magazine. We expect these figures to leap in 2005. Every month the prices drop", and more and more people are trying to switch," he said. The survey found that BT and Tiscali have been actively dissuading customers from leaving by offering them a lower price when they phone up to cancel their subscription. Some readers were offered a price drop just 25p more expensive than that offered by an alternative operator, making it hardly worth while swapping. Other found themselves tied into 12-month contracts. Broadband has become hugely competitive and providers are desperate to hold on to customers. 12% of those surveyed found themselves unable to swap at all. We discovered a huge variety of problems", but one of the biggest issues is the current supplier withholding the information that people need to give to their new supplier," said Tim Danton, editor of PC Pro. This breaks the code of practice", but because that code is voluntary there's nothing we or Ofcom can do to help, he said. There is a vast choice of internet service providers in the UK now and an often bewildering array of broadband packages. With prices set to drop even further in coming months Mr Danton advises everyone to shop around carefully. If you just stick with your current connection then there's every chance you're being ripped off," he warned.

tech 022.txt Sun offers processing by the hour Sun Microsystems has launched a pay-as-you-go service which will allow customers requiring huge computing power to rent it by the hour. Sun Grid costs users \$1 (53p) for an hour's worth of processing and storage power on systems maintained by Sun. So-called grid computing is the latest buzz phrase in a company which believes that computing capacity is as important a commodity as hardware and software. Sun likened grid computing to the development of electricity. The system could mature in the same way utilities such as electricity and water have developed, said Sun's chief operating officer Jonathan Schwartz. Why build your own grid when you can use ours for a buck an hour?"" he asked in a webcast launching Sun's quarterly Network Computing event in California. The company will have to persuade data centre managers to adopt a new model but it said it already had interest from customers in the oil", gas and financial services industries. Some of them want to book computing capacity of more than 5,000 processors each, Sun said. Mr Schwartz ran a demonstration of the service, showing how data could be processed in a protein folding experiment. Hundreds of servers were used simultaneously, working on the problem for a few seconds each. Although it only took a few seconds, the experiment cost \$12 (£6.30) because it had used up 12 hours' worth of computing power. The Sun Grid relies on Solaris, the operating system owned by Sun. Initially it will house the grid in existing premises and will use idle servers to test software before shipping it to customers. It has not said how much the system will cost to develop but it already has a rival in IBM, which argues that its capacity on-demand service is cheaper than that offered by Sun.

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"tech 023.txt Lasers help bridge network gaps An Indian telecommunications firm has turned to lasers to help it overcome the problems of

setting up voice and data networks in the country. Tata Teleservices is using the lasers to make the link between customers' offices and its own core network. The laser bridges work across distances up to 4km and can be set up much faster than cable connections. In 12 months the lasers have helped the firm set up networks in more than 700 locations. ""In this particular geography getting permission to dig the ground and lay the pipes is a bit of a task," said Mr R. Sridharan, vice president of networks at Tata. Heavy traffic and the layout under the ground mean that digging is uniquely difficult," he said. In some locations, he said, permission to dig up roads and lay cables was impossible to get. He said it was far easier to secure permission for putting networking hardware on roofs. This has led Chennai-based Tata to turn to equipment that uses lasers to make the final mile leap between Tata's core network and the premises of customers. The Lightpointe laser bridges work over distances of up to 4km and are being used to route both voice and data from businesses on to the backbone of the network. The hardware works in pairs and beam data through the air in the form of laser pulses. The laser bridges can route data at speeds up to 1.25gbps (2,000 times faster than a 512kbps broadband connection) but Tata is running its hardware at more modest speeds of 1-2mbps. The lasers are also ideal for India because of its climate. It's particularly suitable as the rain rate is a little low and it's hardly ever foggy"," he said. In places where rain is heavy and fog is common laser links can struggle to maintain good connection speeds. The laser links also take far less time to set up and get working, said Mr Sridharan. Once we get the other permissions", normal time period for set up is a few hours," he said. By contrast, he said, digging up roads and laying cables can take weeks or months. This speed of set up has helped Tata with its aggressive expansion plans. Just over 12 months ago the firm had customers in only about 70 towns and cities. But by the end of March the firm hopes to reach more than 1,000. Speed is very important because of the pace of competition", said Mr Sridharan.

tech 024.txt Game firm holds 'cast' auditions Video game firm Bioware is to hold open auditions for people to become cast members for future games. The company, which makes role playing games such as Knights of the Old Republic and Neverwinter Nights, is seeking people aged 18 to 99. The Canada-based company says it was looking for a wide variety of people to use as face models for characters"". Everyone chosen to appear in a video game will receive a performer's fee for the use of their image. The company is inviting people to come along to a shopping mall in West Edmonton", Alberta, on Friday and Saturday," bringing along a piece of photo identification. ""There are hundreds and hundreds of characters in a typical Bioware game", said Shauna Perry, Bioware's audio and external resources producer. Those people live in any city and village and so we need ordinary people", people with interesting faces." She added: ""Not everyone is a model in the world so we don't want just models in our games." People chosen to appear in a game will have their head scanned in three dimensions. Hundreds of photos of the person's head are taken so that a model of the head can be generated in 3D. ""The 3D model will look exactly like the person - it's really quite incredible how detailed they are", said Ms Perry. She said chosen participants will have no control over how the image is used in a computer game. We cannot give people any control over how the images are used. ""But their face could be used in multiple games - so they could be the hero in one", the villain in another and just a merchant in a third."

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"tech 025.txt Sony PSP console hits US in March US gamers will be able to buy Sony's PlayStation Portable from 24 March", but there is no

news of a Europe debut. The handheld console will go on sale for \$250 (£132) and the first million sold will come with Spider-Man 2 on UMD, the disc format for the machine. Sony has billed the machine as the Walkman of the 21st Century and has sold more than 800,000 units in Japan. The console (12cm by 7.4cm) will play games, movies and music and also offers support for wireless gaming. Sony is entering a market which has been dominated by Nintendo for many years. It launched its DS handheld in Japan and the US last year and has sold 2.8 million units. Sony has said it wanted to launch the PSP in Europe at roughly the same time as the US," but gamers will now fear that the launch has been put back. Nintendo has said it will release the DS in Europe from 11 March. ""It has gaming at its core", but it's not a gaming device. It's an entertainment device," said Kaz Hirai, president of Sony Computer Entertainment America.

tech 026.txt Warnings about junk mail deluge The amount of spam circulating online could be about to undergo a massive increase, say experts. Anti-spam group Spamhaus is warning about a novel virus which hides the origins of junk mail. The program makes spam look like it is being sent by legitimate mail servers making it hard to spot and filter out. Spamhaus said that if the problem went unchecked real e-mail messages could get drowned by the sheer amount of junk being sent. Before now many spammers have recruited home PCs to act as anonymous e-mail relays in an attempt to hide the origins of their junk mail. The PCs are recruited using viruses and worms that compromise machines via known vulnerabilities or by tricking people into opening an attachment infected with the malicious program. Once compromised the machines start to pump out junk mail on behalf of spammers. Spamhaus helps to block junk messages from these machines by collecting and circulating blacklists of net addresses known to harbour infected machines. But the novel worm spotted recently by Spamhaus routes junk via the mail servers of the net service firm that infected machines used to get online in the first place. In this way the junk mail gets a net address that looks legitimate. As blocking all mail from net firms just to catch the spam is impractical, Spamhaus is worried that the technique will give junk mailers the ability to spam with little fear of being spotted and stopped. Steve Linford, director of Spamhaus, predicted that if a lot of spammers exploit this technique it could trigger the failure of the net's e-mail sending infrastructure. David Stanley, UK managing director of filtering firm Ciphertrust, said the new technique was the next logical step for spammers. They are adding to their armoury"," he said. The amount of spam in circulation was still growing, said Mr Stanley, but he did not think that the appearance of this trick would mean e-mail meltdown. But Kevin Hogan, senior manager at Symantec security response, said such warnings were premature. If something like this meant the end of e-mail then e-mail would have stopped two-three years ago", " said Mr Hogan. While the technique of routing mail via mail servers of net service firms might cause problems for those that use blacklists and block lists it did not mean that other techniques for stopping spam lost their efficacy too. Mr Hogan said 90% of the junk mail filtered by Symantec subsidiary Brightmail was spotted using techniques that did not rely on looking at net addresses. For instance, said Mr Hogan, filtering out e-mail messages that contain a web link can stop about 75% of spam.

tech 027.txt Warning over tsunami aid website Net users are being told to avoid a scam website that claims to collect cash on behalf of tsunami victims. The site looks plausible because it uses an old version of the official Disasters Emergency Committee webpage. However, DEC has no connection with the fake site and says it has contacted the police about it. The site is just the latest in a long list of scams that try to cash in on the goodwill generated by the tsunami disaster. The link to the website is contained in a spam

e-mail that is currently circulating. The message's subject line reads "Urgent Tsunami Earthquake Appeal" and its text bears all the poor grammar and bad spelling that characterises many other phishing attempts. The web address of the fake site is decuk.org which could be close enough to the official www.dec.org.uk address to confuse some people keen to donate. Patricia Sanders", spokeswoman for the Disaster Emergency Committee said it was aware of the site and had contacted the Computer Crime Unit at Scotland Yard to help get it shut down. She said the spam e-mails directing people to the site started circulating two days ago shortly after the domain name of the site was registered. It is thought that the fake site is being run from Romania. Ms Sanders said DEC had contacted US net registrars who handle domain ownership and the net hosting firm that is keeping the site on the web. DEC was going to push for all cash donated via the site to be handed over to the official organisation. BT and DEC's hosting company were also making efforts to get the site shut down, she said. Ms Sanders said sending out spam e-mail to solicit donations was not DEC's style and that it would never canvass support in this way. She said that DEC hoped to get the fake site shut down as soon as possible. All attempts by the BBC News website to contact the people behind the site have failed. None of the e-mail addresses supplied on the site work and the real owner of the domain is obscured in publicly available net records. This is not the first attempt to cash in on the outpouring of goodwill that has accompanied appeals for tsunami aid. One e-mail sent out in early January came from someone who claimed that he had lost his parents in the disaster and was asking for help moving an inheritance from a bank account in the Netherlands. The con was very similar to the familiar Nigerian forward fee fraud e-mails that milk money out of people by promising them a cut of a much larger cash pile. Other scam e-mails included a link to a website that supposedly let people donate money but instead loaded spyware on their computers that grabbed confidential information. In a monthly report anti-virus firm Sophos said that two e-mail messages about the tsunami made it to the top 10 hoax list during January. Another tsunami-related e-mail is also circulating that carries the Zar worm which tries to spread via the familiar route of Microsoft's Outlook e-mail program. Anyone opening the attachment of the mail will have their contact list plundered by the worm keen to find new addresses to send itself to.

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"tech 028.txt Piero gives rugby perspective BBC Sport unveils its new analysis tool Piero at the Wales v England rugby union match on Saturday. But what does it do and how does it work? Picture the scene - Wales are camped on the England line in the dying seconds of the Six Nations' opening match. A ball is flung out to winger Shane Williams who crosses to score the winning try for Wales. But the England players are incensed - arguing that the pass was forward and the try should not stand. In the past", sports fans would be left debating the validity of the try for days and weeks to come. But BBC Sport's new tool Piero could end discussions in minutes. Piero, named after the Italian painter and pioneer of perspective Piero della Francesca, creates a virtual stadium in which virtual players can be tracked from almost any angle. Viewers will be able to see precisely how the ball was thrown and by whom," giving a greater depth to the growing wealth of analysis available during sports broadcasts. The technology has been created by BBC Research and Development for BBC Broadcast and BBC Outside Broadcasts. BBC Sport is the first client to start using the system. ""In order to keep audiences growing and growing... we need to work closely with people who create technology and innovation to bring sport to life"," said Andrew Thompson, the BBC's head of development, new media and sport news. We want to appeal to core fans - to give them more analysis", more data

il," more definitive answers about key passages of play."" Piero works by taking telemetric data from fixed camera positions and sending that data inside the video signal to a PC which can then render the information into 3D graphics. The more cameras using Piero"," the better the detail possible out the other end when the data is turned into 3D models. ""It allows us to tell the story of a passage of play", tracking individual players across the field, looking at tactics," said Andy Townsend, from BBC Broadcast. An operator can manipulate the information and provide almost real-time replays of incidents, as well as more in-depth analysis. The virtual camera"" can focus on virtually any aspect of the pitch", giving viewers an insight into action that the camera normally cannot see. Piero also provides a wealth of statistical detail - from the length of kicks, to the length of a run of an individual player and the height of a lift at any lineout. Mr Townsend said sports performance companies were already showing an interest in the technology. BBC Broadcast hopes the technology can be sold to third parties interested in using it a number of different ways - from sport broadcasting to entertainment and game shows.

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"tech 029.txt Open source leaders slam patents The war of words between Microsoft and the open source movement heated up this week as Linux founder Linus Torvalds led an attack on software patents. In a panel discussion at a Linux summit in California Mr Torvalds said software patents were a problem for the open source movement. Mitchell Kapor", chairman of the Mozilla foundation, warned that Microsoft could use patent lawsuits in the future. Linux is a freely-available alternative to Microsoft's Windows. It relies on a community of programmers for its development and is based on open source principles, which allow others to use and modify it without having to pay licence fees. The attack on software patents comes at a time when IBM has made 500 of its patents freely available. Other companies are expected to follow suit. There are between 150,000 and 300,"000 registered software patents in the US and open source developers argue that many should never have been granted. This is a view corroborated by the UK Patent Office. ""Some of the patents have dubious validity and are being wielded by some big companies to force smaller companies to buy licences in the knowledge that they can't afford to take them to court", said Dr Jeremy Philpott of the UK Patent Office. Some panel members are worried that Microsoft would issue a series of patent lawsuits in the future. If totally pushed to the wall - because their business model no longer holds up in an era in which open source is an economically superior way to produce software...of course they're going to unleash the WMDs," Mr Kapor is reported as saying. Microsoft did not want to comment directly, referring the issue instead to trade body Intellect, of which it is a member. As far as Intellect is concerned", open source and patents have co-existed for many years without problems, said spokeswoman Jill Sutherland. The industry respects the open source movement and in fact many of the members we represent use the open source system to develop software, We think the important point to make is that companies should be able to choose between patents, copyrights and open source as to the treatment of their intellectual discoveries, and not be forced into using one or the other," she added.

tech 030.txt Reboot ordered for EU patent law A European Parliament committee has ordered a rewrite of the proposals for controversial new European Union rules which govern computer-based inventions. The Legal Affairs Committee (JURI) said the Commission should re-submit the Computer Implemented Inventions Directive after MEPs failed to back it. It has had vocal critics who say it could favour large over small firms and impact open-source software innovation. Supporters say it would let firms protect their inventions. The dir

ective is intended to offer patent protection to inventions that use software to achieve their effect, in other words, computer implemented invention". The draft law suffered setbacks when Poland", one of the largest EU member states, rejected its adoption twice in two months. Intense lobbying on the issue has started to gain momentum in some national parliaments putting them under immense pressure. Only two MEPs backed the draft law at the JURI meeting, with one voting to abstain. Opponents of the draft directive welcomed the decision and said a new first reading of the proposals would give the EU a chance to have fuller debates about its implications in all member states. In the US," the patenting of computer programs and internet business methods is permitted. This means that the US-based Amazon.com holds a patent for its ""one-click shopping"" service", for example. Critics are concerned that the directive could lead to a similar model happening in Europe. This, they fear, could hurt small software developers because they do not have the legal and financial might of larger companies if they had to fight patent legal action in court. Supporters say current laws are inefficient and it would serve to even up a playing field without bringing EU laws in line with the US.

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"tech 031.txt Solutions to net security fears Fake bank e-mails", or phishing, and stories about ID theft are damaging the potential of using the net for online commerce, say e-business experts. Trust in online security is falling as a result. Almost 70% of those asked in a poll said that net firms are not doing enough to protect people. The survey of more than 1,000 people reported that 43% were not willing to hand over personal information online. It is worrying for shopaholics and firms who want to exploit the net. More people are becoming aware of online security issues but they have little confidence that companies are doing enough to counter the threats, said security firm RSA," which carried out the poll. An estimated 12 million Britons now use the net as a way of managing their financial affairs. Security experts say that scare stories and the vulnerabilities dogging e-commerce and e-banking are being taken seriously - by banks in particular. ""I don't think the threat is overplayed"," Barry Beal, global security manager for Capgemini, told the BBC News website. He added: The challenge for banks is to provide the customer with something that improves security but balances that with usability." Ensuring extra security measures are in place protects them too", as well as the individual, and it is up to both parties to make sure they do what is necessary to prevent fraud," he said. ""Card issuers will keep us informed of types of attacks and what procedure to take to protect ourselves. If we do that", they will indemnify us," he said. Many believe using login details like usernames and passwords are simply not good enough anymore though. One of the biggest challenges to improving security online is how to authenticate an individual's identity. Several security companies have developed methods which complement or replace passwords, which are easily compromised and easy to forget. Last year, a street survey found that more than 70% of people would reveal their password for a bar of chocolate. On average, people have to remember four different passwords. Some resort to using the same one for all their online accounts. Those who use several passwords often write them down and hide them in a desk or in a document on their computer. In a separate survey by RSA, 80% said they were fed up with passwords and would like a better way to login to work computer systems. For many, the ideal is a single online identity that can be validated once with a series of passwords and questions, or some biometric measurement like a fingerprint or iris scan with a token like a smartcard. Activcard is just one of the many companies, like RSA Security, which has been trying to come up with just that. RSA has

a deal with internet provider AOL that lets people pay monthly for a one-time passcode generation service. Users get a physical token which automatically generates a code which stays active for 60 seconds. Many companies use a token-based method already for employees to access networks securely already. Activcard's method is more complex. It is currently trailing its one-time passcode generation technology with UK banks. Steve Ash, from Activcard, told the BBC News website there are two parts to the process of identification. The most difficult is to ascertain whether an individual is who they say they are when they are online. The end solution is to provide a method where you combine something the user knows with something they have and present those both. "The method it has developed makes use of the chip embedded in bank cards and a special card reader which can generate unique codes that are active for a specified amount of time. This can be adjusted at any time and can be active for as little as 30 seconds before it changes. It combines that with usual usernames and passwords", as well as other security questions. "You take the card", put it in the reader, enter your pin number," and a code is given. "If you wanted then to transfer funds", for instance, "you would have to have the code to authorise the transaction." The clever bit happens back at the bank's secure servers. The code is validated by the bank's systems", matching the information they expect with the customer's unique key. "Each individual gets a key which is unique to them. It is a 2048-bit long number that is virtually impossible to crack", said Mr Ash. It means that in a typical security attack, explains Mr Ash, even if password information is captured by a scammer using keystroke software or just through spoof websites, they need the passcode. By the time they go back [to use the information]", the code has expired, so they can't prove who they are," according to Mr Ash. In the next few years, Mr Ash predicts that this kind of method will be commonplace before we see biometric authentication that is acceptable for widespread use. PCs will have readers built into them", the cost of readers will be very cheap," and more people will have the cards." The gadgets we carry around", like personal digital assistants (PDAs) and mobiles," could also have integrated card reader technology in them. "The PDA or phone method is a possible alternative as people are always carrying phones around", he said.

tech 032.txt Mobile networks seek turbo boost Third-generation mobile (3G) networks need to get faster if they are to deliver fast internet surfing on the move and exciting new services. That was one of the messages from the mobile industry at the 3GSM World Congress in Cannes last week. Fast 3G networks are here but the focus has shifted to their evolution into a higher bandwidth service, says the Global Mobile Suppliers Association. At 3GSM, Siemens showed off a system that transmits faster mobile data. The German company said data could be transmitted at one gigabit a second - up to 20 times faster than current 3G networks. The system is not available commercially yet, but Motorola, the US mobile handset and infrastructure maker, held a clinic for mobile operators on HSDPA (High Speed Downlink Packet Access), a high-speed, high bandwidth technology available now. Early HSDPA systems typically offer around two megabits per second (Mbps) compared with less than 384 kilobits per second (Kbps) on standard 3G networks. High-Speed Downlink Packet Access (HSDPA) - sometimes called Super 3G - will be vital for profitable services like mobile internet browsing and mobile video clips", according to a report published by UK-based research consultancy Analysys. A number of companies are developing the technology. Nokia and Canada-based wireless communication products company Sierra Wireless recently agreed to work together on High Speed Downlink Packet Access. The two companies aim to jointly market the HSDPA solution to global network operator customers. While HSDPA theoretically enables data rates up to a maximum of 14Mbps, practical throughputs will be lower than this in wide-area networks," s

aid Dr Alastair Brydon, author of the Analysys report: Pushing Beyond the Limits of 3G with HSDPA and Other Enhancements. The typical average user rate in a real implementation is likely to be in the region of one megabit per second which, even at this lower rate, will more than double the capacity... when compared to basic WCDMA [3G]," he added. Motorola has conducted five trials of its technology and says speeds of 2.9Mbps have been recorded at the edge of an outdoor 3G cell using a single HSDPA device. But some mobile operators are opting for a technology called Evolution, Data Optimised (EV-D0). US operator Sprint ordered a broadband data upgrade to its 3G network at the end of last year. We are expanding our network and deploying EV-D0 technology to meet customer demand for faster wireless speeds", said Oliver Valente, Sprint's vice president for technology development, when the contract was announced. As part of \$3bn in multi-year contracts announced late last year, Sprint will spend around \$1bn on EV-D0 technology from Lucent Technologies, Nortel Networks and Motorola that provides average data speeds of 0.3-0.5 megabits a second, and peak download rates of 2.4Mbps. MM02, the UK-based operator with services in the UK, Ireland and Germany, has opted for technology based on the High Speed Downlink Packet Access (HSDPA) standard. Using technology from Lucent, it will offer data speeds of 3.6Mbps from next summer on its Isle of Man 3G network, and will eventually support speeds of up to 14.4Mbps. US operator Cingular Wireless is also adopting HSDPA, using technology from Lucent alongside equipment from Siemens and Ericsson. Siemens' plans for a one gigabit network may be more than a user needs today, but Christoph Caselitz, president of the mobile networks division at the firm says that: By the time the next generation of mobile communication debuts in 2015", the need for transmission capacities for voice, data, image and multimedia is conservatively anticipated to rise by a factor of 10." Siemens - in collaboration with the Fraunhofer German-Sino Lab for Mobile Communications and the Institute for Applied Radio System Technology - has souped up mobile communications by using three transmitting and four receiving antennae", instead of the usual one. This enables a data transmission, such as sending a big file or video, to be broken up into different flows of data that can be sent simultaneously over one radio frequency band. The speeds offered by 3G mobile seemed fast at the time mobile operators were paying huge sums for 3G licences. But today, instead of connecting to the internet by slow, dial-up phone connection, many people are used to broadband networks that offer speeds of 0.5 megabits a second - much faster than 3G. This means users are likely to find 3G disappointing unless the networks are souped up. If they aren't," those lucrative "power users""", such as computer geeks and busy business people will avoid them for all but the most urgent tasks, reducing the potential revenues available to mobile operators. But one gigabit a second systems will not be available immediately. Siemens says that though the system works in the laboratory, it still has to assess the mobility of multiple-antennae devices and conduct field trials. A commercial system could be as far away as 2012, though Siemens did not rule out an earlier date.

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"tech 033.txt Global digital divide 'narrowing' The ""digital divide"" between rich and poor nations is narrowing fast", according to a World Bank report. The World Bank questioned a United Nation's campaign to increase usage and access to technology in poorer nations. ""People in the developing world are getting more access at an incredible rate - far faster than... in the past", said the report. But a spokesman for the UN's World Summit on the Information Society said the digital divide remained very real. The digital divide is rapidly closing," the World Bank report said. Half the world's population now has access to a fixed-line telephone, the report said, and 77% to a mobile

network. The report's figures surpass a WSIS campaign goal that calls for 50% access to telephones by 2015. The UN hopes that widening access to technology such as mobile phones and the net will help eradicate poverty. Developing countries are catching up with the rich world in terms of access [to mobile networks]", the report said. Africa is part of a worldwide trend of rapid rollout... this applies to countries rich and poor, reformed or not, African, Asian," European and Latin American."" A spokesman for the World Summit for the Information Society (WSIS)", which is meeting this week in Geneva," told the BBC News website: ""The digital divide is very much real and needs to be addressed. ""Some financing has to be found to help narrow the divide."" On Tuesday",, a meeting of the WSIS in Geneva agreed to the creation of a Digital Solidarity Fund. ""The fund is voluntary and will help finance local community-based projects",, said the WSIS spokesman. Under the proposals agreed, voluntary contribution of 1% on contracts obtained by private technology service providers could be made to the Digital Solidarity Fund. The exact financing mechanism of the fund is to be ironed out in the coming days, said the WSIS. Sixty percent of resources collected by the fund will be made available for projects in least developed countries, 30% for projects in developing countries, and 10% for projects in developed countries.

tech 034.txt UK gets official virus alert site A rapid alerting service that tells home computer users about serious internet security problems is being launched by the UK government. The service, IT Safe, will issue warnings about damaging viruses, software vulnerabilities and weaknesses on devices such as mobile phones. Alerts tell people how the threats affect them and what they can do to avoid trouble and protect themselves. The service will be free and those who sign up can get e-mail or text alerts. The scheme is aimed at home users and small businesses. The government estimates it will issue security alerts about six to 10 times a year, based on previous experience of virus outbreaks. There is a clear need for easy-to-understand and simple independent advice for non-technically minded people who use computers either at home or at work",, said Home Office Minister Hazel Blears. The purpose of this new government service is to ensure computer users are aware of the risks involved and how to deal with them easily and effectively without causing alarm." Those signing up will only be told about the most serious security threats that have the potential to affect millions of people. Full-time staff are being employed to comb through the many hundreds of alerts issued each year by computer security firms to spot which ones have the potential to catch out a large number of people. Between alerts the service will occasionally send messages giving people advice about safe ways to use their computers and phones. ""IT Safe will take our technical expertise and use it to help home users understand the risks and keep their computer systems", mobile phones and a range of related consumer electronic items, safe," said Roger Cumming, director of the National Infrastructure Security Coordination Centre (NISCC). The NISCC, which is running the service, also stressed that those signing up would still need to use anti-virus software, firewalls, and software updates to stay secure. Warnings about security problems will tell people what the problem is, how it affects them and what they can do to avoid trouble. Alerts will not be issued unless users can do something to protect themselves against the threat. This might include downloading an update from an anti-virus vendor or updating software to close loopholes and fix vulnerabilities. However no software patches or programs will actually be dispensed through the site. The alerts will tell people how to go about getting hold of patches from security firms. The NISCC spokesman said the site and alerting service would stay in existence for as long as there were security bugs on home computers and other gadgets. Government statistics show that more than half of all UK house

seholds own a home computer. It was estimated that almost 13 million of these were able to access the internet in 2004. The launch comes as the number of viruses and other malicious programs in existence is reaching unprecedented numbers. In September 2004, the number of malicious programs circulating topped the 100,000 mark. Some fear that this figure could hit 150,000 by September 2005. The creation of the national alert service follows similar efforts in the Netherlands and US. The National Alerting Service for the Netherlands (aka De Waarschuwingsdienst) and the US National Cyber Alerting Service also tell citizens of serious security threats.

tech 035.txt Iran jails blogger for 14 years An Iranian weblogger has been jailed for 14 years on charges of spying and aiding foreign counter-revolutionaries. Arash Sigarchi was arrested last month after using his blog to criticise the arrest of other online journalists. Mr Sigarchi, who also edits a newspaper in northern Iran, was sentenced by a revolutionary court in the Gilan area. His sentence, criticised by human rights watchdog Reporters Without Borders, comes a day after an online "day of action" to secure his release. Iranian authorities have recently clamped down on the growing popularity of web logs", restricting access to major blogging sites from within Iran. A second Iranian blogger, Motjaba Saminejad, who also used his website to report on bloggers' arrests, is still being held. A spokesman for Reporters Without Borders, which tracks press freedom across the globe," described Mr Sigarchi's sentence as ""harsh"" and called on Iranian President Mohammed Khatami to work to secure his immediate release. ""The authorities are trying to make an example of him", the organisation said in a statement. By handing down this harsh sentence against a blogger," their aim is to dissuade journalists and internet-users from expressing themselves online or contacting foreign media." In the days before his arrest Mr Sigarchi gave interviews to the BBC Persian Service and the US-funded Radio Farda. Iranian authorities have arrested about 20 online journalists during the current crackdown. They accused Mr Sigarchi of a string of crimes against Iranian state", including espionage, insulting the founder of Iran's Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini," and current Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Mr Sigarchi's lawyer labelled the revolutionary court ""illegal and incompetent"" and called for a retrial in a public court. Mr Sigarchi was sentenced one day after an online campaign highlighted his case in a "day of action" in defence of bloggers around the world. The Committee to Protect Bloggers designated 22 February 2005 as Free Mojtaba and Arash Day. Around 10",000 people visited the campaign's website during the day. About 12% of users were based in Iran," the campaign's director told the BBC News website. Curt Hopkins said Mr Sigarchi's sentence would not dent the resolve of bloggers joining the campaign to help highlight the case. ""The eyes of 8 million bloggers are going to be more focused on Iran since Sigarchi's sentence", not less. ""The mullahs won't be able to make a move without it being spread across the blogosphere.""  
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tech 036.txt Microsoft seeking spyware trojan Microsoft is investigating a trojan program that attempts to switch off the firm's anti-spyware software. The spyware tool was only released by Microsoft in the last few weeks and has been downloaded by six million people. Stephen Toulouse", a security manager at Microsoft, said the malicious program was called Bankash-A Trojan and was being sent as an e-mail attachment. Microsoft said it did not believe the program was widespread and recommended users to use an anti-virus program. The program attempts to disable or delete Microsoft's anti-spyware tool and suppress warning messages given to users. It may also try to steal online banking passwords or other personal information by tracking users' keystrokes. Mic

rosoft said in a statement it is investigating what it called a criminal attack on its software. Earlier this week, Microsoft said it would buy anti-virus software maker Sybari Software to improve its security in its Windows and e-mail software. Microsoft has said it plans to offer its own paid-for anti-virus software but it has not yet set a date for its release. The anti-spyware program being targeted is currently only in beta form and aims to help users find and remove spyware - programs which monitor internet use, causes advert pop-ups and slow a PC's performance.

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, "tech 037.txt US woman sues over cartridges A US woman is suing Hewlett Packard (HP)", saying its printer ink cartridges are secretly programmed to expire on a certain date. The unnamed woman from Georgia says that a chip inside the cartridge tells the printer that it needs re-filling even when it does not. The lawsuit seeks to represent anyone in the US who has purchased an HP inkjet printer since February 2001. HP, the world's biggest printer firm," declined to comment on the lawsuit. HP ink cartridges use a chip technology to sense when they are low on ink and advise the user to make a change. But the suit claims the chips also shut down the cartridges at a predetermined date regardless of whether they are empty. ""The smart chip is dually engineered to prematurely register ink depletion and to render a cartridge unusable through the use of a built-in expiration date that is not revealed to the consumer", the suit said. The lawsuit is asking for restitution, damages and other compensation. The cost of printer cartridges has been a contentious issue in Europe for the last 18 months. The price of inkjet printers has come down to as little as £34 but it could cost up to £1,700 in running costs over an 18-month period due to cartridge, a study by Computeractive Magazine revealed last year. The inkjet printer market has been the subject of an investigation by the UK's Office of Fair Trading (OFT), which concluded in a 2002 report that retailers and manufacturers needed to make pricing more transparent for consumers.

tech 038.txt Movie body hits peer-to-peer nets The movie industry has struck out at file-sharing networks with another round of lawsuits in the US. The Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) also said it had succeeded in getting a network called LokiTorrent closed down. It is the latest network which uses the peer-to-peer system called BitTorrent to be hit by the MPAA. The MPAA began its legal campaign against operators of similar networks across four continents in December. A Dallas court agreed that Hollywood lawyers would be allowed access to LokiTorrent's server records which could let them single out those who were sharing files illegally. In October 2004, the site had provided links to more than 30,000 files. The action came after the operators of LokiTorrent agreed a settlement with the MPAA. A stark message has appeared on the site from the MPAA warning You can click", "but you can't hide"". In BitTorrent systems", server sites do not host the files being shared. They host links," called ""trackers"" that direct people to others that have it instead. As well as filing an unspecified number of file suits across the US", the MPAA said it had given operators that host eDonkey servers ""take down"" notices. Hollywood studios are aggressively clamping down on file-sharers who it says infringe copyright laws by copying films and TV programmes then share the files online. But it is now targeting the operators of BitTorrent networks themselves. It has filed 100 lawsuits against operators of BitTorrent server sites since December. The strategy of hitting those who run the servers which link to copyrighted material is intended to stunt file-sharers' ability to swap content using BitTorrent systems. The film industry says the black market for illegally copied v

ideos and DVDs already costs them billions every year and it is worried that illegal file-sharing is adding to their losses. In December", the legal action claimed its most high-profile victim. The popular Suprnova.org website was forced to close, and others like Phoenix Torrent followed soon after.

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"tech 039.txt Security warning over 'FBI virus' The US Federal Bureau of Investigation is warning that a computer virus is being spread via e-mails that purport to be from the FBI. The e-mails show that they have come from an fbi.gov address and tell recipients that they have accessed illegal websites. The messages warn that their internet use has been monitored by the FBI's Internet Fraud Complaint Center. An attachment in the e-mail contains the virus", the FBI said. The message asks recipients to click on the attachment and answer some questions about their internet use. But rather than being a questionnaire, the attachment contains a virus that infects the recipient's computer," according to the agency. It is not clear what the virus does once it has infected a computer. Users are warned never to open attachment from unsolicited e-mails or from people they do not know. ""Recipients of this or similar solicitations should know that the FBI does not engage in the practice of sending unsolicited e-mails to the public in this manner", the FBI said in a statement. The bureau is investigating the phoney e-mails. The agency earlier this month shut down fbi.gov accounts, used to communicate with the public, because of a security breach. A spokeswoman said the two incidents appear to be unrelated.

tech 040.txt Apple iPod family expands market Apple has expanded its iPod family with the release of its next generation of the digital music players. Its latest challenges to the growing digital music gadget market include an iPod mini model which can hold 6GB compared to a previous 4GB. The company, which hopes to keep its dominant place in the digital music market, also said the gold coloured version of the mini would be dropped. A 30GB version has also been added to the iPod Photo family. The latest models have a longer battery life and their prices have been cut by an average of £40. The original iPod took an early lead in the digital music player market thanks to its large storage capacity and simple design. During 2004 about 25 million portable players were sold, 10 million of which were Apple iPods. But analysts agree that the success is also down to its integration with the iTunes online store, which has given the company a 70% share of the legal download music market. Mike McGuire, a research director at analyst Gartner, told the BBC News website that Apple had done a good job in sealing off the market from competition" so far. ""They have created a very seamless package which I think is the idea of the product - the design", function and the software are very impressive," he said. He added that the threat from others was always present, however. Creative", other Microsoft-partnered devices, Real, Sony and so on, are ratcheting up the marketing message and advertising," he said. Creative was very upbeat about how many of its Creative Zen players it had shipped by the end of last year, he said. Its second-generation models, like the Creative Zen Micro Photo, is due out in the summer. It will have 5GB of memory on board. Digital music players are now the gadget of choice among young Americans, according to recent research by the Pew Internet and American Life Project. One in 10 US adults - 22 million people - now owns a digital music player of some sort. Sales of legally downloaded songs also rose more than tenfold in 2004, according to the record industry, with 200 million tracks bought online in the US and Europe in 12 months. The IFPI industry body said that the popularity of portable music players was behind the growth. Analysts say that the ease of use and growth of music services available on the net will continue to drive the trend towards portable music players. People

e are also starting to use them in novel ways. Some are combining automatic syncing functions many of them have with other net functions to automatically distribute DIY radio shows, called podcasts. But 2005 will also see more competition from mobile phone operators who are keen to offer streaming services on much more powerful and sophisticated handsets. According to Mr McGuire, research suggests that people like the idea of building up huge libraries of music, which they can do with high-capacity storage devices, like iPods and Creative Zens. Mobiles do not yet have this capacity though, and there are issues about the ease of portability of mobile music. Mr McGuire said Apple was ensuring it kept a foot in the mobile music door with its recent deal with Motorola to produce a version of iTunes for Motorola phones.

tech 041.txt T-Mobile bets on 'pocket office' T-Mobile has launched its latest pocket office"" third-generation (3G) device which also has built-in wi-fi - high-speed wireless net access. Unlike other devices where the user has to check which high-speed network is available to transfer data", the device selects the fastest one itself. The MDA IV, released in the summer, is an upgrade to the company's existing smartphone, the 2.5G/wi-fi MDA III. It reflects the push by mobile firms for devices that are like mini laptops. The device has a display that can be swivelled and angled so it can be used like a small computer, or as a conventional clamshell phone. The Microsoft Mobile phone, with two cameras and a Qwerty keyboard, reflects the design of similar all-in-one models released this year," such as Motorola's MPx. ""One in five European workers are already mobile - meaning they spend significant time travelling and out of the office",, Rene Obermann, T-Mobile's chief executive, told a press conference at the 3GSM trade show in Cannes. He added: What they need is their office when they are out of the office." T-Mobile said it was seeing increasing take up for what it calls ""Office in a Pocket"" devices", with 100,000 MDAs sold in Europe already. In response to demand, T-Mobile also said it would be adding the latest phone-shaped Blackberry to its mobile range. Reflecting the growing need to be connected outside the office, it announced it would introduce a flat-fee £20 (\$38) a month wi-fi tariff for people in the UK using its wi-fi hotspots. It said it would nearly double the number of its hotspots - places where wi-fi access is available - globally from 12,300 to 20,000. It also announced it was installing high-speed wi-fi on certain train services, such as the UK's London to Brighton service, to provide commuters a fast net connection too. The service, which has been developed with Southern trains, Nomad Digital (who provide the technology), begins with a free trial on 16 trains on the route from early March to the end of April. A full service is set to follow in the summer. Wi-fi access points will be connected to a Wimax wireless network - faster than wi-fi - running alongside the train tracks. Brian McBride, managing director of T-Mobile in the UK," said: ""We see a growing trend for business users needing to access e-mail securely on the move. ""We are able to offer this by maintaining a constant data session for the entire journey." He said this was something other similar in-train wi-fi services", such as that offered on GNER trains, did not offer yet. Mr Obermann added that the mobile industry in general was still growing, with many more opportunities for more services which would bear fruit for mobile companies in future. Thousands of mobile industry experts are gathered in Cannes, France, for the 3GSM which runs from 14 to 17 February.

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"tech 042.txt Hotspot users gain free net calls People using wireless net hotspots will soon be able to make free phone calls as well as surf the net. Wireless provider Broadreach and net telephony firm Skype are rolling out a service at 350 hotspots around the UK this week. Users will need a

Skype account - downloadable for free - and they will then be able to make net calls via wi-fi without paying for net access. Skype allows people to make free PC-based calls to other Skype users. Users of the system can also make calls to landlines and mobiles for a fee. The system is gaining in popularity and now has 28 million users around the world. Its paid service - dubbed Skype Out - has so far attracted 940",000 users. It plans to add more paid services with forthcoming launches of video conferencing, voice mail and Skype In, a service which would allow users to receive phone calls from landlines and mobiles. London-based software developer Connectotel has unveiled software that will expand the SMS functions of Skype, allowing users to send text messages to mobile phones from the service. Broadreach Networks has around two million users and hotspots in places such as Virgin Megastores," the Travelodge chain of hotels and all London's major rail terminals. The company is due to launch wi-fi on Virgin Trains later in the year. ""Skype's success at spreading the word about internet telephony is well-known and we are delighted to be offering free access to Skype users in our hotspots", commented Broadreach chief executive Magnus McEwen-King.

tech 043.txt DVD copy protection strengthened DVDs will be harder to copy thanks to new anti-piracy measures devised by copy protection firm Macrovision. The pirated DVD market is enormous because current copy protection was hacked more than five years ago. Macrovision says its new RipGuard technology will thwart most, but not all, of the current DVD ripping (copying) programs used to pirate DVDs. RipGuard is designed to... reduce DVD ripping and the resulting supply of illegal peer to peer", said the firm. Macrovision said the new technology will work in nearly all"" current DVD players when applied to the discs", but it did not specify how many machines could have a problem with RipGuard. The new technology will be welcomed by Hollywood film studios which are increasingly relying on revenue from DVD sales. The film industry has stepped up efforts to fight DVD piracy in the last 12 months," taking legal action against websites which offer pirated copies of DVD movies for download. ""Ultimately", we see RipGuard DVD... evolving beyond anti-piracy, and towards enablement of legitimate online transactions, interoperability in tomorrow's digital home, and the upcoming high-definition formats," said Steve Weinstein, executive vice president and general manager of Macrovision's Entertainment Technologies Group. Macrovision said RipGuard was designed to plug the digital hole"" that was created by so-called DeCSS ripper software. It circumvents Content Scrambling System measures placed on DVDs and let people make perfect digital copies of copyrighted DVDs in minutes. Those copies could then be burned onto a blank DVD or uploaded for exchange to a peer-to-peer network. Macrovision said RipGuard would also prevent against ""rent", "rip and return"" - where people would rent a DVD", copy it and then return the original. RipGuard is expected to be rolled out on DVDs from the middle of 2005, the company said. The new system works specifically to block most ripping programs - if used, those programs will now most likely crash, the company said. Macrovision has said that Rip Guard can be updated if hackers find a way around the new anti-copying measures.

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"tech 044.txt Apple attacked over sources row Civil liberties group the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) has joined a legal fight between three US online journalists and Apple. Apple wants the reporters to reveal 20 sources used for stories which leaked information about forthcoming products", including the Mac Mini. The EFF, representing the reporters," has asked California's Superior court to stop Apple pursuing the sources. It argues that the journalists are protected by the American constitution. The EFF says the cas

e threatens the basic freedoms of the press. Apple is particularly keen to find the source for information about an unreleased product code-named Asteroid and has asked the journalists' e-mail providers to hand over communications relevant to that. ""Rather than confronting the issue of reporter's privilege head-on", Apple is going to the journalist's ISPs for his e-mails," said EFF lawyer Kurt Opsahl. This undermines a fundamental First Amendment right that protects all reporters. ""If the court lets Apple get away with this", and exposes the confidences gained by these reporters, potential confidential sources will be deterred from providing information to the media and the public will lose a vital outlet for independent news, analysis and commentary," he said. The case began in December 2004 when Apple asked a local Californian court to get the journalists to reveal their sources for articles published on websites AppleInsider.com and PowerPage.org. Apple also sent requested information from the Nfox.com, the internet service provider of PowerPage's publisher Jason O-Grady. As well as looking at how far corporations can go in preventing information from being published, the case will also examine whether online journalists have the same privileges and protections as those writing for newspapers and magazines. The EFF has gained some powerful allies in its legal battle with Apple, including Professor Tom Goldstein, former dean of the Journalism School at the University of California and Dan Gillmor, a well-known Silicon Valley journalist. Apple was not immediately available for comment.

tech 045.txt Sony PSP tipped as a 'must-have' Sony's PlayStation Portable is the top gadget for 2005, according to a round-up of ultimate gizmos compiled by Stuff Magazine. It beats the iPod into second place in the Top Ten Essentials list which predicts what gadget-lovers are likely to covet this year. Owning all 10 gadgets will set the gadget lover back £7,455. That is £1,000 cheaper than last year's list due to falling manufacturing costs making gadgets more affordable. Portable gadgets dominate the list, including Sharp's 902 3G mobile phone, the Pentax Optio SV digital camera and Samsung's Yepp YH-99 video jukebox. What this year's Essentials shows is that gadgets are now cheaper", sexier and more indispensable than ever. We've got to the point where we can't live our lives without certain technology," said Adam Vaughan, editor of Stuff Essentials. The proliferation of gadgets in our homes is inexorably altering the role of the high street in our lives thinks Mr Vaughan. Take digital cameras", who would now pay to develop an entire film of photos? Or legitimate downloads," who would travel miles to a record shop when they could download the song in minutes for 70p?"" he asks. Next year will see a new set of technologies capturing the imaginations of gadget lovers", Stuff predicts. The Xbox 2, high-definition TV and MP3 mobiles will be among the list of must-haves that will dominate 2006, it says. The spring launch of the PSP in the UK is eagerly awaited by gaming fans.

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"tech 046.txt BBC leads interactive Bafta wins The BBC and the National Theatre have led the field at this year's Interactive Bafta awards. The National Theatre's Stagework website picked up the prize for best learning as well as top factual site. The BBC collected three awards", including best online entertainment for the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy Adventure Game. Spooks Interactive took the best interactive TV prize. The annual awards recognise the best in digital media. BBC Sport Interactive fought off competition from CBBC Newsround and the Guardian to take home the best news and sport trophy for its coverage of England's exit from Euro 2004. It was recognised for its ""groundbreaking"" use of animation. Bafta's Grant Dean", chair of Bafta's Interactive Entertainment committee," said all the entrants had been of ""outstandi

ng quality"" and that judging had been ""enormously difficult"". ""Without a doubt", 2005 has been a landmark year for the Bafta Interactive Awards, he added. Many of the top awards this year have gone to the companies we most commonly associate with traditional entertainment, showing how the gap between new media, "film and television is closing." Awards were given out in 12 different categories", including interactive TV, film, music, design, as well as technical and social innovation, at a London ceremony. The top music award was given to SSEYO miniMIXA, a mobile music sequencer designed to let people write," edit and share compositions. Warner Bros was given two prizes for its ""inspiring"" efforts in film and DVD interactivity. The Chaplin Collection beat Oasis", Really Bend It Like Beckham, Shaun of the Dead and The Day Today in the DVD category, and Trauma won best film. Elsewhere, fashionista and clothes designer Alexander McQueen took the accolade for the best-designed website. The awards have been running since 1997, but in 2002 the British Academy of Film and Television decided to split them into separate games and interactive ceremonies. On Tuesday Half-Life 2 dominated the games prizes. It collected six Baftas, including best game and best online game.

tech 047.txt Millions buy MP3 players in US One in 10 adult Americans - equivalent to 22 million people - owns an MP3 player", according to a survey. A study by the Pew Internet and American Life Project found that MP3 players are the gadget of choice among affluent young Americans. The survey did not interview teenagers but it is likely that millions of under-18s also have MP3 players. The American love affair with digital music players has been made possible as more and more homes get broadband. Of the 22 million Americans who own MP3 players, 59% are men compared to 41% of women. Those on high income - judged to be \$75,000 (£39,000) or above - are four times more likely to have players than those earning less than \$30,000 (£15,000). Broadband access plays a big part in ownership too. Almost a quarter of those with broadband at home have players, compared to 9% of those who have dial-up access. MP3 players are still the gadget of choice for younger adults. Almost one in five US citizens aged under 30 have one. This compares to 14% of those aged 30-39 and 14% of those aged 40-48. The influence of children also plays a part. Sixteen percent of parents living with children under 18 have digital players compared to 9% of those who don't. The ease of use and growth of music available on the net are the main factors for the upsurge in ownership," the survey found. People are beginning to use them as instruments of social activity - sharing songs and taking part in podcasting - the survey found. ""IPods and MP3 players are becoming a mainstream technology for consumers"" said Lee Rainie", director of the Pew Internet and American Life Project. ""More growth in the market is inevitable as new devices become available", as new players enter the market, and as new social uses for iPods/MP3 players become popular," he added.

tech 048.txt 'No re-draft' for EU patent law A proposed European law on software patents will not be re-drafted by the European Commission (EC) despite requests by MEPs. The law is proving controversial and has been in limbo for a year. Some major tech firms say it is needed to protect inventions, while others fear it will hurt smaller tech firms. The EC says the Council of Ministers will adopt a draft version that was agreed upon last May but said it would review all aspects of the directive". The directive is intended to offer patent protection to inventions that use software to achieve their effect", in other words, ""computer implemented invention"". In a letter", EC President Jose Manuel Barroso told the President of the European Parliament, Josep Borrell," that the Commission ""did not intend to refer a new proposal to the P

arliament and the Council (of ministers)"" as it had supported the agreement reached by ministers in May 2004. If the European Council agrees on the draft directive it will then return for a second reading at the European Parliament. But that will not guarantee that the directive will become law - instead it will probably mean further delays and controversy over the directive. Most EU legislation now needs the approval of both parliament and the Council of Ministers before it becomes law. French Green MEP Alain Lipietz warned two weeks ago that if the Commission ignored the Parliament's request it would be an ""insult"" to the assembly. He said that the parliament would then reject the Council's version of the legislation as part of the final or conciliation stage of the decision procedure. In the US", the patenting of computer programs and internet business methods is permitted. This means that the US-based Amazon.com holds a patent for its ""one-click shopping"" service", for example. Critics are concerned that the directive could lead to a similar model happening in Europe. This, they fear, could hurt small software developers because they do not have the legal and financial might of larger companies if they had to fight patent legal action in court. Supporters say current laws are inefficient and it would serve to even up a playing field without bringing EU laws in line with the US.

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"tech 049.txt Domain system scam fear A system to make it easier to create website addresses using alphabets like Cyrillic could open a back door for scammers", a trade body has warned. The Internationalised Domain Names system has been a work in progress for years and has recently been approved by the Internet Electronic Task Force. But the UK Internet Forum (UKIF) is concerned that the system will let scammers create fake sites more easily. The problem lies in the computer codes used to represent language. Registering names that look like that of legitimate companies but lead users to fake sites designed to steal passwords and credit card details could become a whole lot easier for determined scammers, says Stephen Dyer," director of UKIF. Domain names are the ""real language"" addresses of websites", rather than their internet protocol address, which is a series of numbers. They are used so people can more easily navigate the web. So-called ASCII codes are used to represent European languages but for other languages a hybrid of a system called Unicode is used. So, for example, website PayPal could now be coded using a mixture of the Latin alphabet and the Russian alphabet. The resulting domain as displayed to the users would look identical to the real site as a Russian 'a' look just like an English 'a'. But the computer code would be different, and the site it would lead users to could be a fake. This is more than just a theory. A fake Paypal.com has already been registered with net domain giant Verisign by someone who has followed the debate around the Internationalised Domain Name (IDN) system, said Mr Dyer. As the idea was to prove a point rather than be malicious the fake domain has now been handed back to Paypal but it sets a worrying precedent," Mr Dyer said. ""Although the IDN problem is well known in technical circles", the commercial world is totally unaware how easily their websites can be faked, said Mr Dyer. It is important to alert users that there is a new and invisible and almost undetectable way of diverting them to what looks like a perfectly genuine site," he added. There are solutions. For instance, browsers could spot domains that use mixed characters and display them in different colours as a warning to users. Mr Dyer acknowledged that it would be a huge undertaking to update all the world's browsers. Another solution, to introduce IDN-disabled browsers could be a case of throwing out the baby with the bath water", he said. CENTR, the Council of European National Top Level Domain Registries, agrees. A rush to introduce IDN-disabled browsers into the marketplace is an overly-zealous step that will h

arm public confidence in IDNs - a technology that is desperately needed in the non-English speaking world", " the organisation said in a statement.

tech 050.txt Cheaper chip for mobiles A mobile phone chip which combines a modem and a computer processor on one bit of silicon instead of two could make phones cheaper and more powerful. The specially-designed chip, developed by Texas Instruments, could drive down the cost of making mobiles capable of 3D gaming and 30-frame-a-second video. Currently, rich multimedia features tend to be on more expensive handsets. The technology, OMAP-Vox, is being tested by firms in Europe and Asia and could appear by the end of the year. Texas, which makes computer chips for more than half the world's mobile phones, said it was keen to make multimedia functions like video and gaming more affordable. We're going to drive them down into meat-and-potatoes phones that have the largest market share", " said Doug Rasor, a marketing vice president at Texas. The chip also uses much less power than conventional chips, said Texas, which means less strain on mobile battery life. More than 50 million people own a mobile in the UK, but mobile operators are keen to encourage people to move onto more sophisticated handsets that can do more. Texas is keen to cash in on the third generation (3G) of mobile technology, which offers high-speed networks for video streaming and other multimedia functions. But it faces stiff competition from the likes of Intel which is also looking to provide better chips for high-end mobiles. Competition to get people using 3G mobiles will grow in the next year as almost all of the UK's operators have now launched third generation networks. A recent survey by Sony Ericsson predicted that the number of 3G handsets sold in 2005 would double from 2004 to account for 10% of all phones sold. Many consumers are still to be convinced though. A further recent survey said that only 4% of mobile owners were thinking of upgrading to 3G phones. Many said they were confused about the different ways to pay for phones and the vast array of features most have onboard. But there will be continued demand for better chips as the industry continues to develop new standards and future networks. Earlier in January, NTT DoCoMo and Vodafone joined forces to develop the next generation of high-speed networks, known as super 3G""", intended to be 10 times faster than 3G services. The first stage of development is to be completed by 2007, but no date has been set for a commercial launch. The newly-designed OMAP-Vox chip set was announced ahead of the start of a major mobile industry conference, 3GSM, which takes place in Cannes, France this week.

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"tech 051.txt Blind student 'hears in colour' A blind student has developed software that turns colours into musical notes so that he can read weather maps. Victor Wong", a graduate student from Hong Kong studying at Cornell University in New York State," had to read coloured maps of the upper atmosphere as part of his research. To study ""space weather"" Mr Wong needed to explore minute fluctuations in order to create mathematical models. A number of solutions were tried", including having a colleague describe the maps and attempting to print them in Braille. Mr Wong eventually hit upon the idea of translating individual colours into music," and enlisted the help of a computer graphics specialist and another student to do the programming work. ""The images have three dimensions and I had to find a way of reading them myself", " Mr Wong told the BBC News website. For the sake of my own study - and for the sake of blind scientists generally - I felt it would be good to develop software that could help us to read colour images." He tried a prototype version of the software to explore a photograph of a parrot. In order to have an exact reference to the screen", " a pen and tablet device is used. The software then assigns one of 88 piano notes to individually coloured pixels - ranging from blue at the lower

end of this scale to red at the upper end. Mr Wong says the application is still very much in its infancy and is only useful for reading images that have been created digitally. ""If I took a random picture and scanned it and then used my software to recognise it", " it wouldn't work that well.""" Mr Wong has been blind from the age of seven and he thinks that having a ""colour memory"" makes the software more useful than it would be to a scientist who had never had any vision. ""As the notes increase in pitch I know the colour's getting redder and redder", " and in my mind's eye a patch of red appears.""" The colour to music software has not yet been made available commercially", and Mr Wong believes that several people would have to work together to make it viable. But he hopes that one day it can be developed to give blind people access to photographs and other images.

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"tech 052.txt Xbox 2 may be unveiled in summer Details of the next generation of Microsoft's Xbox games console - codenamed Xenon - will most likely be unveiled in May", according to reports. It was widely expected that gamers would get a sneak preview of Xbox's successor at the Game Developers Conference (GDC) in March. But a Microsoft spokeswoman confirmed that it would not be at GDC. Sony, Microsoft and Nintendo are all expected to release their more powerful machines in the next 18 months. The next Xbox console is expected to go on sale at the end of the year, but very few details about it have been released. It is thought that the machine may be unveiled at the Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) in Los Angeles, which takes place in May, according to a Reuters news agency report. E3 concentrates on showing off the latest in gaming to publishers, marketers and retailers. The GDC is aimed more at game developers. Microsoft chief, Bill Gates, used the GDC event to unveil the original Xbox five years ago. Since its launch, Microsoft has sold 19.9 million units worldwide. At the Consumer Electronics Show earlier this year, there was very little mention of the next generation gaming machine. In his keynote speech, Mr Gates only referred to it as playing an essential part of his vision of the digital lifestyle. But the battle between the rival consoles to win gamers' hearts and thumbs will be extremely hard-fought. Sony has traditionally dominated the console market with its PlayStation 2. But earlier this year, Microsoft said it had reached a European milestone, selling five million consoles since its European launch in March 2002. Hit games like Halo 2, which was released in November, helped to buoy the sales figures. Gamers are looking forward to the next generation of machines because they will have much more processing and graphical power. They are also likely to pack in more features and technologies that make them more central as entertainment and communications hubs. Although details of PlayStation 3, Xenon, and Nintendo's so-called Revolution, are yet to be finalised, developers are already working on titles. Rory Armes, studio general manager for games giant Electronic Arts (EA) in Europe, recently told the BBC News website in an interview that EA was beginning to get a sense of the capabilities of the new machines. Microsoft had delivered development kits to EA, but he said the company was still waiting on Sony and Nintendo's kits. But, he added, " the PlayStation 3 was rumoured to have ""a little more under the hood [than Xbox 2]"".

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"tech 053.txt Microsoft launches its own search Microsoft has unveiled the finished version of its home-grown search engine. The now formally launched MSN search site takes the training wheels off the test version unveiled in November 2003. The revamped engine indexes more pages than before", can give direct answers to factual questions, and features tools to help people

create detailed queries. Microsoft faces challenges establishing itself as a serious search site because of the intense competition for queries. Google still reigns supreme as the site people turn to most often when they go online to answer a query, keep up with news or search for images. But in the last year Google has faced greater competition than ever for users as old rivals, such as Yahoo and Microsoft, and new entrants such as Amazon and Blinkx, try to grab some of the searching audience for themselves. This renewed interest has come about because of the realisation that many of the things people do online begin with a search for information - be it for a particular web page, recipe, book, gadget, news story, image or anything else. Microsoft is keen to make its home-grown search engine a significant rival to Google. To generate its corpus of data, Microsoft has indexed 5 billion webpages and claims to update its document index every two days - more often than rivals. The Microsoft search engine can also answer specific queries directly rather than send people to a page that might contain the answer. For its direct answer feature, Microsoft is calling on its Encarta encyclopaedia to provide answers to questions about definitions, facts, calculations, conversions and solutions to equations. Tony Macklin, director of product at Ask Jeeves," pointed out that its search engine has been answering specific queries this way since April 2003. ""The major search providers have moved beyond delivering only algorithmic search", so in many ways Microsoft is following the market," he said. Tools sitting alongside the MSN search engine allow users to refine results to specific websites, countries, regions or languages. Microsoft is also using so-called graphic equalisers"" that let people adjust the relevance of terms to get results that are more up-to-date or more popular. The company said that user feedback from earlier test versions had been used to refine the workings of the finished system. The test", or beta, version of the MSN search engine unveiled in November had a few teething troubles. On its first day many new users keen to try it were greeted with a page that said the site had been overwhelmed.

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"tech 054.txt Moving mobile improves golf swing A mobile phone that recognises and responds to movements has been launched in Japan. The motion-sensitive phone - officially titled the V603SH - was developed by Sharp and launched by Vodafone's Japanese division. Devised mainly for mobile gaming", users can also access other phone functions using a pre-set pattern of arm movements. The phone will allow golf fans to improve their swing via a golfing game. Those who prefer shoot-'em-ups will be able to use the phone like a gun to shoot the zombies in the mobile version of Sega's House of the Dead. The phone comes with a tiny motion-control sensor, a computer chip that responds to movement. Other features include a display screen that allows users to watch TV and can rotate 180 degrees. It also doubles up as an electronic musical instrument. Users have to select a sound from a menu that includes clapping, tambourine and maracas and shake their phone to create a beat. It is being recommended for the karaoke market. The phone will initially be available in Japan only and is due to go on sale in mid-February. The new gadget could make for interesting people-watching among Japanese commuters, who are able to access their mobiles on the subway. Fishing afficianados in South Korea are already using a phone that allows them to simulate the movement of a rod. The PH-S6500 phone, dubbed a sports-leisure gadget, was developed by Korean phone giant Pantech and can also be used by runners to measure calorie consumption and distance run.

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"tech 055.txt Junk e-mails on relentless rise Spam traffi

c is up by 40%", putting the total amount of e-mail that is junk up to an astonishing 90%. The figures, from e-mail management firm Email Systems, will alarm firms attempting to cope with the amount of spam in their in-boxes. While virus traffic has slowed down, denial of service attacks are on the increase according to the firm. Virus mail accounts for just over 15% of all e-mail traffic analysis by the firm has found. It is no longer just multi-nationals that are in danger of so-called denial of service attacks, in which websites are bombarded by requests for information and rendered inaccessible. Email Systems refers to a small UK-based engineering firm, which received a staggering 12 million e-mails in January. The type of spam currently being sent has subtlety altered in the last few months, according to Email Systems analysis. Half of spam received since Christmas has been health-related with gambling and porn also on the increase. Scam mails, offering ways to make a quick buck," have declined by 40%. "January is clearly a month when consumers are less motivated to purchase financial products or put money into dubious financial opportunities", said Neil Hammerton, managing director of Email Systems. Spammers seem to have adapted their output to reflect this", focussing instead on medically motivated and pornographic offers, presumably intentionally intended to coincide with what is traditionally considered to be the bleakest month in the calendar," he said.

tech 056.txt Sporting rivals go to extra time The current slew of sports games offers unparalleled opportunities for fans who like to emulate on-field action without ever moving from the couch. The two giants in the field - ESPN and EA Sports - have been locked in a heavyweight battle for years. The latter is the world's largest games manufacturer. Years of experience mean that the titles in their steady flow of sport sims are finely honed, massively entertaining and ooze flair. Sports broadcaster ESPN, meanwhile, has leant its name to a series of games that are similarly classy but lower in profile and price. But that status quo was changed forever - or for the next 15 years at least - by a deal earlier this year when ESPN sold EA the rights to its TV branding and on-air talent, meaning the ESPN games presently developed by Sega will have to come to an end in their present form. It was a massive-money deal that not only raised eyebrows but stirred active indignation in many quarters, with fans concerned that it is set to enable EA to monopolise the sports gaming landscape to an unhealthy degree. Some particularly disgruntled fans set up an online petition that notched more than 18,000 virtual signatures. Many of those clicking to complain were already rankled, for the ESPN coup happened just weeks after EA had pulled off another enormous licensing deal, controversially giving them exclusive rights to teams and personnel from America's National Football League (NFL). So, will the Sega - ESPN range be missed? A key reason for answering yes"" is that liking or disliking a sports game regularly comes down to personal taste", and having some options available always proves hugely handy. Online soccer fans will testify to that, between bouts of arguing over which high-profile title rules supreme out of the similar-yet-hugely-different FIFA 2005 and Pro Evolution Soccer 4. On the same note, the ESPN 2k5 and EA sports games have so little to choose between them that picking favourites will come down to players' personal preferences and spending budget rather than any technical elements. Taking hockey and basketball as examples, both publishers' efforts are phenomenally entertaining and fairly accessible. They also both look awesome, with the Sega / ESPN versions perhaps shading things on a graphical front. In terms of gameplay, I marginally preferred EA's NBA Live 2005 for basketball, and was more satisfied ice hockey-wise by ESPN's NHL 2K5. The ESPN games are a touch more arcade-like in look and feel and are slightly easier to get into, although like their rivals, they also offer a dizzyingly-extensive array of in-game tricks and overall challenge modes that should be enough to quench thirsts of e

ven the most die-hard of sports fans. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the ESPN deal will be seeing how it affects the presentation of EA's future titles. The front-end decoration of EA's games has become something of an art-form in itself, loaded with slick visuals and oodles of licensed music. They are also immediately identifiable as coming from the EA stable, and the inevitable compulsion to add an ESPN look will no doubt change that in various ways. What is a shame is that the ESPN titles took similar care about framing the gameplay with an authentic setting - their preambles look and sound much like they would on TV. They are neat and excellent-value games in their current form, and combining them with EA's own established brand should produce a truly formidable beast.

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"tech 057.txt Half-Life 2 sweeps Bafta awards PC first person shooter Half-Life 2 has won six Bafta Awards", including best game and best online game. The title, developed by Valve, was released last year to universal acclaim - receiving special praise for its immersive plot and physics engine. The game also won Baftas for best action adventure, best PC game, art direction and animation. Burnout 3 won three awards in the categories for racing, technical direction and best PlayStation 2 game. Grant Dean, chairman of the Bafta games awards," said at a ceremony in London on Tuesday: ""The last year has been a great year for the interactive entertainment industry. ""These awards reflect the enormous achievements", progress and diversity that we have seen in that time." Halo 2 won the best Xbox game category", while Prince of Persia: Warrior Within was adjudged the best GameCube title. The sports award went to Konami's Pro Evolution Soccer 4. Bafta said the ""significant feature"" of this year's awards was the number of ""non-traditional games"". The originality award was won by PlayStation 2 title Singstar while the children's award went to Game Cube bongo rhythm game Donkey Konga. The Handheld Award went to Colin McRae Rally 2005 while the mobile category was won by Blue Tooth Byplanes. The audio award was won by Call of Duty: Finest Hour and Hitman: Contracts won the music award.

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"tech 058.txt BT boosts its broadband packages British Telecom has said it will double the broadband speeds of most of its home and business customers. The increased speeds will come at no extra charge and follows a similar move by internet service provider AOL. Many BT customers will now have download speeds of 2Mbps", although there are usage allowances of between one gigabyte and 30 gigabytes a month. The new speeds start to come into effect on 17 February for home customers and 1 April for businesses. ""Britain is now broadband Britain", said Duncan Ingram, BT's managing director, broadband and internet services. He added: Ninety percent of our customers will see real increases in speed. ""These speed increases will give people the opportunity to do a lot more with their broadband connections", he said. Upload speeds - the speed at which information is sent from a PC via broadband - will remain at the same speed, said Mr Ingram. Despite the increases, BT will continue to have usage allowances for home customers. The allowances are extremely generous", said Mr Ingram. For what we are seeing in the market place - they are really not an issue." BT will begin enforcing the allowances in the summer. Customers who exceed the amounts will either be able to pay for a bigger allowance or see their download speeds reduced. BT now has a 36% share of the broadband market - down from 39% - which is becoming increasingly competitive. In the last few months", many rival ISPs have begun to offer 2Mbps services, including AOL," Plusnet and UK Online. But Britain continues to lag behind some countries - especially Japan a

nd South Korea - which offer broadband speeds of up to 40Mbps. But Mr Ingram said it was important to ""separate hype from reality"". He said that a limited number of people with those connections consistently received speeds of 40Mbps. Customers will not see their connections double immediately on 17 February. Mr Ingram said there would be a roll out across the network in order to prevent any problems.

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"tech 059.txt Mobiles 'not media players yet' Mobiles are not yet ready to be all-singing", all-dancing multimedia devices which will replace portable media players, say two reports. Despite moves to bring music download services to mobiles, people do not want to trade multimedia services with size and battery life," said Jupiter. A separate study by Gartner has also said real-time TV broadcasts to mobiles is ""unlikely"" in Europe until 2007. Technical issues and standards must be resolved first", said the report. Batteries already have to cope with other services that operators offer, like video playback, video messaging, megapixel cameras and games amongst others. Bringing music download services based on the success of computer-based download services will put more demands on battery life. Fifty percent of Europeans said the size of a mobile was the most important factor when it came to choosing their phone," but more power demands tend to mean larger handsets. ""Mobile phone music services must not be positioned to compete with the PC music experience as the handsets are not yet ready", said Thomas Husson, mobile analyst at Jupiter research. Mobile music services should be new and different", and enable operators to differentiate their brands and support third generation network launches." Other problems facing mobile music include limited storage on phones", compared to portable players which can hold up to 40GB of music. The mobile industry is keen to get into music downloading, after the success of Apple's iTunes, Napster and other net music download services. With phones getting smarter and more powerful, there are also demands to be able to watch TV on the move. In the US, services like TiVo To Go let people transfer pre-recorded TV content onto their phones. But, the Gartner report on mobile TV broadcasting in Europe suggests direct broadcasting will have to wait. Currently, TV-like services, where clips are downloaded, are offered by several European operators, like Italy's TIM and 3. Mobile TV will have to overcome several barriers before it is widely taken up though, said the report. Various standards and ways of getting TV signals to mobiles are being worked on globally. In Europe, trials in Berlin and Helsinki are making use of terrestrial TV masts to broadcast compressed signals to handsets with extra receivers. A service from the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation lets people watch TV programmes on their mobiles 24 hours a day. The service uses 3GP technology, one of the standards for mobile TV. But at the end of 2004, the European Telecommunications Institute (Etsi) formally adopted Digital Video Broadcasting Handheld (DVB-H) as the mobile TV broadcasting standard for Europe. Operators will be working on the standard as a way to bring real-time broadcasts to mobiles, as well as trying to overcome several other barriers. The cost and infrastructure needs to set up the services will need to be addressed. Handsets also need to be able to work with the DVB-H standard. TV services will have to live up to the expectations of the digital TV generation too, which expects good quality images at low prices, according to analysts. People are also likely to be put off watching TV on such small screens, said Gartner. Digital video recorders, like Europe's Sky+ box, and video-on-demand services mean people have much more control over what TV they watch. As a result, people may see broadcasting straight to mobiles as taking away that control. More powerful smartphones like the XDA II, Nokia 6600, SonyEricsson P900 and the Orange E200, offering we

b access, text and multimedia messaging, e-mail, calendar and gaming are becoming increasingly common. A report by analysts InStat/MDR has predicted that smartphone shipments will grow by 44% over the next five years. It says that smartphones will make up 117 million out of 833 million handsets shipped globally by 2009.

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"tech 060.txt Microsoft releases patches Microsoft has warned PC users to update their systems with the latest security fixes for flaws in Windows programs. In its monthly security bulletin," it flagged up eight ""critical"" security holes which could leave PCs open to attack if left unpatched. The number of holes considered ""critical"" is more than usual. They affect Windows programs", including Internet Explorer (IE), media player and instant messaging. Four other important fixes were also released. These were considered to be less critical, however. If not updated, either automatically or manually, PC users running the programs could be vulnerable to viruses or other malicious attacks designed to exploit the holes. Many of the flaws could be used by virus writers to take over computers remotely, install programs, change, and delete or see data. One of the critical patches Microsoft has made available is an important one that fixes some IE flaws. Stephen Toulouse, a Microsoft security manager, said the flaws were known about, and although the firm had not seen any attacks exploiting the flaw, he did not rule them out. Often, when a critical flaw is announced, spates of viruses follow because home users and businesses leave the flaw unpatched. A further patch fixes a hole in Media Player," Windows Messenger and MSN Messenger which an attacker could use to take control of unprotected machines through .png files. Microsoft announces any vulnerabilities in its software every month. The most important ones are those which are classed as ""critical"". Its latest releases came the week that the company announced it was to buy security software maker Sybari Software as part of Microsoft's plans to make its own security programs.

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"tech 061.txt Concern over RFID tags Consumers are very concerned about the use of radio frequency ID (RFID) tags in shops", a survey says. More than half of 2,000 people surveyed said they had privacy worries about the tags, which can be used to monitor stock on shelves or in warehouses. Some consumer groups have expressed concern that the tags could be used to monitor shoppers once they had left shops with their purchases. The survey showed that awareness of tags among consumers in Europe was low. The survey of consumers in the UK, France, Germany and the Netherlands was carried out by consultancy group Capgemini. The firm works on behalf of more than 30 firms who are seeking to promote the growth of RFID technology. The tags are a combination of computer chip and antenna which can be read by a scanner - each item contains a unique identification number. More than half (55%) of the respondents said they were either concerned or very concerned that RFID tags would allow businesses to track consumers via product purchases. Fifty nine percent of people said they were worried that RFID tags would allow data to be used more freely by third parties. Ard Jan Vetham, Capgemini's principal consultant on RFID," said the survey showed that retailers needed to inform and educate people about RFID before it would become accepted technology. ""Acceptance of new technologies always has a tipping point at which consumers believe that benefits outweigh concerns. ""With the right RFID approach and ongoing communication with consumers"," the industry can reach this point." He said that the survey also showed people would accept RFID if they felt that the technology could mean a reduction in car theft or fa

ster recovery of stolen items. The tags are currently being used at one Tesco distribution centre in the UK - the tags allow the rapid inventory of bulk items. They are also in use as a passcard for the M6 Toll in the Midlands", in the UK. Mr Vetham said the majority of people surveyed (52%) believed that RFID tags could be read from a distance. He said that was a misconception based on a lack of awareness of the technology. At least once consumer group - Consumers Against Supermarket Privacy Invasion and Numbering (Caspian) - has claimed that RFID chips could be used to secretly identify people and the things they are carrying or wearing. All kinds of personal belongings, including clothes, could constantly broadcast messages about their whereabouts and their owners, it warned.

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"tech 062.txt Ask Jeeves joins web log market Ask Jeeves has bought the Bloglines website to improve the way it handles content from web journals or blogs. The Bloglines site has become hugely popular as it gives users one place in which to read", search and share all the blogs they are interested in. Ask Jeeves said it was not planning to change Bloglines but would use the 300 million articles it has archived to round out its index of the web. How much Ask Jeeves paid for Bloglines was not revealed. Bloglines has become popular because it lets users build a list of the blogs they want to follow without having to visit each journal site individually. To do this it makes use of a technology known as Really Simple Syndication (RSS) that many blogs have adopted to let other sites know when new entries are made on their journals. The acquisition follows similar moves by other search sites. Google acquired Pyra Labs, makers of the Blogger software, in 2003. In 2004 MSN introduced its own blog system and Yahoo has tweaked its technology to do a better job of handling blog entries. Jim Lanzone, vice president of search properties at Ask Jeeves in the U S," said it did not acquire Bloglines just to get a foothold in the blog publishing world. He said Ask Jeeves was much more interested in helping people find information they were looking for rather than helping them write it. ""The universe of readers is vastly larger than the universe of writers", he said. Mr Lanzone said the acquisition would sit well with Ask's My Jeeves service which lets people customise their own web experience and build up a personal collection of useful links. Search engines are about discovering information for the first time and RSS is the ideal way to keep track of and monitor those sites," he said. It would also help drive information and entries from blogs to the portals that Ask Jeeves operates. There would be no instant sweeping changes to Bloglines, said Mr Lanzone. Our intent is to take our time to figure out the right business model not to try to monetise it right away", he said. Though Mr Lanzone added that Ask Jeeves would be helping organise the database of 300m blog entries Bloglines holds with its own net indexing technology. Being able to search the blogosphere as one corpus of information will be very useful in its own right," said Mr Lanzone. Rumours about the acquisition were broken by the Napsterization weblog which said it got the hint from Ask Jeeves insiders.

tech 063.txt Digital guru floats sub-\$100 PC Nicholas Negroponte, chairman and founder of MIT's Media Labs, says he is developing a laptop PC that will go on sale for less than \$100 (£53). He told the BBC World Service programme Go Digital he hoped it would become an education tool in developing countries. He said one laptop per child could be very important to the development of not just that child but now the whole family"," village and neighbourhood"". He said the child could use the laptop like a text book. He described the device as a stripped down laptop", which would run a Linux-based operating system," ""We have to get the display down to below \$20"," to do this we need to rear project the image rather than using an ordinary flat panel. ""The second

d trick is to get rid of the fat "," if you can skinny it down you can gain speed and the ability to use smaller processors and slower memory." " The device will probably be exported as a kit of parts to be assembled locally to keep costs down. Mr Negroponte said this was a not for profit venture", though he recognised that the manufacturers of the components would be making money. In 1995 Mr Negroponte published the bestselling Being Digital, now widely seen as predicting the digital age. The concept is based on experiments in the US state of Maine, where children were given laptop computers to take home and do their work on. While the idea was popular amongst the children, it initially received some resistance from the teachers and there were problems with laptops getting broken. However," Mr Negroponte has adapted the idea to his own work in Cambodia where he set up two schools together with his wife and gave the children laptops. ""We put in 25 laptops three years ago ", only one has been broken, the kids cherish these things, it's also a TV a telephone and a games machine," not just a textbook." " Mr Negroponte wants the laptops to become more common than mobile phones but conceded this was ambitious. ""Nokia make 200 million cell phones a year", so for us to claim we're going to make 200 million laptops is a big number, but we're not talking about doing it in three or five years," we're talking about months." " He plans to be distributing them by the end of 2006 and is already in discussion with the Chinese education ministry who are expected to make a large order. ""In China they spend \$17 per child per year on textbooks. That's for five or six years", so if we can distribute and sell laptops in quantities of one million or more to ministries of education that's cheaper and the marketing overheads go away." "

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"tech 064.txt Looks and music to drive mobiles Mobile phones are still enjoying a boom time in sales", according to research from technology analysts Gartner. More than 674 million mobiles were sold last year globally, said the report, the highest total sold to date. The figure was 30% more than in 2003 and surpassed even the most optimistic predictions, Gartner said. Good design and the look of a mobile, as well as new services such as music downloads, could go some way to pushing up sales in 2005, said analysts. Although people were still looking for better replacement phones, there was evidence, according to Gartner," that some markets were seeing a slow-down in replacement sales. ""All the markets grew apart from Japan which shows that replacement sales are continuing in western Europe", mobile analyst Carolina Milanesi told the BBC News website. Japan is where north America and western European markets can be in a couple of years' time. ""They already have TV", music, ringtones, cameras, and all that we can think of on mobiles," so people have stopped buying replacement phones." " But there could be a slight slowdown in sales in European and US markets too", according to Gartner, as people wait to see what comes next in mobile technology. This means mobile companies have to think carefully about what they are offering in new models so that people see a compelling reason to upgrade, said Gartner. Third generation mobiles (3G) with the ability to handle large amounts of data transfer, like video, could drive people into upgrading their phones," but Ms Milanesi said it was difficult to say how quickly that would happen. ""At the end of the day", people have cameras and colour screens on mobiles and for the majority of people out there who don't really care about technology the speed of data to a phone is not critical." " Nor would the rush to produce two or three megapixel camera phones be a reason for mobile owners to upgrade on its own. The majority of camera phone models are not at the stage where they can compete with digital cameras which also have flashes and zooms. More likely to drive sales in 2005 would be the attention to design and aesthetic

s", as well as music services. The Motorola Razr V3 phone was typical of the attention to design that would be more commonplace in 2005," she added. This was not a ""women's thing""", she said, but a desire from men and women to have a gadget that is a form of self-expression too. It was not just about how the phone functioned," but about what it said about its owner. ""Western Europe has always been a market which is quite attentive to design", said Ms Milanesi. People are after something that is nice-looking, and together with that," there is the entertainment side. ""This year music will have a part to play in this." The market for full-track music downloads was worth just \$20 million (£10.5 million) in 2004", but is set to be worth \$1.8 billion (£9.4 million) by 2009, according to Jupiter Research. Sony Ericsson just released its Walkman branded mobile phone, the W800, which combines a digital music player with up to 30 hours' battery life, and a two megapixel camera. In July last year, Motorola and Apple announced a version of iTunes online music downloading service would be released which would be compatible with Motorola mobile phones. Apple said the new iTunes music player would become Motorola's standard music application for its music phones. But the challenge will be balancing storage capacity with battery life if mobile music hopes to compete with digital music players like the iPod. Ms Milanesi said more models would likely be released in the coming year with hard drives. But they would be more likely to compete with the smaller capacity music players that have around four gigabyte storage capacity, which would not put too much strain on battery life.

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"tech 065.txt Yahoo celebrates a decade online Yahoo", one of the net's most iconic companies," is celebrating its 10th anniversary this week. The web portal has undergone remarkable change since it was set up by Stanford University students David Filo and Jerry Yang in a campus trailer. The students wanted a way of keeping track of their web-based interests. The categories lists they devised soon became popular to hundreds of people and the two saw business potential in their idea. Originally dubbed ""Jerry's Guide to the World Wide Web"" the firm adopted the moniker Yahoo because the founders liked the dictionary definition of a yahoo as a rude", unsophisticated, uncouth person. The term was popularised by the 18th Century satirist Jonathan Swift in his classic novel," Gulliver's Travels. ""We were certainly not sophisticated or civilised" Mr Yang told reporters ahead of the anniversary, which will be officially recognised on 2 March. They did have business brains however, and in April 1995 persuaded venture capitalists Sequoia Capital, which also invested in Apple Computer and Cisco Systems, to fund Yahoo to the tune of \$2m (£1.04m). A second round of funding followed in the autumn and the company floated in April 1996 with less than 50 employees. Now the firm employs 7,600 workers and insists its dot com culture of work hard", play hard"" still remains. It is one of just a handful of survivors of the dot-com crash although it now faces intense rivalry from firms such as Google", MSN and AOL. Jerry Yang," who remains the firm's ""Chief Yahoo""", is proud of what the company has achieved. ""In just one decade", the internet has changed the way consumers do just about everything - and it's been a remarkable and wonderful experience," he said. Through it all, we wanted to build products that satisfied our users wants and needs, but it's even more than that - it's to help every one of us to discover, get more done, share and interact.

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"tech 066.txt Kenyan school turns to handhelds At the Mbita Point primary school in western Kenya students click away at a handheld comp

uter with a stylus. They are doing exercises in their school textbooks which have been digitised. It is a pilot project run by EduVision", "which is looking at ways to use low cost computer systems to get up-to-date information to students who are currently stuck with ancient textbooks. Matthew Herren from EduVision told the BBC programme Go Digital how the non-governmental organisation uses a combination of satellite radio and handheld computers called E-slates. ""The E-slates connect via a wireless connection to a base station in the school. This in turn is connected to a satellite radio receiver. The data is transmitted alongside audio signals." "The base station processes the information from the satellite transmission and turns it into a form that can be read by the handheld E-slates. ""It downloads from the satellite and every day processes the stream", " sorts through content for the material destined for the users connected to it. It also stores this on its hard disc." "The system is cheaper than installing and maintaining an internet connection and conventional computer network. But Mr Herren says there are both pros and cons to the project. ""It's very simple to set up", just a satellite antenna on the roof of the school, but it's also a one-way connection," so getting feedback or specific requests from end users is difficult." "The project is still at the pilot stage and EduVision staff are on the ground to attend to teething problems with the Linux-based system.

""The content is divided into visual information", "textual information and questions. Users can scroll through these sections independently of each other." "EduVision is planning to include audio and video files as the system develops and add more content. Mr Herren says this would vastly increase the opportunities available to the students. He is currently in negotiations to take advantage of a project being organised by search site Google to digitise some of the world's largest university libraries. ""All books in the public domain", something like 15 million," could be put on the base stations as we manufacture them. Then every rural school in Africa would have access to the same libraries as the students in Oxford and Harvard." "Currently the project is operating in an area where there is mains electricity. But Mr Herren says EduVision already has plans to extend it to more remote regions. ""We plan to put a solar panel at the school with the base station", have the E-slates charge during the day when the children are in school," then they can take them home at night and continue working." "Maciej Sundra", who designed the user interface for the E-slates," says the project's ultimate goal is levelling access to knowledge around the world.

""Why in this age when most people do most research using the internet are students still using textbooks? The fact that we are doing this in a rural developing country is very exciting - as they need it most." "

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"tech 067.txt Tough rules for ringtone sellers Firms that flout rules on how ringtones and other mobile extras are sold could be cut off from all UK phone networks. The rules allow offenders to be cut off if they do not let consumers know exactly what they get for their money and how to turn off the services. The first month under the new rules has seen at least ten firms suspended while they clean up the way they work. The rules have been brought in to ensure that the problems plaguing net users do not spread to mobile phones. In the last couple of years ringtones", wallpapers, screensavers and lots of other extras for phones have become hugely popular. But fierce competition is making it difficult for firms to get their wares in front of consumers, said Jeremy Flynn," head of third party services at Vodafone. ""If you are not on the operator's portal you are going to have quite heavy marketing costs because it's a problem of how people discover your services", "he said. To combat this many ringtone and other mobile content sellers started using a new tactic to squeeze

more cash out of customers. This tactic involved signing people up for a subscription to give them, for instance, several ringtones per week or month instead of the single track they thought they were getting. Mr Flynn said that the move to using subscriptions happened over the space of a few weeks at the end of 2004. Websites such as grumbletext.co.uk started getting reports from customers who were racking up large bills for phone content they did not know they had signed up for. What made us uncomfortable was that these services were not being marketed transparently", " said Mr Flynn. People did not know they were being offered a subscription service." " "We saw potential for substantial consumer harm here", he added. The swift adoption of subscription services led to the creation of a new code of conduct for firms that want to sell content for mobile phones. The drafting of the new rules was led by the Mobile Entertainment Forum and the UK's phone firms. Everyone is required to conform to this code of conduct," said Andrew Bud, regulatory head of the MEF and executive chairman of messaging firm MBlox. It's all about transparency", " he said. Consumers have to be told what they have got themselves into and how to get out of it." " "The consumer has a right to be protected", " he said. Christian Harris, partnership manager of mobile content firm Zed, said the new system was essential if consumers were to trust companies that sell ringtones and other downloads. The groundrules must be applied across the whole industry and if that's done effectively we will see the cowboys driven out", " he said. The new rules came in to force on 15 January and the first month under the new regime has seen many firms cautioned for not honouring them. Some have been told to revamp websites so customers know what they get for their money and what they are signing up for, said Mr Flynn. Also, said Mr Flynn, Vodafone has briefly cut off between eight and ten content sellers flouting the rules. We have quite draconian contracts with firms", " he said. We do not have to say why. We can just cut them off." " Under the rules consumers must be able to switch off the services by using a universal "stop" command sent via text message. He said the system had been designed to limit how much a consumer will pay if they inadvertently signed up for a service. " "The mobile is so personal that people really resent the abuse of what is effectively part of their personality", " said Mr Flynn.

tech 068.txt Creator of first Apple Mac dies Jef Raskin, head of the team behind the first Macintosh computer, has died. Mr Raskin was one of the first employees at Apple and made many of the design decisions that made the Mac so distinctive when it was first released. He led the team that decided to use a graphical interface and mouse that let people navigate around the computer by pointing and clicking. The 1984 release of the Mac reflected Mr Raskin's belief that good design should make computers easy to use. Mr Raskin joined Apple in 1978 as employee number 31, initially to lead the company's publications department. However, in 1979 he was put in charge of a small team to design a computer that lived up to his idea of a machine that was cheap, aimed at consumers rather than computer professionals and was very easy to use. The result was the 1984 Macintosh that did away with the then common text-based interface in favour of one based around graphics that resembled a virtual desktop and used folders and documents. Users navigated around the machine using a mouse and by pointing, clicking and dragging. Although now in common use in almost all computers, these methods were pioneering when first used in the Macintosh. The GUI was developed by Xerox PARC, and used in its Star machine. But the acceptance of the interface did not truly begin until the concept was developed for use by Apple in its pioneering Lisa computer. His role on the Macintosh was the initiator of the project", so it wouldn't be here if it weren't for him," said Andy Hertzfeld, an early Macintosh team member. Although Mr Raskin drove the team that created the Macintosh he did not stay at Apple to see it released. In 1

981 he was removed from the project following a dispute with Apple's mercurial boss Steve Jobs. In 1982, Mr Raskin left Apple entirely. The Macintosh was reputedly named after Mr Raskin's favourite apple, though the name was changed slightly following a trademark dispute with another company. After leaving Apple, Mr Raskin founded another company called Information Appliance and continued to work on better ways to interface with computers. He was also an accomplished musician, played three instruments and conducted San Francisco's Chamber Opera Society. Mr Raskin was diagnosed in December 2004 with pancreatic cancer and died on 26 February at his home in California.

tech 069.txt 'Friends fear' with lost mobiles People are becoming so dependent on their mobile phones that one in three are concerned that losing their phone would mean they lose their friends. More than 50% of mobile owners reported they had had their phone stolen or lost in the last three years. More than half (54%) of those asked in a poll for mobile firm Intervoice said that they do not have another address book. A fifth rely entirely on mobiles. About 80% of UK adults own at least one mobile, according to official figures. It is estimated that 53% of over 65s own a mobile, according to Intervoice, but the figures are higher for those aged between 15 and 34. Most 15 to 24-year-olds (94%), and 25 to 34-year-olds (92%), own at least one. Nineteen percent of mobile owners were more concerned about how long it would take to find their contacts' information again if the phone was lost, stolen or replaced. The survey showed that extent to which people have become reliant on their phones as an address book. Many mobile owners do not bother to make back-ups of their contact details, and with people changing their phones once a year on average, it becomes a problem. They also are becoming less likely to remember numbers by heart, relying on the mobile phone book instead. "We're a nation of lazy so-and-sos", David Noone from Intervoice said. We put the numbers in our phones so we can call a friend at the touch of just one or two buttons and we certainly can't be bothered to write them down in an old fashioned address book. ""The mobile phone plays such a key role in modern relationships; take the phone away and the way we manage these relationships falls apart." One in three women", the survey said, thought if they lost their phones, it would mean they would lose touch with people altogether. Most (62%) said they had no idea what their partner's number was. Mr Noone said it should be up to mobile operators to provide back-up services on the network itself, instead of relying on mobile owners to find ways themselves. Generally, information from Sim cards can be backed up on physical memory cards, or can be copied onto computers via cables if the phone is a smartphone model with the right software. Sim back-up devices can be bought from phone shops for just a few pounds. But some operators offer customers free web-based back-up services too. Orange told the BBC News website that those with Orange Smartphones could use the My Phone syncing service which means back-ups of address books and other data are created online. For non-smartphone users, a Memory Mate card could be used to back up data on the phone. O2 also offers a free, web-based syncing service which works over GPRS and GSM. Neither Vodafone or T-Mobile currently offer a free network service for back-ups, but encourage people to use Sim back-up devices. It is thought that about 10,000 phones are lost or stolen every month and 50% of total street crime involves a mobile. Mobile phone sales are expected to continue growing over the next year. Globally, more than 167 million mobile phones were sold in the third quarter of 2004, 26% more than the previous year, according to analysts. It is predicted that there will be two billion handsets in use worldwide by the end of 2005.

elewest is to offer a personal video recorder (PVR) in a set -top box to challenge Sky Plus. Sky Plus is the market leader in the field of digital video recorders in the UK", with 474,000 subscribers. PVRs record TV programmes to a hard drive, letting viewers pause," and rewind live television and effectively ""time shift"" the viewing experience. A number of PVRs incorporating Freeview digital terrestrial TV are also on the market but their success is limited. Telewest's PVR will offer a 160GB hard drive", which has storage for up to 80 hours of programmes. The box has three tuners, which means viewers can record two channels simultaneously while watching a third channel. Sky Plus boxes come in two versions - a 20GB version for £99 and a 160GB version for £399. Sky also charges a £10 subscription fee to the service, unless viewers have a subscription to one of its premium packages. Telewest has yet to reveal pricing for the new box or if it will be charging a subscription fee for the service. Eric Tveten, president and chief operating officer at Telewest Broadband," said: ""We will make our PVR set-top box available later this year", putting a stop to missed soap s," interrupted films and arguments over which programmes to record."" PVRs and recordable DVD players are set to replace video recorders as the standard method of recording and saving favourite TV programmes. Last year", high street retailer Dixons said it was going to stop selling VHS machines in favour of PVRs and recordable DVD machines. Sky has said it aims to have 25% of its subscribers using Sky Plus by 2010 - it is predicting 10 million total subscribers by that date. It currently has 7.4 million subscribers, while Telewest provides digital cable to 1.7 million customers.

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"tech 071.txt Games enter the classroom Video games could soon be transplanted from their natural habitat to the more academic atmosphere of the classroom. With violent titles continuing to top the charts"," gaming and learning have not always sat well together but the tide could be beginning to turn. Recent research by the London Institute of Education concluded that games have a valid place in the classroom. ""Games teach life skills such as decision making", problem solving," said Martin Owen, at Futurelab. Mr Owen said games could also help children make quick assessments of situations and learning by trial and error. Futurelab is a non-profit organisation looking at ways of using technology for innovative learning. Most game firms are too busy turning a profit in the lucrative commercial market to consider developing games for use in schools but Liverpool-based games firm Lateral Visions saw a gap in the market. Learning games were somewhat old-fashioned and we didn't see anyone else doing what we wanted to do"," said Dr Carl Gavin, managing director of Lateral Visions. The company set out to write something that had all the look and feel of a commercial game but with an educational and learning element. The result is Racing Academy, a massively multiplayer car racing game, which requires not only a thirst for speed but a working knowledge of physics and engineering as well. It is being used by Futurelab to test the viability of using gaming in the classroom. We are keen to find out whether alongside learning a game", we can also learn something that the rest of the world can understand as being educational," said Mr Owen. Players will have to understand how a car works in order to win races and the knowledge of physics and engineering that they gather along the way will be done in a way that no text book can teach. The game requires users to build and maintain their vehicles and to monitor and analyse performance using data from a variety of outputs, before and after racing. Teamwork is essential and a chat area allows students to exchange information and data, work collaboratively and review their own performances. This fusion of chatrooms and gaming is of special interest to Futurelab as it is through talking to others tha

t much of the learning can be achieved, thinks Mr Owen. The game has been trialled in two secondary schools in Bristol and feedback from students has been positive. Pupils used the statistics to work out the best way to build their cars and the online message board to share ideas and support each other", " said Ben Williamson, a researcher at Futurelab charged with testing the game in real schools. Dr Gavin thinks the game satisfies both teachers' need for learning outcomes and the children's desire to rise to a challenge. Games in the classroom need to support the teacher. It is not about giving children free rein to play game but recognising that games attract attention and offer a challenge", " he said. Professor Angela MacFarlane, based at Bristol University, has spent several years researching how games can be incorporated into classrooms. Use of games in schools has been patchy she found, with Sim City proving the most popular. Traditionally schools have eschewed mainstream games in favour of used so-called edutainment software in a belief that such packages help to make learning fun, she found in her research. It is perhaps in a compromise between edutainment and mainstream games that the greatest potential for classroom useable games lies", " she wrote in a paper entitled Games and Learning. 'Lite' versions of existing games could be the way forward and would overcome one of the biggest hurdles - persuading developers to write for the educational market. This would appeal to developers because of the low costs involved in adapting them as well as offering a new opportunity for marketing. Already there are games on the market, such as Civilisation and Age of Empire, that have educational elements said Mr Owen. Even in Grand Theft Auto it is not just the violence that engages people", " he said. It could be some time until that particular game makes it into the classroom though.

tech 072.txt Gadget growth fuels eco concerns Technology firms and gadget lovers are being urged to think more about the environment when buying and disposing of the latest hi-tech products. At the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas earlier this month, several hi-tech firms were recognised for their strategies to help the environment. Ebay also announced the Rethink project bringing together Intel, Apple, and IBM among others to promote recycling. The US consumer electronics market is set to grow by over 11% in 2005. But more awareness is needed about how and where old gadgets can be recycled as well as how to be more energy efficient, said the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Of particular growing concern is how much energy it takes to recharge portable devices, one of the fastest growing markets in technology. The Consumer Electronics Association (CEA) has predicted that shipments of consumer technologies in 2005 will reach more than \$125.73 billion (nearly £68 billion). eBay's initiative pulls together major technology firms, environment groups, government agencies and eBay users to give information about what to do with old computers and where to send them. The online auction house thinks that its already-established community of loyal users could be influential. We really became aware of the e-waste issue and we saw that our 125 million users can be a powerful force for good", " eBay's David Stern told the BBC News website. We saw the opportunity to meet the additional demand we have on the site for used computers and saw the opportunity too to do some good for the environment." " But it is not just computers that cause a problem for the environment. Teenagers get a new mobile every 11 months", adults every 18 months and a 15 million handsets are replaced in total each year. Yet, only 15% are actually recycled. This year, a predicted two billion people worldwide will own a mobile, according to a Deloitte report. Schemes in the US, like RIPMobile, could help in targeting younger generations with recycling messages. The initiative, which was also launched at CES," rewards 10 to 28-year-olds for returning unused phones. ""This system allows for the transformation of a drawer full of unused mobile phones into anythi

ng from music to clothes to electronics or games", " said Seth Heine from RIPMobile. One group of students collected 1,000 mobiles for recycling in just three months. Mr Heine told the BBC News website that what was important was to raise awareness amongst the young so that recycling becomes learned behaviour". Europe is undoubtedly more advanced than the US in terms of recycling awareness and robust ""end of life"" programmes", " although there is a tide change happening in the rest of the world too. Intel showcased some its motherboards and chips at CES which are entirely lead free. ""There is more and more awareness on the consumer side", but the whole industry is moving towards being lead free, Intel's Allen Wilson told the BBC News website. There is still low-level awareness right now," but it is on the rise - the highest level of awareness is in Europe." A European Union (EU) directive", WEEE (Waste Electronic and Electrical Equipment), comes into effect in August. It puts the responsibility on electrical manufacturers to recycle items that are returned to them. But developments are also being made to design better technologies which are more energy efficient and which do not contain harmful substances. Elements like chromium, lead, and cadmium - common in consumer electronics goods - will be prohibited in all products in the EU by 2006. But it is not just about recycling either. The predicted huge growth in the gadget market means the amount of energy used to power them up is on the rise too. The biggest culprit, according to the EPA, is the innocuous power adaptor," nicknamed ""energy vampires"". They provide vital juice for billions of mobile phones", PDAs (personal digital assistants), digital cameras, camcorders, and digital music players. Although there is a focus on developing efficient and improved circuits in the devices themselves, the technologies inside rechargers are still outdated and so eat up more energy than is needed to power a gadget. On 1 January, new efficiency standards for external power supplies came into effect as part of the European Commission Code of Conduct. But at CES, the EPA also unveiled new guidelines for its latest Energy Star initiative which targets external power adapters. These map out the framework for developing better adaptors that can be labelled with an Energy Star logo, meaning they are about 35% more efficient. The initiative is a global effort and more manufacturers' adaptors are being brought on board. Most are made in China. About two billion are shipped global every year," and about three billion are in use in the US alone. The EPA is already working with several companies which make more than 22% of power supplies on the market. ""We are increasingly finding companies that not only want to provide neat", hi-tech devices, but also bundle with it a hi-tech, efficient power supply," the EPA's Andrew Fanara said. Initiatives like this are critical; if power adaptors continue to be made and used as they are now, consumer electronics and other small appliances will be responsible for more than 40% of electricity used in US homes, said the EPA.

tech 073.txt 'Evil twin' fear for wireless net People using wireless high-speed net (wi-fi) are being warned about fake hotspots, or access points. The latest threat, nicknamed evil twins, pose as real hotspots but are actually unauthorised base stations, say Cranfield University experts. Once logged onto an Evil Twin, sensitive data can be intercepted. Wi-fi is becoming popular as more devices come with wireless capability. London leads the global wi-fi hotspots league, with more than 1,000. The number of hotspots is expected to reach 200,000 by 2008, according to analysts. Users need to be wary of using their wi-fi enabled laptops or other portable devices in order to conduct financial transactions or anything that is of a sensitive or personal nature", " said Professor Brian Collins, head of information systems at Cranfield University. Users can also protect themselves by ensuring that their wi-fi device has its security measures activated", " he added. BT Openzone, which operates a vast proportion of public hotspots in the UK, told the BBC News website that it made eve

ry effort to make its wi-fi secure. Naturally", people may have security concerns," said Chris Clark, chief executive for BT's wireless broadband. But wi-fi networks are no more or less vulnerable than any other means of accessing the internet", " like broadband or dial-up." He said BT Openzone", as well as others," have sophisticated encryption from the start of the login process to the service at a hotspot. "This means that users' personal information and data", login usernames and passwords are protected and secure," said Mr Clark. In the vast majority of cases, base stations straight out of the box from the manufacturers are automatically set up with the least secure mode possible, said Dr Nobles. Cybercriminals who try to glean personal information using the scam, jam connections to a legitimate base station by sending a stronger signal near to the wireless client. Anyone with the right gear can find a real hotspot and substitute it with an evil twin. Cybercriminals don't have to be that clever to carry out such an attack", " said Dr Phil Nobles, a wireless net and cybercrime expert at Cranfield. Because wireless networks are based on radio signals they can be easily detected by unauthorised users tuning into the same frequency." Althrough wi-fi is increasing in popularity as more people want to use high-speed net on the move", there have been fears over how secure it is. Some companies have been reluctant to use them in large numbers because of fears about security. A wireless network that is not protected can provide a backdoor into a company's computer system. Public wi-fi hotspots offered by companies like BT Openzone and The Cloud," are accessible after users sign up and pay for use. But many home and company wi-fi networks are left unprotected and can be ""sniffed out"" and hi-jacked by anyone with the correct equipment. "BT advises that customers should change all default settings", make sure that their security settings on all equipment are configured correctly," said Mr Clark. We also advocate the use of personal firewalls to ensure that only authorised users can have access and that data cannot be intercepted." Dr Nobles is due to speak about wireless cyber crime at the Science Museum's Dana Centre in London on Thursday.

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"tech 074.txt China 'to overtake US net use' The Chinese net-using population looks set to exceed that of the US in less than three years", says a report. China's net users number 100m but this represents less than 8% of the country's 1.3 billion people. Market analysts Panlogic predicts that net users in China will exceed the 137 million US users of the net by 2008. The report says that the country's culture will mean that Chinese people will use the net for very different ends than in many other nations. Already net use in China has a very different character than in many Western nations, said William Makower, chief executive of Panlogic. In many Western nations desktop computers that can access the net are hard to escape at work. By contrast in China workplace machines are relatively rare. This, combined with the relatively high cost of PCs in China and the time it takes to get phone lines installed," helps to explains the huge number of net cafes in China. Only 36% of Chinese homes have telephones according to reports. "Net usage tends to happen in the evening", " said Mr Makower, they get access only when they go home and go off to the internet cafe." "Its fundamentally different usage to what we have here", " he said. Net use in China was still very much an urban phenomenon with most users living on the country's eastern seaboard or in its three biggest cities. The net is key to helping Chinese people keep in touch with friends, said Mr Makower. Many people use it in preference to the phone or arrange to meet up with friends at net cafes. What people can do on the net is also limited by aspects of Chinese life. For instance, said Mr Makower, credit cards are rare in China partly because of fears people have about getting in to debt. The most popular way to

pay is Cash-On-Delivery", " he said, and that's quite a brake to the development of e-commerce." " The arrival of foreign banks in China", due in 2006, could mean greater use of credit cards but for the moment they are rare," said Mr Makower. But if Chinese people are not spending cash online they are interested in the news they can get via the net and the view it gives them on Western ways of living. " "A large part of the attraction of the internet is that it goes below the radar", " he said. Generally it's more difficult for the government to be able to control it." " Its real value is as an open window onto what's happening elsewhere in the world", he said. Government restrictions on how much advertising can appear on television means that the net is a source of many commercial messages Chinese people would not see anywhere else. Familiarity with the net also has a certain social cachet. It's a sign of them having made it that they can use the internet and navigate around it," said Mr Makower.

tech 075.txt US peer-to-peer pirates convicted The first convictions for piracy over peer-to-peer networks have been handed down in the US. New Yorker William Trowbridge and Texan Michael Chicoine have pleaded guilty to charges that they infringed copyright by illegally sharing music, movies and software. The two men faced charges following raids in August on suspected pirates by the FBI. The pair face jail terms of up to five years and a \$250,000 (£130,000) fine. In a statement the US Department of Justice said the two men operated the central hubs in a piracy community organised across the Direct Connect peer-to-peer network. The piracy group called itself the Underground Network and membership of it demanded that users share between one and 100 gigabytes of files. Direct Connect allows users to set themselves up as central servers that act as co-ordinating spots for sharers. Users would swap files, such as films and music, by exchanging data over the network. During its investigation FBI agents reportedly downloaded 84 movies, 40 software programs, 13 games and 178 sound recordings" from the five hubs that made up the larger piracy group. The raids were organised under the umbrella of Operation Digital Gridlock which was aimed at fighting " "criminal copyright theft on peer-to-peer networks" ". In total", six raids were carried out in August. Five were on the homes of suspected copyright thieves and one on a net service firm. The Department of Justice said that both men pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit felony copyright infringement. They also pleaded guilty to acting for commercial advantage. The two men are due to be sentenced on 29 April.

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"tech 076.txt Google launches TV search service The net search giant Google has launched a search service that lets people look for TV programmes. The service", Google Video beta, searches closed caption information that comes with programmes. It only searches US channel content currently. Results list programmes with still images and text from the point where the search phrase was spoken. It should expand over time to include content from more channels," said a Google spokesperson. The first version of the service is part of Google's expanding efforts to be a ubiquitous search engine for people to find what they want on the web and beyond. " "We think TV is a big part of people's lives", " said Jonathan Rosenberg, Google's vice president of product management. Ultimately", " we would like to have all TV programming indexed." " Google Video has been indexing US-based programmes from PBS", the NBA, Fox News," and C-SPAN since December. But there were few clues from Google about when more global broadcasters would be included. " "Over time", we plan to increase the number of television channels and video content available via Google Video but don't have more product details to share with you today," a Google spokesperson told the BBC News website. The results thrown up by the search will also include pro

gramme and episode information like channel, date and time. It also lets people find the next time and channel where a programme will aired locally using a US zip code search function. Rival search engine Yahoo has been developing a similar type of video search for webcasts and TV clips which it promotes from its homepage. It offers direct links to websites with movies or other clips relevant to the search query, but does not pinpoint when the search query occurred. A spokeswoman told the Financial Times on Monday that Yahoo was adding captioning for Bloomberg, BBC and BSkyB broadcasts. A smaller service, blinkx.tv, was launched last month. It searches for and links to TV news, film trailers, and other video and audio clips.

tech 077.txt Rich pickings for hi-tech thieves Viruses, trojans and other malicious programs sent on to the net to catch you out are undergoing a subtle change. The shift is happening as tech savvy criminals turn to technology to help them con people out of cash, steal valuable data or take over home PCs. Viruses written to make headlines by infecting millions are getting rarer. Instead programs are now crafted for directly criminal ends and firms are tightening up networks with defences to combat the new wave of malicious code. The growing criminal use of malware has meant the end of the neat categorisation of different sorts of viruses and malicious programs. Before now it has been broadly possible to name and categorise viruses by the method they use to spread and how they infect machines. But many of the viruses written by criminals roll lots of technical tricks together into one nasty package. You cannot put them in to the neat little box that you used to", said Pete Simpson, head of the threat laboratory at security firm Clearswift. Now viruses are just as likely to spread by themselves like worms, or to exploit loopholes in browsers or hide in e-mail message attachments. It's about outright criminality now", said Mr Simpson, explaining why this change has come about. He said many of the criminal programs came from Eastern Europe where cash-rich organised gangs can find a ready supply of technical experts that will crank out code to order. Former virus writer Marek Strihavka, aka Benny from the 29A virus writing group, recently quit the malware scene partly because it was being taken over by spyware writers, phishing gangs, and spammers who are more interested in money rather than the technology. No longer do virus writers produce programs to show off their technical prowess to rivals in the underground world of malware authors. Not least, said Paul King, principal security consultant at Cisco, because the defences against such attacks are so common. In many ways the least likely way to do it is e-mail because most of us have got anti-virus and firewalls now", he said. Few of the malicious programs written by hi-tech thieves are cleverly written, many are much more pragmatic and use tried and tested techniques to infect machines or to trick users into installing a program or handing over important data. If you think of criminals they do not do clever", said Mr King, they just do what works." As the tactics used by malicious programs change", said Mr King, so many firms were changing the way they defend themselves. Now many scan machines that connect to the corporate networks to ensure they have not been compromised while off the core network. Many will not let a machine connect and a worker get on with their job before the latest patches and settings have been uploaded. As well as using different tactics," criminals also use technology for reasons that are much more transparent. ""The main motivation now is money", said Gary Stowell, spokesman for St Bernard software. Mr Stowell said organised crime gangs were turning to computer crime because the risks of being caught were low and the rates of return were very high. With almost any phishing or spyware attack, criminals are guaranteed to catch some people out and have the contacts to exploit what they recover. So-called spyware was proving very popular with criminals because it allowed them to take over machines for their own ends,

to steal key data from users or to hijack web browsing sessions to point people at particular sites. In some cases spyware was being written that searched for rival malicious programs on PCs it infects and then trying to erase them so it has sole ownership of that machine.

tech 078.txt Blog reading explodes in America Americans are becoming avid blog readers, with 32 million getting hooked in 2004, according to new research. The survey, conducted by the Pew Internet and American Life Project, showed that blog readership has shot up by 58% in the last year. Some of this growth is attributable to political blogs written and read during the US presidential campaign. Despite the explosive growth, more than 60% of online Americans have still never heard of blogs, the survey found. Blogs, or web logs, are online spaces in which people can publish their thoughts, opinions or share news events in their own words. Companies such as Google and Microsoft provide users with the tools to publish their own blogs. The rise of blogs has spawned a new desire for immediate news and information, with six million Americans now using RSS aggregators. RSS aggregators are downloaded to PCs and are programmed to subscribe to feeds from blogs, news sites and other websites. The aggregators automatically compile the latest information published online from the blogs or news sites. Reading blogs remains far more popular than writing them, the survey found. Only 7% of the 120 million US adults who use the internet had created a blog or web-based diary. Getting involved is becoming more popular though, with 12% saying they had posted material or comments on other people's blogs. Just under one in 10 of the US's internet users read political blogs such as the Daily Kos or Instapundit during the US presidential campaign. Kerry voters were slightly more likely to read them than Bush voters. Blog creators were likely to be young, well-educated, net-savvy males with good incomes and college educations, the survey found. This was also true of the average blog reader, although the survey found there was a greater than average growth in blog readership among women and those in minorities. The survey was conducted during November and involved telephone surveys of 1,324 internet users.

tech 079.txt Software watching while you work Software that can not only monitor every keystroke and action performed at a PC but also be used as legally binding evidence of wrong-doing has been unveiled. Worries about cyber-crime and sabotage have prompted many employers to consider monitoring employees. The developers behind the system claim it is a break-through in the way data is monitored and stored. But privacy advocates are concerned by the invasive nature of such software. The system is a joint venture between security firm 3ami and storage specialists BridgeHead Software. They have joined forces to create a system which can monitor computer activity, store it and retrieve disputed files within minutes. More and more firms are finding themselves in deep water as a result of data misuse. Sabotage and data theft are most commonly committed from within an organisation according to the National Hi-Tech Crime Unit (NHTCU) A survey conducted on its behalf by NOP found evidence that more than 80% of medium and large companies have been victims of some form of cyber-crime. BridgeHead Software has come up with techniques to prove, to a legal standard, that any stored file on a PC has not been tampered with. Ironically the impetus for developing the system came as a result of the Freedom of Information Act, which requires companies to store all data for a certain amount of time. The storage system has been incorporated into an application developed by security firm 3ami which allows every action on a computer to be logged. Potentially it could help employers to follow the trail of stolen files and pinpoint whether they had been emailed to a third party, copied, printed, deleted or saved to CD, floppy disk, memory stick or flash card. Other activities the system can monitor include the downloading of pornography, the use of racist or bullying lan

guage or the copying of applications for personal use. Increasingly organisations that handle sensitive data, such as governments, are using biometric log-ins such as fingerprinting to provide conclusive proof of who was using a particular machine at any given time. Privacy advocates are concerned that monitoring at work is not only damaging to employee's privacy but also to the relationship between employers and their staff. That is not the case", " said Tim Ellsmore, managing director of 3ami. It is not about replacing dialogue but there are issues that you can talk through but you still need proof", he said. People need to recognise that you are using a PC as a representative of a company and that employers have a legal requirement to store data," he added.

tech 080.txt New delay hits EU software laws A fresh delay has hit controversial new European Union rules which govern computer-based inventions. The draft law was not adopted by EU ministers as planned at a Brussels meeting on Monday during which it was supposed to have been discussed. The fresh delay came after Polish officials had raised concerns about the law for the second time in two months. Critics say the law would favour large companies over small ones and could impact open-source software innovation. There was at one point the intention to put the item on today's agenda. But in the end we could not put it on", " an EU spokesman told the Reuters agency. He added that no date had been chosen for more discussion of the law. In December, Poland requested more time to consider the issue because it was concerned that the law could lead to the patenting of pure computer software. Its ministers want to see the phrasing of the text of the Directive on the Patentability of Computer-Implemented Inventions changed so that it excludes software patenting. Poland is a large EU member, so its backing for the legislation is vital. The EU says the law would bring Europe more in line with how such laws work in the US, but this has caused some angry debate amongst critics and supporters. In the US, the patenting of computer programs and internet business methods is permitted. This means that the US-based Amazon.com holds a patent for its one-click shopping" service. Critics say a similar model in Europe would hurt small software developers which do not have the legal and financial might of larger companies. But supporters say current law does not let big companies protect inventions which they have spent years developing.

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"tech 081.txt Savvy searchers fail to spot ads Internet search engine users are an odd mix of naive and sophisticated", suggests a report into search habits. The report by the US Pew Research Center reveals that 87% of searchers usually find what they were looking for when using a search engine. It also shows that few can spot the difference between paid-for results and organic ones. The report reveals that 84% of net users say they regularly use Google, Ask Jeeves, MSN and Yahoo when online. Almost 50% of those questioned said they would trust search engines much less, if they knew information about who paid for results was being hidden. According to figures gathered by the Pew researchers the average user spends about 43 minutes per month carrying out 34 separate searches and looks at 1.9 webpages for each hunt. A significant chunk of net users, 36%, carry out a search at least weekly and 29% of those asked only look every few weeks. For 44% of those questioned, the information they are looking for is critical to what they are doing and is information they simply have to find. Search engine users also tend to be very loyal and once they have found a site they feel they can trust tend to stick with it. According to Pew Research 44% of searchers use just a single search engine, 48% use two or three and a small number, 7%, consult more than three sites. Tony Macklin, spokesman for Ask Jeeves, said the results reflected its own research which showed that pe

ople use different search engines because the way the sites gather information means they can provide different results for the same query. Despite this liking for search sites half of those questioned said they could get the same information via other routes. A small number, 17%, said they wouldn't really miss search engines if they did not exist. The remaining 33% said they could not live without search sites. More than two-thirds of those questioned, 68%, said they thought that the results they were presented with were a fair and unbiased selection of the information on a topic that can be found on the net. Alongside the growing sophistication of net users is a lack of awareness about paid-for results that many search engines provide alongside lists of websites found by indexing the web. Of those asked, " 62% were unaware that someone has paid for some of the results they see when they carry out a search. Only 18% of all searchers say they can tell which results are paid for and which are not. Said the Pew report: ""This finding is ironic", since nearly half of all users say they would stop using search engines if they thought engines were not being clear about how they presented paid results." Commenting Mr Macklin said sponsored results must be clearly marked and though they might help with some queries user testing showed that people need to be able to spot the difference.

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"tech 082.txt Games firms 'face tough future' UK video game firms face a testing time as they prepare for the next round of games consoles", the industry warns. Fred Hasson, head of Tiga, which represents independent developers, said that more UK firms would go under due to greater risks in making new titles. Three leading UK video game companies also predicted that more firms would close as they struggled to adapt. Microsoft, Sony and Nintendo are expected to release new consoles in the next 18 months. Microsoft has said repeatedly that it wants to be first to the market and some analysts predict that Xbox 2 will be released in the US before the end of 2005. The new machines will all have much greater processing and graphical power which will have a huge impact on development of next generation games. Mr Hasson said: ""In the last four years we have probably lost a third of independent developers." He said there were about 150 independent developers left in the industry and more were likely to close. ""Once the cull has finished its likely to present those still standing with great opportunities", he said. Mr Hasson said the industry was predicting that developments costs and teams were likely to need to double in order to cope with the demands of the new machines. That figure was endorsed by three independent companies contacted by the BBC News website - Codemasters, Climax and Rebellion. As consoles get more powerful", the content gets more detailed and that means more cost," said Gary Dunn, development director at Codemasters, which develops games in house and also publishes titles. Jason Kingsley, chief executive of Rebellion, said the transition from the current generation of consoles to the new machines was difficult because the production quality expected by consumers will be that much bigger"". He added: ""We have been through five technology transitions and survived so far. ""Each one has involved the death of some people. All companies said they were investing in new tools - called middleware - in order to try and avoid staff numbers spiralling out of control. Simon Gardner", president of Climax's Action studio," said: ""We are investing in superior tools and editors. We are investing upfront to generate this content without the need for huge teams. ""It's vital we avoid huge teams." He said Climax was already directing about 20% of its resources to preparation for next generation titles. Mr Dunn warned that companies could face a short supply of programming", development and artistic talent. ""If companies are hiring bigger and bigger teams", at some point the talent is going to run out." Mr Hasson s

aid games developers were beginning to realise that they had to be more ""business-like""." "There are still some developers who were involved in games from the bedroom coding days. ""Some of them are still making games for peer group approval - that has to stop.""

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tech 083.txt Microsoft makes anti-piracy move Microsoft says it is clamping down on people running pirated versions of its Windows operating system by restricting their access to security features. The Windows Genuine Advantage scheme means people will have to prove their software is genuine from mid-2005. It will still allow those with unauthorised copies to get some crucial security fixes via automatic updates", but their options would be ""limited"". Microsoft releases regular security updates to its software to protect PCs. Either PCs detect updates automatically or users manually download fixes through Microsoft's site. Those running pirated Windows programs would not have access to other downloads and ""add-ons"" that the software giant offers. People who try to manually download security patches will have to let Microsoft run an automated checking procedure on their computer or give an identification number. Microsoft's regular patches which it releases for newly-found security flaws are important because they stop worms", viruses and other threats penetrating PCs. Some security experts are concerned that restricting access to such patches could mean a rise in such attacks and threats, with more PCs left unprotected. But Graham Cluley, senior consultant at security firm Sophos," told the BBC News website that it was a positive decision. ""It sounds like their decision to allow critical security patches to remain available to both legitimate and illegitimate users of Windows is good news for everyone who uses the net", he said. Windows Genuine Advantage was first introduced as a pilot scheme in September 2004 for English-language versions of Windows. Microsoft's Windows operating system is heavily exploited by virus writers because it is so widespread and they are constantly seeking out new security loopholes to take advantage of. The company is trying to tackle security threats whilst cracking down on pirated software at the same time. Software piracy has cost the company billions, it says. The company announced earlier in January that it was releasing security tools to clean up PCs harbouring viruses and spyware, which 90% of PCs are infected with. The virus-fighting program, updated monthly, is a precursor to Microsoft's dedicated anti-virus software. Last year it introduced the Windows XP Counterfeit Project, a UK-based pilot scheme, which ran from November to December. The scheme meant that anyone with pre-installed copies of the operating system in PCs bought before November could replace counterfeit versions of Windows XP with legal ones for free. It is also increasing efforts to squash software piracy in China, Norway and the Czech Republic, where pirated software is a huge problem, by offering discounts on legitimate software to users of pirated copies Windows. China in particular is a problem", with piracy estimated at 92%, said Mr Cluley.

tech 084.txt Nintendo handheld given Euro date Nintendo's new handheld console, the DS, will launch in Europe on 11 March, the company has announced. The portable games machine, which features touch-screen control, will retail for £99 in the UK (149 euros). Nintendo said 15 games would be available in the UK at launch, with prices ranging from £19 to £29. More than 2.8 million DS consoles have been sold since it first appeared in the US and Japan at the end of 2004. Rival Sony has said it will launch its first handheld console, the PSP, in the US and Europe before the end of March. The PSP is expected to compete for a large part of the same handheld market, despite Sony's assertion that the machines are aimed at different consumers. The 15 games available o

n the European launch date will include Nintendo's Super Mario 64 DS, as well as titles from third-party developers such as Ubisoft's Rayman DS. More than 120 games are in development for the new console, Nintendo has said. The DS is backwards compatible with the Game Boy Advance, allowing the earlier machine's back catalogue of 700 games to be played. Additionally, a short-range wireless link for multiplayer gaming is built in to the DS, with a download play"" option which allows a group to play against each other", even if just one person owns a copy. Other features include a short-range messaging application called Picto chat, and a built-in microphone which is used in Sega's launch title Project Rub. Nintendo has also announced a media adapter, which will allow the console to play music and video on the move. The launch price of £99 (149 euros) compares favourably with the US price of \$149, according to John Houlihan," editor of the Computerandvideogames.com magazine. ""It's a very", very competitive price point. There are some innovative features, and Nintendo has created quite a buzz, he says. However, the line-up of games could have been stronger. Everyone wanted to see the eight-player Mario Kart DS," for example." Mr Houlihan believes that there is likely to be an audience for both the Nintendo DS and Sony's new PSP", with the former aimed largely at a younger audience and the latter expected to be marketed as a multimedia device. ""The PSP is a sexy bit of kit", but Sony's attitude to the PSP has been very understated in Europe, so far," Mr Houlihan said. The worldwide handheld software market had an estimated worth of \$2.6bn at the end of 2004, according to industry analysts Screen Digest. In the past, games consoles and handhelds have generally launched much later in Europe than in other parts of the world. However Nintendo president Satoru Iwata said the company was pleased to have offered such a short period of time between the US and European launch"". ""Europe is an extremely important market for Nintendo"," Mr Iwata added. Nintendo raised its sales targets for the DS console last December after selling a million in the US and Japan in just a few weeks.

tech 085.txt Smart search lets art fans browse If you don't know art but know what you like, new search technology could prove a useful gateway to painting. ArtGarden, developed by BT's research unit, is being tested by the Tate as a new way of browsing its online collection of paintings. Rather than search by the name of an artist or painting, users are shown a selection of pictures. Clicking on their favourite will change the gallery in front of them to a selection of similar works. The technology uses a system dubbed smart serendipity, which is a combination of artificial intelligence and random selection. It 'chooses' a selection of pictures, by scoring paintings based on a selection of keywords associated with them. So, for instance a Whistler painting of a bridge may have the obvious keywords such as bridge and Whistler associated to it but will also widen the search net with terms such as aesthetic movement, 19th century and water. A variety of paintings will then be shown to the user, based partly on the keywords and partly on luck. It is much more akin to wandering through the gallery", said Jemima Rellie, head of the Tate's digital programme. For Richard Tateson, who worked on the ArtGarden project, the need for a new way to search grew out of personal frustration. I went to an online clothes store to find something to buy my wife for Christmas but I didn't have a clue what I wanted", he said. The text-based search was restricted to looking either by type of garment or designer, neither of which he found helpful. He ended up doing his present shopping on the high street instead. He thinks the dominance of text-based searching is not necessarily appealing to the majority of online shoppers. Similarly, with art, browsing is often more important than finding a particular object. You don't arrive at Tate Britain and tell people what you want to see. One of the skills of showing off the collection is to introduce people to things they wouldn't have asked for", he said. The Tate is committed

to making its art more accessible and technology such as ArtGarden can help with that, said Ms Rellie. She hopes the technology can be incorporated on to the website in the near future. BT research is looking at extending the technology to other searching, such as for music and films.

tech 086.txt Warning over Windows Word files Writing a Microsoft Word document can be a dangerous business, according to document security firm Workshare. Up to 75% of all business documents contained sensitive information most firms would not want exposed, a survey by the firm revealed. To make matters worse 90% of those companies questioned had no idea that confidential information was leaking. The report warns firms to do a better job of policing documents as corporate compliance becomes more binding. Sensitive information inadvertently leaked in documents includes confidential contractual terms, competitive information that rivals would be keen to see and special deals for key customers, said Andrew Pearson, European boss of Workshare which commissioned the research. The efficiencies the internet has brought in such as instant access to information have also created security and control issues too", he said. The problem is particularly acute with documents prepared using Microsoft Word because of the way it maintains hidden records about editing changes. As documents get passed around, worked on and amended by different staff members the sensitive information finds its way into documents. Poor control over the editing and amending process can mean that information that should be expunged survives final edits. Microsoft, however, does provide an add-on tool for Windows PCs that fixes the problem. The Remove Hidden Data add-in is a tool that you can use to remove personal or hidden data that might not be immediately apparent when you view the document in your Microsoft Office application", says the instructions on Microsoft's website. Microsoft recommends that the tool is used before people publish any Word document. A tool for Apple machines running Word is not available. Workshare surveyed firms around the world and found that, on average, 31% of documents contained legally sensitive information but in many firms up to three-quarters fell in to the high risk category. Often, said Mr Pearson, this sensitive information was invisible because it got deleted and changed as different drafts were prepared. However, the way that Windows works means that earlier versions can be recalled and reconstructed by those keen to see how a document has evolved. Few firms have any knowledge of the existence of this so-called metadata about the changes that a document has gone through or that it can be reconstructed. The discovery of this hidden information could prove embarrassing for companies if, for instance, those tendering for contracts found out about the changes to terms of a deal being negotiated. The research revealed that a document's metadata could be substantial as, on average, only 40% of contributors' changes to a document make it to the final draft. Problems with documents could mean trouble for firms as regulatory bodies step up scrutiny and compliance laws start to bite, said Mr Pearson.

tech 087.txt Net regulation 'still possible' The blurring of boundaries between TV and the internet raises questions of regulation, watchdog Ofcom has said. Content on TV and the internet is set to move closer this year as TV-quality video online becomes a norm. At a debate in Westminster, the net industry considered the options. Lord Currie, chairman of super-regulator Ofcom, told the panel that protecting audiences would always have to be a primary concern for the watchdog. Despite having no remit for the regulation of net content, disquiet has increased among internet service providers as speeches made by Ofcom in recent months hinted that regulation might be an option. At the debate, organised by the Internet Service Providers' Association (ISPA), Lord Currie did not rule out the possibility of regulation. The challenge will arise when boundaries between TV and the internet truly blur and then there is a bala

nce to be struck between protecting consumers and allowing them to assess the risks themselves", he said. Adopting the rules that currently exist to regulate TV content or self-regulation, which is currently the practice of the net industry, will be up for discussion. Some studies suggest that as many as eight million households in the UK could have adopted broadband by the end of 2005, and the technology opens the door to TV content delivered over the net. More and more internet service providers and media companies are streaming video content on the web. BT has already set up an entertainment division to create and distribute content that could come from sources such as BSkyB, ITV and the BBC. Head of the division, Andrew Burke, spoke about the possibility of creating content for all platforms. How risque can I be in this new age? With celebrity chefs serving up more expletives than hot dinners", surely I can push it to the limit," he said. In fact, he said, if content has been requested by consumers and they have gone to lengths to download it, then maybe it should be entirely regulation free. Internet service providers have long claimed no responsibility for the content they carry on their servers since the Law Commission dubbed them mere conduits"" back in 2002. This defence does not apply if they have actual knowledge of illegal content and have failed to remove it. The level of responsibility they have has been tested in several high-profile legal cases. Richard Ayers", portal director at Tiscali, said there was little point trying to regulate the internet because it would be impossible. Huge changes are afoot in 2005, he predicted, as companies such as the BBC offer TV content over the net. The BBC's planned interactive media player which will give surfers the chance to download programmes such as EastEnders and Top Gear will make net TV mainstream and raise a whole new set of questions, he said. One of these will be about the vast sums of money involved in maintaining the network to supply such a huge quantity of data and could herald a new digital licence fee, said Mr Ayers. As inappropriate net content, most obviously pornography viewed by children, continues to dominate the headlines, internet regulation remains a political issue said MP Richard Allan," Liberal Democrat spokesman on IT. Mr Allan thinks that the answer could lie somewhere between the cries of ""impossible to regulate"" and ""just apply offline laws online"". In fact", instead of seeing regulation brought online, the future could bring an end to regulation as we know it for all TV content. After Lord Currie departed," the panel agreed that this could be a reality and that for the internet people power is likely to reign. ""If content is on-demand", consumers have pulled it up rather than had pushed to them, then it is the consumers' choice to watch it. There is no watershed on the net," said Mr Burke.

tech 088.txt      Voters flock to blog awards site      Voting is under way for the annual Bloggies which recognise the best web blogs - online spaces where people publish their thoughts - of the year. Nominations were announced on Sunday, but traffic to the official site was so heavy that the website was temporarily closed because of too many visitors. Weblogs have been nominated in 30 categories, from the top regional blog, to the best-kept-secret blog. Blogs had a huge year, with a top US dictionary naming blog"" word of 2004. Tech norati", a blog search engine, tracks about six million blogs and says that more than 12,000 are added daily. A blog is created every 5.8 seconds, according to US research think-tank Pew Internet and American Life, but less than 40% of the total are updated at least once every two months. Nikolai Nolan, who has run the Bloggies for the past five years," told the BBC News website he was not too surprised by the amount of voters who crowded the site. ""The awards always get a lot of traffic; this was just my first year on a server with a bandwidth limit", so I had to guess how much I'd need," he said. There were many new finalists this year, he added, and a few that had won Bloggies before. Several entr

ies reflected specific news events. There are four nominations for the South-East Asia Earthquake and Tsunami Blog", which is a pretty timely one for 2005," said Mr Nolan. The big Bloggies battle will be for the ultimate prize of blog of the year. The nominated blogs are wide-ranging covering what is in the news to quirky sites of interest. Fighting it out for the coveted award are Gawker, This Fish Needs a Bicycle, Wonkette, Boing Boing, and Gothamist. In a sign that blogs are playing an increasingly key part in spreading news and current affairs, The South-East Asia Earthquake and Tsunami Blog is also nominated in the best overall category. GreenFairyDotcom, Londonist, Hicksdesign, PlasticBag and London Underground Tube Blog are the nominees in the best British or Irish weblog. Included in the other categories is best meme"". This is for the top ""replicating idea that spread about weblogs"". Nominations include Flickr", a web photo album which lets people upload, tag, share and publish their images to blogs. Podcasting has also made an appearance in the category. It is an increasingly popular idea that makes use of RSS (really simple syndication) and audio technology to let people easily make their own radio shows, and distribute them automatically onto portable devices. Many are done by those who already have text-based blogs, so they are almost like audio blogs. Three new categories have been added to the list this year, including best food, best entertainment, and best writing of a weblog. One of the categories that was scrapped though was best music blog. The winners of the fifth annual Bloggies are chosen by the public. Public voting closes on 3 February and the winners will be announced sometime between 13 and 15 March.

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"tech 089.txt Latest Opera browser gets vocal Net browser Opera 8.0", due for official release at the end of next month," will be ""the most accessible browser on the market""", according to its authors. The latest version of the net browser can be controlled by voice command and will read pages aloud. The voice features, based on IBM technology," are currently only available in the Windows version. Opera can also magnify text by up to 10 times and users can create ""style sheets""", its developers say. This will enable them to view pages with colours and fonts that they prefer. But the browser does not yet work well with screen reader software often used by blind people," so its accessibility features are more likely to appeal to those with some residual vision. ""Our mission was always to provide the best internet experience for everyone", said Opera spokeswoman, Berit Hanson. So we would obviously not want to exclude disabled computer users." Another feature likely to appeal to people with low vision is the ability to make pages fit to the screen width", which eliminates the need for horizontal scrolling. The company points out that this will also appeal to anyone using Opera with a handheld device. The company says that features like voice activation are not solely aimed at visually impaired people. ""Our idea was to take a first step in making human-computer interaction more natural", said Ms Hanson. People are not always in a situation where they can access a keyboard," so this makes the web a more hands-free experience." Unlike commercially available voice recognition software", Opera does not have to be ""trained"" to recognise an individual voice. Around 50 voice commands are available and users will have to wear a headset which incorporates a microphone. The voice recognition function is currently only available in English. Opera is free to download but a paid-for version comes without an ad banner in the top right hand corner and with extra support. Opera began life as a research project - a spin-off from Norwegian telecoms company Telenor. Its browser is used by an estimated 10 million people on a variety of operating systems and a number of different platforms.

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"tech 090.txt Web radio takes Spanish rap global Spin the radio dial in the US and you are likely to find plenty of Spanish-language music. But what you will not find is much Spanish-language hip-hop. Hip-hop and rap are actually quite popular in the Spanish-speaking world", but local artists are having trouble marketing their work abroad. But now, a US company is bringing rap and hip-hop en espanol to computer users everywhere. Los Caballeros de Plan G are one of Mexico's hottest hip-hop acts. They have a devoted fan base in their native Monterrey. But most Mexican hip-hop fans, not to mention fans in most of the Spanish-speaking world," rarely get a chance to hear the group's tracks on the radio. ""You can't really just go on the radio and listen to hip-hop in Spanish... it's just not accessible", " says Manuel Millan, a native of San Diego, California. It's really hard for the Spanish hip-hop scene to get into mainstream radio. You usually have a very commercialised sound and the groups are not really known around the country or around the world." Millan and two friends set out to change that - they wanted to make groups like Los Caballeros de Plan G accessible to fans globally. Mainstream radio stations were not going to play this kind of music", and starting their own broadcast station was economically impossible. So, Millan and his friends launched a website called latinohiphopradio.com. The name says it all: it is web-based radio, devoted to the hottest Spanish language rap and hip-hop tracks. The site, which is in both English and Spanish, is meant to be easy to navigate. All the user has to do is download a media player. There are no DJs. It is just music streamed over the net for free. Suddenly, with the help of the website," Los Caballeros de Plan G are producing ""export quality"" rap. The web might be just the right medium for Spanish language hip-hop right now. The genre is in what Millan calls its ""infant stage"". But the production values are improving", " and artists such as Argentina's Mustafa Yoda are pushing to make it better and better. Mustafa Yoda is currently one of the hottest tracks on latinohiphopradio.com. ""He's considered the Eminem of Argentina", and the Latin American hip-hop scene, Millan says. He really hasn't had that much exposure as far as anywhere in the world," but he's definitely the one to look out for as far as becoming the next big thing in the Spanish-speaking world." Currently", the Chilean group Makisa is also in latinohiphopradio.com's top 10," as is Cuban artist Papo Record. ""Every country's got its own cultural differences and they try to put those into their own songs", " Millan says. Latinohiphopradio.com has been up and running for a couple of months now. The site has listeners from across the Spanish speaking world. Right now, Mexico leads the way, accounting for about 50% of listeners. But web surfers in Spain are logging in as well - about 25% of the web station's traffic comes from there. That is not surprising as many consider Spain to be the leader in Spanish-language rap and hip-hop. Millan says that Spain is actually just behind the United States and France in terms of overall rap and hip-hop production. That might be changing, though, as more and more Latin American artists are finding audiences. But one Spaniard is still firmly in latinohiphopradio.com's top 10. His name is Tote King and Manuel Millan says that he is the hip-hop leader in Spain. On his track Uno Contra Veinte Emcees, or One Against 20 Emcees, Tote King shows he is well aware of that fact. It's basically him bragging that he's one of the best emcees in Spain right now", Millan says. And it's pretty much true. He has the tightest productions, and his rap flow is impeccable," it's amazing." Latinohiphopradio.com is hoping to expand in the coming year. Millan says they want to include more music and more news from the world of Spanish language hip-hop and rap. Clark Boyd is technology correspondent for The World", a BBC World Service and WGBH-Boston co-production.

tech 091.txt Movie body targets children's PCs The body that represents the US movie industry has released its latest tool in its campaign to clamp down on movie file-sharing", " aimed at parents. The Movie Association for America's (MPAA) free Parent File Scan software lets parents check their children's computers for peer-to-peer programs. It will also list all movie and music files they have on their hard drive. Parents then have the choice to remove programs and files. The MPAA said files found would not be passed on to it. ""Our ultimate goal is to help consumers locate the resources and information they need to make appropriate decisions about using and trading illegal files", " said Dan Glickman, MPAA chief. Many parents are concerned about what their children have downloaded and where they've downloaded it from." " But some computer users who had tested the latest software reported on some technology sites that the program had identified Windows default wav files as copyrighted material and wanted to delete them. Movie piracy cost the industry £3.7bn (\$7bn) in 2 003", " according to analysts. The MPAA said in a statement that it would continue to provide easy access to similar tools in the coming months to combat ""the deleterious effects of peer-to-peer software", including such common problems as viruses," Trojan horses and identity theft". Mr Glickman said that the film industry was embracing ""digital age technologies""", like Movielink and Cinema Now," which are legal movie sites. ""But legal services such as these need a chance to grow and thrive without having to compete against illegitimate operations that depend on stolen property to survive", " he added. The industry also said it had launched a second round of legal action against online movie-swap pers across the US, but did not say how many were being sued. Its first set of lawsuits were filed in November 2004. It also started a campaign against operators of BitTorrent, eDonkey and DirectConnect peer-to-peer networks. The first convictions for peer-to-peer piracy were handed out in the US in January. William Trowbridge and Michael Chicoine pleaded guilty to charges that they infringed copyright by illegally sharing music, movies and software.

tech 092.txt Norway upholds 'Napster' ruling A Norwegian student who ran a website which linked to downloadable MP3 files has been ordered to pay compensation by the country's Supreme Court. Frank Allan Bruvik was ordered to pay 100,000 kroner (£8,000) to the music industry in Norway. He was a student when he set up his napster.no site, which allowed users to submit and receive links to MP3 files. Bruvik had earlier been cleared on appeal after a lower court had found for the music industry. Music industry bosses in Norway said the ruling would help build confidence in the internet as a distribution medium. Frank Allan Bruvik set up the napster.no website as part of a school project in 2001 while studying computer engineering in the Norwegian town of Lillehammer. The website was not associated with the napster.com site in the USA, which had been operating since 1999 and was already facing legal action. Bruvik's site was online between August and November 2001, and while it did not host any music, at its peak it was providing links to more than 170 free files on other servers. As well as providing links, the site allowed those visiting it to submit links that could later be accessed by other visitors. A legal complaint for copyright violation was filed by groups including Norway's performing rights society, Tono, and the Norwegian branches of Sony Music and Universal Music, who saw it as an important test of principle. A Norwegian court ruled in 2003 that Bruvik would have to pay 100,000 kroner to the music industry, but the country's Court of Appeal cleared him, saying that the copyright violation occurred when others posted the music. However, the Supreme Court stated that the music was clearly published in violation of copyright law. It added that the case was d

ecided based on the responsibility for abetting an illegal act, and that Bruvi k's actions were premeditated. Norway's music industry said it was satisfied with the ruling, because showed that music piracy would not be accepted. Meanwhile, in the USA a further 717 lawsuits against people alleged to have traded copyrighted songs were filed this week by the Recording Industry Association of America. The suits, brought on behalf of the major record companies, cite the individuals for illegally distributing music via unauthorized peer-to-peer services such as Kazaa and eDonkey. As with preceding cases, the fresh action was made against so-called John Doe"" defendants", who are identified only by the codes given to their computers' internet connections.

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"tech 093.txt The future in your pocket If you are a geek or gadget fan", the next 12 months look like they are going to be a lot of fun. The relentless pace of development in the hi-tech world and rampant competition in many of its sectors, particularly among mobile phone firms, all suggests that 2005 is going to be a very good year. To begin with, 2005 will be the year that third-generation (3G) mobile phones become inescapable. The 3 network launched in 2003, Vodafone launched its consumer service in November," Orange followed in early December and T-Mobile and O2 are due to launch in 2005. The main result of these launches will likely be a slew of good deals for consumers as operators try to poach new customers from rivals and convince existing users to trade up. Already the extra capacity in 3G networks lets 3 offer good deals on voice calls at rates that will probably have to be matched by the other operators. But the shift in technology and low cost of voice calls means that operators lose a significant chunk of their revenue. ""Show me an operator that believes their voice business can sustain them"," and I'll write their obituary"" said Niel Ransom", chief technology officer at Alcatel. Instead operators are likely to push all other things that 3G phones can do such as video messaging and other multimedia capabilities. Already camera phones look set to challenge digital cameras and are likely to win more fans as multi-megapixel devices go on sale. But 3G will not have everything its own way. It will face competition from emerging technologies such as Wimax. This wireless technology can boost data transmission speeds up to 75 megabits per second and works over distances of up to 30 miles. Kent is likely to be the site of the UK's first Wimax network which is due to go live in 2005 and it could be the way that rural areas get high-speed net access. Analyst firm Telecom View predicts that Wimax will steal a lot of market share from 3G and will be a clear winner. Bob Larribeau, principal analyst at Telecom View, said the better return on investment offered by technologies such as Wimax could dent the possible returns of 3G networks. And the growing ubiquity of wi-fi must not be forgotten either. The technology is popping up in more places than ever and its wider use is only held back by the price differences across countries and suppliers. Moves to unite mobile and fixed phones look set to get more emphasis in 2005 too. For a start, BT looks set to roll out its Bluephone project during the next 12 months. The service revolves around a hybrid device that uses the mobile networks when you are out and about but switches back to the fixed line when you are at home. Fixed line phones will also start to get much more serious competition from a technology that has the formidable name of Voice over IP (Voip). Voip routes calls via the net instead of the fixed line phone network. Anyone with a broadband connection, which is now more than 50% of the UK's net using population, can use Voip and could slash their monthly phone bills if they used it. Telecommunications regulator Ofcom has declared 056 to be the area code for Voip calls and 2005 is likely to see a lot more consumer-focused Voip call services starting up. Home broadband services will

also start to increase in speed as dwindling numbers of new users signing force the pace of competition. If 2004 has been the year of the portable music player, they 2005 looks like it will be the year of the portable media player. Motorola has just announced a deal with Apple to produce a phone that works with the iTunes service and other hybrid gadgets that sport a big memory and lots of other functions will become commonplace. The pace of advancement in storage media will continue mean that the cost per megabyte of memory will plummet. Some of those devices will sport huge hard drives letting you store more data than you ever wanted or knew you had. Convergence could mean that single-function devices start to dwindle in number. Instead every gadget will be able to do almost anything and communicate almost any way you want. The only downside is that consumers will face a series of tough choices as they are confronted by a bewildering array of gadgets each with an enormous numbers of features and vast data holding capacities. But that is the kind of problem most gadget fans can live with.

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"tech 094.txt What high-definition will do to DVDs First it was the humble home video", then it was the DVD, and now Hollywood is preparing for the next revolution in home entertainment - high-definition. High-definition gives incredible, 3D-like pictures and surround sound. The DVD disks and the gear to play them will not be out for another year or so, and there are still a number of issues to be sorted out. But when high-definition films do come out on the new format DVDs, it will profoundly change home entertainment. For Rick Dean, director of business development for digital content company THX, a high-definition future is an exciting prospect. He has worked on the Star Wars DVD trilogy, Finding Nemo," The Incredibles and Indiana Jones. ""There was a time not so long ago when the film world and the video world were two completely separate worlds", he told the BBC News website. The technology we are dealing with now means they are very much conjoined. ""The film that we see in theatres is coming from the same digital file that we take the home video master", he says. But currently, putting a master feature film onto DVD requires severe compression because current DVD technology cannot hold as much as high-definition films demand. As much as you compress the picture data rate wise", you also take qualities away from the picture that we fight so hard to keep in the master," he explains. I would love to be able to show people what projects that we worked on really look like in the high-def world and I find it very exciting." High-definition DVDs can hold up to six times more data than the DVDs we are used to. It will take time though to persuade people who spent money on DVD players to buy the different players and displays required to watch high-definition DVDs in 18 months' time. Mr Dean is confident though: ""I think if they see real HD [high-definition]", not some heavily compressed version of it," there is such a remarkable difference. ""I have heard comments from people who say the images pop off the screen." High-definition will mean some changes for those working behind the scenes too. On the whole", producing films for high-definition DVDs will be easier in some ways because less compression is needed. Equally," it may mean Hollywood studios ask for more to be put onto the average DVD. ""When we master movies right now", our data rates are running at about 1.2 gigabits per second," says Mr Dean. Our DVDs that we put out today have to be squashed down to about five or six megabits per second. ""That's a huge amount of compression that has to be applied - about 98%. So if you have anything that allows more space", you don't have to compress so hard." Studios could fit a lot more marketing material", games, and features, onto high-capacity DVDs. Currently, an entire DVD project can take up to three months, says Mr Dean. Although the step of down-converting will be bypassed, this will realistically only save a da

y's work, says Mr Dean. One of the most time consuming elements is building DVD navigation and menu systems. On the fairly complex Star Wars disks, making sure the menu buttons worked took 45 human hours alone. If studios want to cash in on the extra space, it could mean extra human hours," for which someone has to pay. ""If the decision on the studio side is that they are going to put a lot more on these disks", "it could be more expensive because of all the extra navigation that is required." And if studios do focus on delivering more ""added value content""", thinks Mr Dean, ultimately it could mean that they will want more money for it. Those costs could filter down to the price ticket on a high-def initiation DVD. But if the consumer is not willing to pay a premium price, studios will listen," thinks Mr Dean. High-definition throws up other challenge to film makers and DVD production alike. More clarity on screen means film makers have to make doubly sure that attention to detail is meticulous. ""When we did the first HD version of Star Wars Episode I", everybody was very sun-tanned," but that was make-up. ""In the HD version of Episode I", all these make-up lines showed up, explains Mr Dean. The restoration of the older Star Wars episodes revealed some interesting items too. There are scans of a corridor [on the Death Star] and fairly plainly in one of those shots," there is a file cabinet stuck behind one of the doorways. ""You never used to be able to see it because things are just blurred enough during the pan that you just didn't see it." What high-definition revolution ultimately means is that the line between home entertainment and cinema worlds will blur. With home theatre systems turning living rooms into cinemas", this line blurs even further. It could also mean that how we get films, and in what format," will widen. ""In the future we are going to look towards file delivery over IP [internet protocol - broadband]", giving a DVD-like experience from the set-top box to the hard drive," says Mr Dean. But that is some time off for most, and for now, people still like to show off something physical in their bookshelves.

tech 095.txt Mobile games come of age The BBC News website takes a look at how games on mobile phones are maturing. A brief round-up follows but you can skip straight to the reviews by clicking on the links below. If you think of Snake when some mentions mobile games"" then you could be in for a bit of a surprise. This is because mobile games have come a long way in a very short time. Even before Nokia's N-Gage game phone launched in late 2003", many mobile operators were realising that there was an audience looking for something to play on their handset. And given that many more people own handsets than own portable game playing gadgets such as the GameBoy it could be a very lucrative market. That audience includes commuters wanting something to fill their time on the way home, game fans looking for a bit of variety and hard core gamers who like to play every moment they can. Life for all these types of player has got immeasurably better in the last year as the numbers of titles you can download to your phone has snowballed. Now sites such as Wireless Gaming Review list more than 200 different titles for some UK networks and the ranges suit every possible taste. There are ports of PC and arcade classics such as Space Invaders, Lunar Lander and Bejewelled. There are also versions of titles, such as Colin McRae Rally, that you typically find on PCs and consoles. There are shoot-em-ups, adventure games, strategy titles and many novel games only found on handsets. Rarely now does an action movie launch without a mobile game tie-in. Increasingly such launches are all part of the promotional campaign for a film, understandable when you realise that a good game can rack up millions of downloads. The returns can be pretty good when you consider that some games cost £5. What has also helped games on mobiles thrive is the fact that it is easier than ever to get hold of them thanks to technology known as Wap push. By sending a text message to a game maker you can have the title downloaded to your handset.

Far better than having to navigate through the menus of most mobile operator portals. The number of handsets that can play games has grown hugely too. Almost half of all phones now have Java onboard meaning that they can play the increasingly sophisticated games that are available - even the ones that use 3D graphics. The minimum technology specifications that phones should adhere to are getting more sophisticated which means that games are too. Now double key presses are possible making familiar tactics such as moving and strafing a real option. The processing power on handsets means that physics on mobile games is getting more convincing and the graphics are improving too. Some game makers are also starting to take advantage of the extra capabilities in a mobile. Many titles, particularly racing games, let you upload your best time to see how you compare to others. Usually you can get hold of their best time and race against a "ghost" or "shadow" to see if you can beat them. A few games also let you take on people in real time via the network or, if you are sitting close to them, via Bluetooth short-range radio technology. With so much going on it is hard to do justice to the sheer diversity of what is happening. But these two features should help point you in the direction of the game makers and give you an idea of where to look and how to get playing.

**T00 FAST T00 FURIOUS (DIGITAL BRIDGE S)**

As soon as I start playing this I remember why I never play driving games - because I'm rubbish at them. No matter if I drive the car via joystick or key pad I just cannot get the hang of braking for corners or timing a rush to pass other drivers. The game rewards replay because to advance you have to complete every section within a time limit. Winning gives you cash for upgrades. Graphically the rolling road is a convincing enough evocation of speed as the palm trees and cactus whip by and the city scrolls past in the background. The cars handle pretty well despite my uselessness but it was not clear if the different models of cars were appreciably different on the track. The only niggle was that the interface was a bit confusing especially when using a joystick rather than the keypad to play.

**FATAL FORCE (MACROSPACE)**

A futuristic shooter that lets you either play various deathmatch modes against your phone or run through a series of scenarios that involves killing aliens invading Earth. Graphics are a bit cartoon-like but only helps to make clear what is going on and levels are well laid out and encourage you to leap about exploring. Both background music and sounds effects work well. The scenarios are well scripted and you regularly get hints from the Fatal Force commanders. Weapons include flamethrowers, rocket launchers, grenades and at a couple of points you even get chance to use a mech for a short while. With the right power-up you can go into a Matrix-style bullet time to cope with the onslaught of aliens. The game lets you play via Bluetooth if others are in range. Online the game has quite a following with clans, player rankings and even new downloadable maps.

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"tech 096.txt California sets fines for spyware The maker s of computer programs that secretly spy on what people do with their home PCs could face hefty fines in California. From 1 January", a new law is being introduced to protect computer users from software known as spyware. The legislation, which was approved by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, is designed to safeguard people from hackers and help protect their personal information. Spyware is considered by computer experts to be one of the biggest nuisance and security threats facing PC users in the coming year. The software buries itself in computers and can collect a wide range of information. At its worst, it has the ability to hijack personal data, like passwords, login details and credit card numbers. The programs are so sophisticated they change frequently and become impossible to eradicate. One form of spyware called adware has the ability to collect

information on a computer user's web-surfing. It can result in people being bombarded with pop-up ads that are hard to close. In Washington, Congress has been debating four anti-spyware bills, but California is a step ahead. The state's Consumer Protection Against Spyware Act bans the installation of software that takes control of another computer. It also requires companies and websites to disclose whether their systems will install spyware. Consumers are able to seek up to \$1,000 in damages if they think they have fallen victim to the intrusive software. The new law marks a continuing trend in California towards tougher privacy rights. A recent survey by Earthlink and Webroot found that 90% of PCs are infested with the surreptitious software and that, on average, each one is harbouring 28 separate spyware programs. Currently users wanting protection from spyware have turned to free programs such as Spybot and Ad-Aware.

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"tech 097.txt Web helps collect aid donations The web is helping aid agencies gather resources to help cope with the aftermath of the tsunami disaster. Many people are making donations via websites or going online to see how they can get involved with aid efforts. High-profile web portals such as Google", Yahoo, Ebay and Amazon are gathering links that lead people to aid and relief organisations. So many were visiting some aid-related sites that some webpages were struggling to cope with the traffic. An umbrella organisation called the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) has been set up by a coalition of 12 charities and has been taking many donations via its specially created website. It urged people to go online where possible to help because donations could be processed more quickly than cash donated in other ways, meaning aid could be delivered as quickly as possible. The site has so far received almost £8 million, with more than 11,000 donations being made online every hour. Telco BT stepped in to take over the secure payments on the DEC site and provided extra logistical support for phone and online appeals after it was initially crippled with online donations. It has also provided space in London's BT tower for one of the call centres dealing with donations. Some of the web's biggest firms are also helping to channel help by modifying their homepages to include links to aid agencies and organisations collecting resources. On its famously sparse homepage Google has placed a link that leads users to a list of sites where donations can be made. Among the 17 organisations listed are Oxfam, Medecins sans Frontieres (Doctors Without Borders) and Network for Good. Many of the sites that Google lists are also taking online donations. Online retailer Amazon has put a large message on its start page that lets people donate money directly to the American Red Cross that will be used with relief efforts. Auction site eBay is giving a list of sites that people can either donate directly to, divert a portion of their profits from anything they sell on eBay to the listed organisations or simply buy items that direct cash to those in the list. Yahoo is proving links direct to charities for those that want to donate. The Auction Drop website is asking people to donate old digital cameras, computers and other gadgets they no longer want that can be auctioned to raise cash for the aid effort. Sadly, the outpouring of goodwill has also encouraged some conmen to try to cash in. Anti-fraud organisations are warning about e-mails that are starting to circulate which try to convince people to send money directly to them rather than make donations via aid agencies. Those wanting to give cash were urged to use legitimate websites of charities and aid agencies.

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"tech 098.txt Mobiles rack up 20 years of use Mobile phones in the UK are celebrating their 20th anniversary this weekend. Britain's fi

rst mobile phone call was made across the Vodafone network on 1 January 1985 by veteran comedian Ernie Wise. In the 20 years since that day", mobile phones have become an integral part of modern life and now almost 90% of Britons own a handset. Mobiles have become so popular that many people use their handset as their only phone and rarely use a landline. The first ever call over a portable phone was made in 1973 in New York but it took 10 years for the first commercial mobile service to be launched. The UK was not far behind the rest of the world in setting up networks in 1985 that let people make calls while they walked. The first call was made from St Katherine's dock to Vodafone's head office in Newbury which at the time was over a curry house. For the first nine days of 1985 Vodafone was the only firm with a mobile network in the UK. Then on 10 January Cellnet (now O2) launched its service. Mike Caudwell, spokesman for Vodafone, said that when phones were launched they were the size of a briefcase, cost about £2,"000 and had a battery life of little more than 20 minutes. ""Despite that they were hugely popular in the mid-80s", he said. They became a yuppie must-have and a status symbol among young wealthy business folk." This was also despite the fact that the phones used analogue radio signals to communicate which made them very easy to eavesdrop on. He said it took Vodafone almost nine years to rack up its first million customers but only 18 months to get the second million. ""It's very easy to forget that in 1983 when we put the bid document in we were forecasting that the total market would be two million people", he said. Cellnet was forecasting half that." Now Vodafone has 14m customers in the UK alone. Cellnet and Vodafone were the only mobile phone operators in the UK until 1993 when One2One (now T-Mobile) was launched. Orange had its UK launch in 1994. Both newcomers operated digital mobile networks and now all operators use this technology. The analogue spectrum for the old phones has been retired. Called Global System for Mobiles (GSM) this is now the most widely used phone technology on the planet and is used to help more than 1.2 billion people make calls. Mr Caudwell said the advent of digital technology also helped to introduce all those things", such as text messaging and roaming that have made mobiles so popular.

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"tech 099.txt Blogs take on the mainstream Web logs or blogs are everywhere", with at least an estimated five million on the web and that number is set to grow. These online diaries come in many shapes and styles, ranging from people willing to sharing their views, pictures and links, to companies interested in another way of reaching their customers. But this year the focus has been on blogs which cast a critical eye over news events, often writing about issues ignored by the big media or offering an eye-witness account of events. Most blogs may have only a small readership, but communication experts say they have provided an avenue for people to have a say in the world of politics. The most well-known examples include Iraqi Salam Pax's accounts of the US-led war, former Iranian vice-president Mohammad Ali Abtahi exclusive insight into the Islamic Republic's government, and the highs and lows of the recent US election campaign. There are already websites pulling together these first-hand reporting accounts heralded by blogs, like [wikinews.com](http://wikinews.com), launched last November. The blogging movement has been building up for many years. Andrew Nachison, Director of the Media Center, a US-based think-tank that studies media, technology and society," highlights the US presidential race as a possible turning point for blogs. ""You could look at that as a moment when audiences exercised a new form of power", to choose among many more sources of information than they have never had before," he says. And blogs were a key part of that transformation." Among them were blogs carrying picture messages", saying "we are sorr

y"" for George W Bush's victory and the responses from his supporters. Mr Nachison argues blogs have become independent sources for images and ideas that circumvent traditional sources of news and information such as newspapers", "TV and radio. ""We have to acknowledge that in all of these cases", mainstream media actually plays a role in the discussion and the distribution of these ideas, he told the BBC News website. But they followed the story," they didn't lead it." Some parts of the so-called traditional media have expressed concerns about this emerging competitor", raising questions about the journalistic value of blogs. Others, like the French newspaper Le Monde, have applied a different strategy," offering blogs as part of its content. ""I don't think the mission and role of journalism is threatened. It is in transition", as society itself is in transition," says Mr Nachison. However, he agrees with other experts like the linguist and political analyst Noam Chomsky, that mainstream media has lost the traditional role of news gatekeeper. The one-to-many road of traditional journalism", yes, it is threatened. And professional journalists need to acclimate themselves to an environment in which there are many more contributors to the discourse, says Mr Nachison. The notion of a gatekeeper who filters and decides what's acceptable for public consumption and what isn't," that's gone forever." "With people now walking around with information devices in their pockets", like camera or video phones," we are going to see more instances of ordinary citizens breaking stories." It seems unlikely that we will end up living in a planet where every human is a blogger. But the current number of blogs is likely to keep on growing", in a web already overloaded with information. Blog analysis firm Technorati estimates the number of blogs in existence, the so-called blogosphere, has already exceeded five million, and is growing at exponential levels. Tools such as Google's Blogger, MovableType and the recently launched beta version of MSN Spaces are making it easier to run a blog. US research think-tank Pew Internet & American Life says a blog is created every 5.8 seconds, although less than 40% of the total are updated at least once every two months. But experts agree that the phenomenon, allowing individuals to publish, share ideas, exchange information, comment on current issues, post images or video on the web easily," is here to stay. ""We are entering one era in which the technological infrastructure is creating a different context for how we tell our stories and how we communicate with each other", " said Mr Nachison. And there's going to be bad that comes with the good."

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"tech 100.txt Honour for UK games maker Leading British computer games maker Peter Molyneux has been made an OBE in the New Year Honours list. The head of Surrey's Lionhead Studios was granted the honour for services to the computer games industry. Mr Molyneux has been behind many of the groundbreaking-breaking games of the last 15 years such as Populous", Theme Park, Dungeon Keeper and Black and White. He is widely credited with helping to create and popularise the so-called god-game genre. Speaking to the BBC News website Mr Molyneux said receiving the honour was something of a surprise. It's come completely out of the blue," he said, I never would have guessed that I'd have that kind of honour." He said he was surprised as much because", not too long ago," many people thought computer gaming was a fad. ""It was thought to be like skateboarding", " he said, a craze that everyone thought would go away." Now", he said, "the gaming world rivals the movie industry for sales and cultural influence. ""Britain plays a big part in it", " he said. It's one of the founding nations that made the industry what it is." Mr Molyneux has been a pivotal figure in the computer games industry for almost 20 years. His career started at Bullfrog Studios which in 1987 produced Populous one of the first God-games. The title g

ave players control over the lives a small population of computerised people. Mr Molyneux said that his involvement with the games industry started almost by accident as back in the early days game making was more a hobby than a career. ""I thought everyone would treat Populous as weird", he said, but it became a huge international success." He left Bullfrog in 1997 to set up Lionhead Studios which was behind the ambitious and widely acclaimed game Black & White. One of the next titles to come from Lionhead puts players in charge of a movie studio and tasks them with producing and directing a hit film. The veteran game maker says he has one problem still to solve. ""Being an absolute geek I've got no idea what I'm going to wear when I go and pick it up", he said.

tech 101.txt Bush website blocked outside US Surfers outside the US have been unable to visit the official re-election site of President George W Bush. The blocking of browsers sited outside the US began in the early hours of Monday morning. Since then people outside the US trying to browse the site get a message saying they are not authorised to view it. The blocking does not appear to be due to an attack by vandals or malicious hackers, but as a result of a policy decision by the Bush camp. The international exclusion zone around georgewbush.com was spotted by net monitoring firm Netcraft which keeps an eye on traffic patterns across many different sites. Netcraft said that since the early hours of 25 October attempts to view the site through its monitoring stations in London, Amsterdam and Sydney failed. By contrast Netcraft's four monitoring stations in the US managed to view the site with no problems. The site can still be seen using anonymous proxy services that are based in the US. Some web users in Canada also report that they can browse the site. The pattern of traffic to the website suggests that the blocking was not due to an attack by vandals or politically motivated hackers. Geographic blocking works because the numerical addresses that the net uses to organise itself are handed out on a regional basis. On 21 October, the George W Bush website began using the services of a company called Akamai to ensure that the pages, videos and other content on its site reaches visitors. Mike Prettejohn, president of Netcraft, speculated that the blocking decision might have been taken to cut costs, and traffic, in the run-up to the election on 2 November. He said the site may see no reason to distribute content to people who will not be voting next week. Managing traffic could also be a good way to ensure that the site stays working in the closing days of the election campaign. However, simply blocking non-US visitors also means that Americans overseas are barred too. Akamai declined to comment, saying it could not talk about customer websites.

tech 102.txt Blogger grounded by her airline A US airline attendant is fighting for her job after she was suspended over postings on her blog, or online diary. Queen of the Sky, otherwise known as Ellen Simonetti, evolved into an anonymous semi-fictional account of life in the sky. But after she posted pictures of herself in uniform, Delta Airlines suspended her indefinitely without pay. Ms Simonetti was told her suspension was a result of inappropriate"" images. Delta Airlines declined to comment. ""I was really shocked", I had no warning, Ms Simonetti told BBC News Online. I never thought I would get in trouble because of the blog. I thought if they had a problem," someone would have said something before taking action." The issue has highlighted concerns amongst the growing blogging community about conflicts of interest", employment law and free speech on personal websites. Ms Simonetti was suspended on 25 September pending an investigation and has since lodged a complaint with the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). A spokesperson for Delta Airlines told BBC News Online: ""All I can tell you is we do not discuss internal employee issues with the media." She added she could not say whether a similar situation over personal websites had occurred in the past. Ms Simonetti started h

er personal blog in January to help her get over her mother's death. She had ensured she made no mention of which airline she worked for", and created fictional names for cities and companies. The airline's name was changed to Anonymous Airline and the city in which she was based was called Quirksville. A large part of the blog contained fictional stories because Queen of the Sky developed over the months as a character in her own right," according to Ms Simonetti. The images were taken from a digital camera she had inherited from her mother. ""We often take pictures on flight or on layovers. I just thought why not include them on my blog for fun. ""I never meant it as something to harm my company and don't understand how they think it did harm them", Ms Simonetti said. She has also claimed that pictures of male Delta Airline employees in uniform are freely available on the web. Of the 10 or so images on the site, only one showed Ms Simonetti's flight wings"". ""They did not tell me which pictures they had a problem with. I am just assuming it was the one of me posing on seats where my skirt rode up", she said. The images were removed as soon as she learned she had been suspended. As far as Ms Simonetti knows, there is no company anti-blogging policy. There is guidance which suggests the company uniform cannot be used without approval from management, but use in personal pictures on websites is unclear. Jeffrey Matsuura, director of the law and technology programme at the University of Dayton, said personal websites can be hazardous for both employers and their employees. There are many examples of employees who have presented some kind of material online that have gotten them in trouble with employers", he said. It was crucial that any policy about what was and what was not acceptable was expressed clearly, was reasonable, and enforced fairly in company policy. You have to remember that as an employee", you don't have total free speech anymore, he said. Mr Matsuura added that some companies actively encouraged employees to blog. One of the areas where it does become a problem is that they encourage this when it suits them," but they may not be particularly clear when they [employees] do cross the line." He speculated that Delta might be concerned that the fictional content on the blog may be linked back to the airline after the images of Ms Simonetti in uniform were posted. ""Whether or not that is successful will depend on what exactly is prohibited", and whether you can reasonably say this content now crosses that line, he said. Ms Simonetti said her suspension has caused two of her friends to discontinue their blogs. One of them was asked to stop blogging by his company before any action was taken. If they had asked me just take down the blog, I would have done it, but that was not been given to me as an option, she said. This blogging thing is obviously a new problem for employers and they need to get a policy about it. If I had known it would cost me my job," I would not have done that."

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"tech 103.txt Camera phones are 'must-haves' Four times more mobiles with cameras in them will be sold in Europe by the end of 2004 than last year", says a report from analysts Gartner. Globally, the number sold will reach 159 million," an increase of 104%. The report predicts that nearly 70% of all mobile phones sold will have a built-in camera by 2008. Improving imaging technology in mobiles is making them an increasingly ""must-have"" buy. In Europe", cameras on mobiles can take 1.3 megapixel images. But in Japan and Asia Pacific, where camera phone technology is much more advanced, mobiles have already been released which can take 3.2 megapixel images. Japan still dominates mobile phone technology, and the uptake there is huge. By 2008, according to Gartner, 95% of all mobiles sold there will have cameras on them. Camera phones had some teething problems when they were first launched as people struggled with poor quality images and uses for them, as well as the complexity and expense of

sending them via MMS (Multimedia Messaging Services). This has changed in the last 18 months. Handset makers have concentrated on trying to make phones easier to use. Realising that people like to use their camera phones in different ways, they have introduced more design features, like rotating screens and viewfinders, removable memory cards and easier controls to send picture messages. Mobile companies have introduced more ways for people to share photos with other people. These have included giving people easier ways to publish them on websites, or mobile blogs - moblogs. But the report suggests that until image quality increases more, people will not be interested in printing out pictures at kiosks. Image sensor technology inside cameras phones is improving. The Gartner report suggests that by mid-2005, it is likely that the image resolution of most camera phones will be more than two megapixels. Consumer digital cameras images range from two to four megapixels in quality, and up to six megapixels on a high-end camera. But a lot of work is being done to make camera phones more like digital cameras. Some handsets already feature limited zoom capability, and manufacturers are looking into technological improvements that will let people take more photos in poorly-lit conditions, like nightclubs. Other developments include wide-angle modes, basic editing features, and better sensors and processors for recording film clips. Images from camera phones have even made it into the art world. An exhibition next month in aid of the charity Mencap, will feature snaps taken from the camera phones of top artists. The exhibition, Fonetography, will feature images taken by photographers David Bailey, Rankin and Nan Goldin, and artists Sir Peter Blake, Tracey Emin and Jack Vettriano. But some uses for them have worried many organisations. Intel, Samsung, the UK's Foreign Office and Lawrence Livermore National Laboratories in the US, have decided to ban camera phones from their buildings for fear of sensitive information being snapped and leaked. Many schools, fitness centres and local councils have also banned them over fears about privacy and misuse. Italy's information commissioner has also voiced concern and has issued guidelines on where and how the phones can be used. But camera phone fears have not dampedened the manufacturers' profits. According to recent figures, Sony Ericsson's profits tripled in the third-quarter because of new camera phones. Over 60% of mobiles sold during the three months through to September featured integrated cameras, it said.

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"tech 104.txt Games 'deserve a place in class' Computer games could enhance learning and have a legitimate place in the classroom", say researchers. Academics from the Institute of Education at London University found that ""games literacy"" was a key skill for youngsters. As well as being used in different areas of the curriculum", games are a legitimate area of study in their own right, researchers say. Pupils should also be able to create their own games," they say. ""Like all games", computer and video games entertain while promoting social development, and playing and talking about games is an important part of young people's lives, said project manager Caroline Pelletier. Games literacy is a way of investigating how games are means of expression and representation, just like writing or drawing," she said. The researchers conducted two studies into the impact of games on education, the first looking at how they can be used in different curriculum subjects to enhance learning. Researchers found that girls were often excluded from the male-dominated world of game playing. Without first-hand experience of how much fun a game can be", they have little motivation to play and remain disengaged from an engrossing and sociable activity," said research fellow Diane Carr. The second project looked at how games can be integrated into media education and concluded that writing games should be a core part of studying them. Sixth-form teacher Barney Oram already

teaches computer games alongside the more traditional study of film, TV and popular music at the A-level course he runs at Long Road Sixth Form College in Cambridge. For parents, the idea that computer games could be brought into the classroom environment, could cause controversy. Dr Andrew Burn, associate director of the Institute of Education's Centre for the Study of Children, Youth and Media moved to reassure anxious parents. Games are a legitimate cultural form that deserve critical analysis in schools just as film", television and literature do," he said. But we also want to argue that full understanding only comes when children have the tools to create their own games."" The games industry welcomed the report", saying it showed how games had a positive impact on children. ""At a time of hysterical and inaccurate reporting it is heartening to see the cultural", social and educational value of computer and video games being assessed intelligently," said Roger Bennett, director general of the Entertainment and Leisure Software Publishers Association. This report is further evidence", if it were needed," about the excellence and imagination that thrives in gaming. They have much to offer to the education of our children and they have much to offer as a career."" The three-year research project", which is being presented at a seminar on Tuesday in London, was partly funded by the Department of Trade and Industry.

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"tech 105.txt Nuclear body seeks new tech The computer systems used to monitor the world's nuclear power installations are so outdated that they are hampering the work of inspectors. A spokesman for the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said its current technology could allow key information to be overlooked as it was more than 20 years old. Such systems are the only method of tracking nuclear material worldwide. The agency has appealed for more funds to update its hardware and software. ""A major overhaul of the system is needed to allow inspectors immediate", secure online access to information," said project manager Livio Costantini. IAEA inspectors make around 3,000 visits a year to more than 900 nuclear facilities worldwide. They are there to verify official reports of activities in the plants, to carry out environmental checks, and also to look for any signs that nuclear material is being smuggled in or out of the facility. The computer system inspectors currently use for comparing data from earlier visits, for instance, was built in the 1970s and largely paper based. An IAEA spokesman said this was extremely inefficient and makes searching for anomalies like searching for a needle in a haystack. The organisation is aiming to start a system upgrade in November, aiming to provide inspectors in the field with secure online access to previous inspection data, design blueprints of nuclear facilities, even satellite images of the plant. Where possible, it hopes to link the system with national records of the import and export of nuclear materials. Further analysis of these could help spot potential smuggling activities or illicit technology transfers between countries, according to a spokesman. Computer specialist at the IAEA, Peter Smith, would like to be able to incorporate state of the art visualisation techniques, more familiar to video games players, into the inspector's toolkit. The commercials you now see have people are moving around in a virtual world", he said. If we could have that on our laptops, we could be walking through the plant seeing, on the laptop," how the plant should look. ""And if there's a door in the wall that is not on our laptop", then we have a problem."" The IAEA estimates the total cost of the four-year project to upgrade its technology will be \$40m. So far it has only received \$11m from the US and the UK. ""Failure to replace the hardware and software", and to integrate fully all the information system components will carry large risks," said an agency statement.

tech 106.txt Web logs aid disaster recovery Some of the most vivid descriptions of the devastation in southern Asia are on the internet - in the form of web logs or blogs. Bloggers have been offering snapshots of information from around the region and are also providing some useful information for those who want to help. Indian writer Rohit Gupta edits a group blog called Dogs without Borders. When he created it, the site was supposed to be a forum to discuss relations between India and Pakistan. But in the wake of Sunday's tsunami, Mr Gupta and his fellow bloggers switched gears. They wanted to blog the tsunami and its aftermath. One Sri Lankan blogger in the group goes by the online name Morquendi. With internet service disrupted by the tsunami, Morquendi started sending SMS text messages via cell phone from the affected areas of Sri Lanka. We started publishing these SMSes", says Mr Gupta. Morquendi was describing scenes like 1,600 bodies washed up on a shore, and people burying," and burying and burying them. People digging holes with their hands. And this was coming through an SMS message. ""We didn't have visual accounts on radio or on TV"," or in the print media."" Soon", thousands of web users around the world were logging on to read Morquendi's first hand accounts. In one message," Morquendi wrote about a Sri Lankan woman who was running home with a friend when the wave hit. ""She was being swept away", Morquendi's message read. She grabbed a tree with one hand and her friend with the other. She says she watched the water pull her friend away."" Mr Gupta says the power of Morquendi's text message blogs was palpable. ""He was running around", looking for friends, burying bodies, carrying bodies, Mr Gupta says of Morquendi. I can't even begin to imagine the psychological state he was in when he was sending us reports," and doing the relief work at the same time. ""He was caught between being a journalist and being a human being."" Others blogs are helping to spread information about relief efforts. Dina Mehta is an Indian blogger who's helping with the newly created South East Asia Earthquake and Tsunami Blog. She says the blog is not meant to be filled with first person accounts. ""What we're doing is we're building a resource", she says. Anyone who says, OK, I want to come and do some work in India, volunteer in India, or in Sri Lanka or Malaysia, this is the sort of one-stop-shop that they can come to for all sorts of resources - emergency help lines, relief agencies, aid agencies," contacts for them etc." Ms Mehta also says she wishes that governments in the region would realise the power of blogs. ""I imagine if they had this resource available to them", if there was a disaster, how quickly you could funnel aid in, and get people to help," she says. Bloggers in the United States are also getting involved. Ramdhan Yadav Kotamaraja is originally from India, but now lives in Dallas. Mr Kotamaraja wanted to help those affected by the tsunami by pooling money with concerned friends. So, he set up an online payment system on his website. Then, says Mr Kotamaraja, the blogging world found out. All my blogger friends started linking up my site", and I saw a lot of people other than my friends. I'd say 70% of the donations came from people I don't know. ""It's simply unbelievable to me", that people that I don't know will come and start donating." News spreads quickly on weblogs", a phenomenon that helps bloggers expand their audience and scope. In Sri Lanka, blogger Morquendi is recruiting others to help. One recruit calls himself Heretic. In one of his latest posts," Heretic asks: ""Have you ever seen fishing trawlers on the road? Ever seen a bus inside a house? ""Well", Heretic writes, that was just the least affected areas - so you can just imagine - or can you?"" He concludes: ""Keep it blogged."" Clark Boyd is technology correspondent for The World", a BBC World Service and WGBH-Boston co-production.

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"tech 107.txt Pandas benefit from wireless net

The worl

d's dwindling panda population is getting a helping hand from a wireless internet network. The Wolong Nature Reserve in the Sichuan Province of southwest China is home to 20% of the remaining 1,500 giant pandas in the world. A broadband and wireless network installed on the reserve has allowed staff to chronicle the pandas' daily activities. The data and images can be shared with colleagues around the world. The reserve conducts vital research on both panda breeding and bamboo ecology. Using the network," vets have been able to observe how infant pandas feed and suggest changes to improve the tiny cubs' chances of survival. ""Digital technology has transformed the way we communicate and share information inside Wolong and with the rest of the world", said Zhang Hemin, director of the Wolong Nature Reserve. Our researchers now have state-of-the-art digital technology to help foster the panda population and manage our precious surroundings." The network has been developed by Intel", working closely with the staff at Wolong. It includes a 802.11b wireless network and a video monitoring system using five cameras to observe pandas around the clock. Before the new infrastructure arrived at the panda park, staff walked or drove to deliver floppy disks across the reserve. Infant panda health was recorded on paper notebooks and research teams in the field had little access to the data. To foster cultural links across the globe, a children's learning lab has been incorporated in the network, in collaboration with Globio (Federation for Global Biodiversity Education for Children), an international non-profit organisation. It will enable children at local primary schools to hook up with their peers in Portland," Oregon in the US. ""Digital technology brings this story to life by enabling a global dialogue to help bridge cultures around the world", said Globio founder Gerry Ellis.

tech 108.txt Search wars hit desktop PCs Another front in the on-going battle between Microsoft and Google is about to be opened. By the end of 2004 Microsoft aims to launch search software to find any kind of file on a PC hard drive. The move is in answer to Google's release of its own search tool that catalogues data on desktop PCs. The desktop search market is becoming increasingly crowded as Google, AOL, Yahoo and many smaller firms tout programs that help people find files. Microsoft made the announcement about its forthcoming search software during a call to financial analysts to talk about its first quarter results. John Connors, Microsoft's chief financial officer said a test version of its desktop search software should be available for download by the end of the year. We're going to have a heck of a great race in search between Google", Microsoft and Yahoo," he said. It's going to be really fun to follow." Microsoft is coming late to the desktop search arena and its software will have to compare favourably with programs from a large number of rivals", many of which have fiercely dedicated populations of users. The program could be based on the software Microsoft owns as a result of its purchase of Lookout Software in early October. On 14 October Google released desktop search software that catalogues all the files on a PC and lets users use one tool to find e-mail messages, spreadsheets, text files and presentations. The software will also find webpages and messages sent via AOL Instant Messenger. Many other firms have released desktop search systems recently too. Companies such as Blinkx, Copernic," Enfish X1 Technologies and X-Friend all do the same job of cataloguing the huge amounts of information that people increasingly store on their desktop or home computer. Apple has also debuted a similar search system for its computers called Spotlight that is due to debut with the release of the Tiger operating system. Due to follow are net giants AOL and Yahoo. The latter recently bought Stata Labs to get its hands on search software that people can use. Microsoft is also reputedly working on a novel search system for the next version of Windows (codenamed Longhorn). However this is not likely to appear until 2006. ""The

recent activity in the search industry shows that there is a need to move beyond simple keyword-based web search", " said Kathy Rittweger, co-founder of Blinkx. Finding information of our own computers is becoming as difficult as it is to find the relevant webpage amongst the billions that exist." " Desktop search has become important for several reasons. According to research by message analysts the Radicati Group up to 45% of the information critical to keeping many businesses running sits in e-mail messages and attachments. JF Sullivan", " spokesman for e-mail software firm Sendmail said many organisations were starting to realise how important messaging was to their organisation and the way the work. " "The key thing is being able to manage all this information", " he said. Also search is increasingly key to the way that people get around the internet. Many people use a search engine as the first page they go to when getting on the net. Many others use desktop toolbars that let them search for information no matter what other program they are using. Having a tool on a desktop can be a lucrative way to control where people go online. For companies such as Google which relies on revenue from adverts this knowledge about what people are looking for is worth huge amounts of money. But this invasiveness has already led some to ask about the privacy implications of such tools.

tech 109.txt Home phones face unclear future The fixed line phone in your home could soon be an endangered species. Research by handset maker Nokia shows that more and more people are using their mobile phone for every call they make or take. According to the study, more than 45 million people in the UK, Germany, US and South Korea now only use a mobile. It showed that people keep their fixed line phone because call charges are lower, but most of those questioned said the future was definitely mobile. The Nokia-sponsored research showed that mobiles and fixed phones were used for different purposes. Home phones were used for longer calls but conversations on mobiles tended to be shorter, between mobiles and to friends. In the UK 69% of those questioned said they turned to their fixed phone because it was still cheaper to use than a mobile. However, when pressed few could say with accuracy how tariffs on fixed and mobile phones compared. In the US and Germany many of those interviewed said they used the fixed phone because it was more reliable than a mobile handset and let them get access to the net at relatively high speeds. In all the countries where interviews were carried out, older people were more likely to use a fixed line phone more than a mobile. Women aged 50 or above almost never use a mobile phone, the research found. The move to mobile was most pronounced in South Korea where 65% of those questioned said they already make most of their calls from a mobile. 18% said they would not get a landline if they moved house. Many of those questioned said they had an emotional connection to their fixed phone that drew on its position in the home and the cosiness" of making a call there. Nokia said these findings had implications for mobile operators who must work hard to ensure that mobiles are seen as cheap", reliable and providing good call quality. The survey also showed that it is not just voice calls that are going wireless. Some of those questioned said they were looking to use a mobile or wireless service to get net access within the next couple of years. Polling firm Mori interviewed more than 6,000 people in the UK, US, Germany and South Korea for the survey.

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"tech 110.txt Podcasts mark rise of DIY radio An Apple iPod or other digital music players can hold anything up to 10",000 songs," which is a lot of space to fill. But more and more iPod owners are filling that space with audio content created by an unpredictable assortment of producers. It is called "podcasting" and its strongest proponent is former MTV host and VJ (vi

deo jockey) Adam Curry. Podcasting takes its name from the Apple iPod", although you do not need an iPod to create one or to listen to a podcast. A podcast is basically an internet-based radio show which podcasters create, usually in the comfort of their own home. They need only a microphone, a PC, and some editing software. They then upload their shows to the internet and others can download and listen to them, all for free. Using technology based on XML computer code and RSS - Really Simple Syndication - listeners can subscribe to podcasts collected automatically in a bit of software, which Mr Curry has pioneered. The latest MP3 files of shows can then be picked up by a music playing device automatically. Mr Curry records, hosts, edits and produce a daily," 40 minute podcast called The Daily Source Code. He wants to make podcasting ""the Next Big Thing"" and says it is an extension of his childhood love of radio gadgetry. ""I was always into technologies and wires", he explains. My parents gave me the Radio Shack 101 project kit," which allows you to build an AM transmitter and subsequently an FM transmitter. ""I had my mom drive me around the block," see how far it would reach on the car radio." Mr Curry is American", but he grew up in the Netherlands where he hosted illegal, pirate radio shows in the Dutch capital. He tried university in the US, and ended up back in Holland where he hosted a music video show. He spent the next seven years in New York where he worked at MTV hosting the Top 20 Video Countdown," but spent most of his hours tinkering with this new thing called the internet. ""At a certain point in 1995", I was driving in on a Friday afternoon, beautiful blue sky, one of those beautiful days thinking," this is so stupid. ""You know", I'm going do the Top 20 Countdown, take the cheque, go home," and sit on the internet until three in the morning. ""So", after I finished the show, I quit. I said, on air, it's been great, I've been here for seven years at that point, there's something on the internet, I've got to go find it," and I'll see you later."" But Mr Curry's technology and broadcast interests started to gel a couple of years ago when computer storage was growing exponentially and high-speed internet connections were becoming more widely available. The MP3 format also meant that people could create and upload audio more cheaply and efficiently than ever before. Most importantly", Mr Curry says," people across the globe were bored with the radio they were hearing. ""Listen to 99% of the radio that you hear today", it's radio voices, and it's fake," it's just fake."" He wanted to make it easier for people to find ""real voices"" on the internet. He wanted software that would automatically download new audio content directly onto players like", iPods. Mr Curry is not a computer programmer, so he asked others to create one for him. No one did," so he tried to write one himself. He finished it a few months ago and says it ""totally sucked."" He put it up on the net as open source software and now dozens of coders and audio junkies are refining it; the result is a work in progress called ""ipodder""". Doug Kaye", a California-based podcaster," praises the former MTV VJ for what he has done. ""Adam created a simple script that solved what we call the last mile problem. Ipodder takes audio from the web and brings it all the way down to the MP3 player", he explains. People can wake up in the morning, pick up their iPods as they go to work or before they go exercise," and discover that there's all this new content automatically put onto their players."" It is created an explosion in podcasting content and podcasters are springing up in Australia", Finland, Brazil, even Malaysia. One couple broadcasts theirs, The Dawn and Drew Show, from Wisconsin in the US, sometimes even from the comfort of their own bed. Topics range from the comfort of their bed, to the latest films or music and have thousands of listeners. Already," websites are springing up that point listeners in the right direction of good podcasts. Chris McIntyre runs Podcast Alley and says that there are good sites out there but that not everyone has the technological know-how to simply listen. ""If I were to tel

l my mom", or my mother-in-law to copy an XML or RSS file to their podcast aggregator, they would think I was speaking a foreign language," Mr McIntyre says. Along with technical challenges, there may be legal challenges to podcasters who air their favourite, albeit copyrighted, music. Some in podcasting also worry that too much attention may turn what they see as the anti-radio"" into something that is more like conventional broadcasting. Already there is interest in podcasting from the corporate world. Heineken is doing its own podcast now", and so is Playboy. For his part, Adam Curry's pressing ahead with his own vision of what podcasting should be. He loves doing The Daily Source Code because it is about introducing good music and cool ideas to new audiences. He has even been called the Ed Sullivan or Johnny Carson of podcasting which, he says, ""is a badge I'll wear with great honour. ""To be the Johnny Carson", or Ed Sullivan of anything is wonderful. And you know what? You don't need a hell of a lot of talent. ""You just have to be nice", have your ears open," and let people shine. And that's good for me." Clark Boyd is technology correspondent for The World", a BBC World Service and WGBH-Boston co-production.

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"tech 111.txt Sony wares win innovation award Sony has taken the prize for top innovator at the annual awards of PC Pro Magazine. It won the award for taking risks with products and for its ""brave"" commitment to good design. Conferring the award", PC Pro's staff picked out Sony's PCG-X50 5/P Vaio laptop as a ""stunning piece of engineering"". The electronics giant beat off strong competition from Toshiba and chip makers AMD and Intel to take the gong. Paul Trotter", news and features editor of PC Pro," said several Sony products helped it to take the innovation award. He said Sony's Clie PEG UX50 media player with its swivel screen and qwerty keyboard ""broke the design rules yet again"". Other Sony products that helped included the Vaio W1 desktop computer and the RA-104 media server. Mr Trotter said Sony's combining of computer", screen and keyboard in the W1 was likely to be widely copied in future home PCs. The company has also become one of the first to use organic LEDs in its products. ""While not always inventing new technology itself", Sony was never afraid to innovate around various formats," said Mr Trotter. Other awards decided by PC Pro's staff and contributors included one for Canon's EOS 300D digital camera in the Most Wanted Hardware category. Microsoft's Media Player 10 took the award for Most Wanted Software. This year was the 10th anniversary of the PC Pro awards, which splits its prizes into two sections. The first are chosen by the magazine's writers and consultants, the second are voted for by readers. Mr Trotter said more than 13,000 people voted for the Reliability and Service Awards, twice as many as in 2003. Net-based memory and video card shop Crucial shared the award for Online Vendor of the year with Novatech.

tech 112.txt Portable PlayStation ready to go Sony's Portable PlayStation (PSP) will go on sale in Japan on 12 December. The long-awaited handheld game playing gadget will cost about 19,800 yen (145 euros) when it hits the shelves. At launch 21 games will be available for the PSP, including Need for Speed, Ridge Racer, Metal Gear Acid and Vampire Chronicle. Sony has not yet announced when the PSP will be available in Europe and the US, but analysts expect it to debut in those territories in early 2005. Fifa 2005 is back at the top of the UK games charts, a week after losing it to rival Pro Evolution Soccer 4. Konami's Pro Evo dropped only one place to two, while the only new entry in the top 10 was another football title, LMA Manager 2005, in at number seven. Tony Hawk's Underground 2 held its own at three, while Star Wars Battlefront inch ed up to four places to four. There was good news for Disney, with the spin-off from the Shark's Tale film moving up the charts into number eight. Fans of

the Gran Turismo series in Europe are going to have to wait until next year for the latest version. Sony has said that the PAL version of GT4 will not be ready for Christmas. The product is localised into 13 different languages across the PAL territories", therefore the process takes considerably longer than it does in Japan," it said. Gran Turismo 4 for the PlayStation 2 is still expected to be released in Japan and the USA this year. Halo 2 has broken video game records, with pre-orders of more than 1.5 million in the US alone. Some 6,500 US stores plan to open just after midnight on Tuesday 9 November for the game's release. Halo 2 is projected to bring in more revenue than any day one box office blockbuster movie in the United States", said Xbox's Peter Moore. We've even heard rumours of fan anticipation of the 'Halo 2 flu' on 9 November." "

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"tech 113.txt Viewers to be able to shape TV Imagine editing Titanic down to watch just your favourite bits or cutting out the slushier moments of Star Wars to leave you with a bare bones action-fest. Manipulating your favourite films to make a more personalised movie is just the beginning of an ambitious new 7.5m euro (£5.1m) project funded by the European Union. New Media for a New Millennium (NM2) will have as its endgame the development of a completely new media genre", which will allow audiences to create their own media worlds based on their specific interests or tastes. Viewers will be able to participate in storylines," manipulate plots and even the sets and props of TV shows. BT is one of 13 partners involved in the project. It will be contributing software that was originally designed to spot anomalies in CCTV pictures. The software uses content recognition algorithms. The three-year project will work on seven productions as it develops a set of software tools that will allow viewers to edit content to their needs. One of the productions will be a experimental television show where the plot will be driven by text messages from the TV audience. Participants will text selected words which will impact how the characters in the drama interact. It is being developed in Finland and will be shown to Finnish TV audiences. Another team will work on the BBC's big budget drama of Mervyn Peake's gothic fantasy Gormenghast. It will be re-engineered to allow people to choose a variety of edited versions. "The BBC is allowing us access to the material so that we can prove the technology and the principles", explained Dr Doug Williams of BT, who will be NM2's technical project manager. The TV at the moment is a relatively dumb box which receives signals. This project is about teaching the machine to look at content like Lego blocks that can be reassembled to make perfect sense", he said. At the moment we have interactive gaming and a limited form of interactive TV which usually means allowing audiences to vote on shows. We are hoping to occupy the space in-between, he added. NM2's co-ordinator Peter Stollenmayer explained that the new genre would radically alter the role of the audience. Viewers will be able to interact directly with the medium and influence what they see and hear according to their personal tastes and wishes," he said. Media users will no longer be passive viewers but become active engagers." It will also be important that the tools are sophisticated enough to obey the complex rules of cinematography and editing said John Wyver", from TV producer Illuminations Television Limited," which is also involved in the project. "It's not just a matter of stringing together the romantic or action portions of a production", said Mr Wyver. The tool has to know which bits fit together both visually, by observing the time-honoured rules that go in editing," and in terms of the story." "Only then will the personalised version both make sense and be aesthetically pleasing", he added. Mr Wyver is planning a production entitled The Golden Age, about Renaissance art. It will allow viewers to create a so-called media world based on their own specific areas of

interest such as poetry, music and architecture. Other productions that the NM2 team will make range from news, documentaries to a romantic comedy drama.

tech 114.txt Games maker fights for survival One of Britain's largest independent game makers, Argonaut Games, has been put up for sale. The London-based company behind the Harry Potter games has sacked about 100 employees due to a severe cash crisis. The administrators told BBC News Online that selling Argonaut was the only way to save it as it had run out of cash. Argonaut warned that it was low on cash 10 days ago when its shares were suspended from trading on the London Stock Exchange. Argonaut has been making games for some 18 years and is one of the largest independent games developers in the UK. Along with its headquarters in north London, it operates studios in Cambridge and Sheffield. Argonaut was behind the Harry Potter games which provided a healthy flow of cash into the company. But, like all software developers, Argonaut needed a constant flow of deals with publishers. Signs that it was in trouble emerged in August, when it warned it was heading for losses of £6m in the financial year due to delays in signing new contracts for games. Those new deals were further delayed, leading Argonaut to warn in mid-October that it was running out of cash and suspend trading of its shares on the London Stock Exchange. As part of cost-cutting measures, some 100 employees were fired. When the news about the £6m loss came out", we knew there were going to be redundancies," said Jason Parkinson, one of the game developers sacked by Argonaut. A lot of people suspected that Argonaut had been in trouble for some time", he told BBC News Online. Mr Parkinson said staff were told the job losses were necessary to save Argonaut from going under. At the start of the year, the company employed 268 people. After the latest round of cuts there are 80 staff at Argonaut headquarters in Edgware in north London, with 17 at its Morpheme offices in Kentish Town, London, and 22 at the Just Add Monsters base in Cambridge. Argonaut called in administrators David Rubin & Partners on Friday to find a way to rescue the company from collapse. It spent the weekend going over the company's finances and concluded that the only way to save the business was to put it up for sale. The administrator told BBC News Online that the costs of restructuring would be too high, partly because of the overheads from the company's four premises across the UK. It said it was hopeful that it could save some 110 jobs by selling the business, saying it had had expressions of interest from several quarters and were looking for a quick sale. The administrator said it would ensure that staff made redundant would receive any wages, redundancy or holiday pay due to them, hopefully by Christmas.

tech 115.txt Pompeii gets digital make-over The old-fashioned audio tour of historical places could soon be replaced with computer-generated images that bring the site to life. A European Union-funded project is looking at providing tourists with computer-augmented versions of archaeological attractions. It would allow visitors a glimpse of life as it was originally lived in places such as Pompeii. It could pave the way for a new form of cultural tourism. The technology would allow digital people and other computer-generated elements to be combined with the actual view seen by tourists as they walk around an historical site. The Lifeplus project is part of the EU's Information Society Technologies initiative aimed at promoting user-friendly technology and enhancing European cultural heritage. Engineers and researchers working in the Europe-wide consortium have come up with a prototype augmented-reality system. It would require the visitor to wear a head-mounted display with a miniature camera and a backpack computer. The camera captures the view and feeds it to software on the computer where the visitor's viewpoint is combined with animated virtual elements. At Pompeii for example, the visitor would not just see the frescos, taverns and villas that have been excavated, but also people going about t

heir daily life. Augmented reality has been used to create special effects in films such as *Troy* and *Lord of the Rings* and in computer gaming. This technology can now be used for much more than just computer games", said Professor Nadia Magnenat-Thalmann of the Swiss research group MiraLab. We are, for the first time, able to run this combination of software processes to create walking, talking people with believable clothing, skin and hair in real-time," she said. Unlike virtual reality, which delivers an entirely computer-generated scene to the viewer, the Lifeplus project is about combining digital and real views. Crucial to the technique is the software that interprets the visitor's view and provides an accurate match between the real and virtual elements. The software capable of doing this has been developed by a UK company, 2d3. Andrew Stoddart, chief scientist at 2d3, said that the EU project has been driven by a new desire to bring the past to life. The popularity of television documentaries and dramatisations using computer-generated imagery to recreate scenes from ancient history demonstrates the widespread appeal of bringing ancient cultures to life", he said.

tech 116.txt Fast moving phone bugs appear Security firms are warning about several mobile phone viruses that can spread much faster than similar bugs. The new strains of the Cabir mobile phone virus use short-range radio technology to leap to any vulnerable phone as soon as it is in range. The Cabir virus only affects high-end handsets running the Symbian Series 60 phone operating system. Despite the warnings, there are so far no reports of any phones being infected by the new variants of Cabir. The original Cabir worm came to light in mid-June 2004 when it was sent to anti-virus firms as a proof-of-concept program. A mistake in the way the original Cabir was written meant that even if it escaped from the laboratory, the bug would only have been able to infect one phone at a time. However, the new Cabir strains have this mistake corrected and will spread via short range Bluetooth technology to any vulnerable phone in range. Bluetooth has an effective range of a few tens of metres. The risk of being infected by Cabir is low because users must give the malicious program permission to download onto their handset and then must manually install it. Users can protect themselves by altering a setting on Symbian phones that conceals the handset from other Bluetooth using devices. Finnish security firm F-Secure issued a warning about the new strains of Cabir but said that the viruses do not do any damage to a phone. All they do is block normal Bluetooth activity and drain the phone's battery. Anti-virus firm Sophos said the source code for Cabir had been posted on the net by a Brazilian programmer which might lead to even more variants of the program being created. So far seven versions of Cabir are known to exist, one of which was inside the malicious Skulls program that was found in late November. Symbian's Series 60 software is licenced by Nokia, LG Electronics, Lenovo, Panasonic, Samsung, Sendo and Siemens.

tech 117.txt Joke e-mail virus tricks users A virus that disguises itself as a joke is spreading rapidly across the net. Anti-virus firms are issuing high-level warnings about the new version of the Bagle e-mail program that seems to be catching a lot of people out. The Windows virus grabs e-mail addresses from Microsoft Outlook and uses its own mail sending software to spread itself to new victims. When it infects a machine, the Bagle variant turns off security measures that usually protect PCs. The new variant is called Bagle.AT, Bagle.BB and Bagle.AU and the attachment bearing the virus code is labelled as either joke"" or ""price"". The body of the virus usually contains nothing but a smiley or emoticon. The virus can strike computers running Windows 95", 98, ME, NT, 2000 and XP. Users will be infected if they open the attachment that travels with the e-mail. As well as plundering Microsoft Outlook for e-mail addresses to send itself to," Bagle.AT also tries to turn off the firewall an

d security centre services on Windows XP machines. BBC News Online has received five warnings about the virus from security companies. Finnish company F-Secure gave the virus its second highest threat level. ""We've had several reports all over the world", said Mikko Hypponen, director of anti-virus research for F-Secure. Security firm Network Box said that it stopped more than 30,000 copies an hour of the virus as the outbreak reached a peak. Black Spider said it had stopped more than 1 million copies of Bagle.AT since the outbreak began at 0630 BST (0530 GMT). Anti-virus firms urged users to be wary of unexpected e-mail messages bearing attachments and to update their software to ensure they are protected against the latest threats.

tech 118.txt Progress on new internet domains By early 2005 the net could have two new domain names. The .post and .travel net domains have been given preliminary approval by the net's administrative body. The names are just two of a total of 10 proposed domains that are being considered by the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, Icann. The other proposed names include a domain for pornography, Asia, mobile phones, an anti-spam domain and one for the Catalan language and culture. The .post domain is backed by the Universal Postal Union that wants to use it as the online marker for every type of postal service and to help co-ordinate the e-commerce efforts of national post offices. The .travel domain would be used by hotels, travel firms, airlines, tourism offices and would help such organisations distinguish themselves online. It is backed by a New York-based trade group called The Travel Partnership. Icann said its early decision on the two domains was in response to the detailed technical and commercial information the organisations behind the names had submitted. Despite this initial approval, Icann cautioned that there was no guarantee that the domains would actually go into service. At the same time Icann is considering proposals for another eight domains. One that may not win approval is a proposal to set up a .xxx domain for pornographic websites. A similar proposal has been made many times in the past. But Icann has been reluctant to approve it because of the difficulty of making pornographers sign up and use it. In 2000 Icann approved seven other new domains that have had varying degrees of success. Three of the new so-called top level domains were for specific industries or organisations such as .museum and .aero. Others such as .info and .biz were intended to be more generic. In total there are in excess of 200 domain names and the majority of these are for nations. But domains that end in the .com suffix are by far the most numerous.

tech 119.txt Argonaut founder rebuilds empire Jez San, the man behind the Argonaut games group which went into administration a week ago, has bought back most of the company. The veteran games developer has taken over the Cambridge-based Just Add Monsters studios and the London subsidiary Morpheus. The Argonaut group went into administration due to a severe cash crisis, firing about half of its staff. In August it had warned of annual losses of £6m for the year to 31 July. Jez San is one of the key figures in the UK's games industry. The developer, who received an OBE in 2002, was estimated to have been worth more than £200m at the peak of the dotcom boom. He founded Argonaut in 1982 and has been behind titles such as 1993 Starfox game. More recently it was behind the Harry Potter games for the PlayStation. But, like all software developers, Argonaut needed a constant flow of deals with publishers. In August it warned of annual losses of £6m, blaming delays in signing new contracts and tough conditions in the software industry. The group's three subsidiaries were placed in administration a week ago, with Mr San resigning as the company's CEO and some 100 staff being fired. After the latest round of cuts, there were 80 workers at Argonaut headquarters in Edgware in north London, with 17 at its Morpheus offices in Kentish Town, London, and 22 at the Just Add Monsters base in

Cambridge. Mr San has re-emerged, buying back Morpheme and Just Add Monsters. We are pleased to announce the sale of these two businesses as going concerns", " said David Rubin of administrators David Rubin & Partners. This has saved over 40 jobs as well as the substantial employment claims that would have arisen had the sales not been achieved." " Mr Rubin said the administrators were in talks over the sale of the Argonaut software division in Edgware and were hopeful of finding a buyer. " "This is a very difficult time for all the employees there", but I salute their commitment to the business while we work towards a solution," he said. Some former employees are angry at the way cash crisis was handled. One told BBC News Online that the staff who had been fired had been financially ruined in the space of a day" ".

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"tech 120.txt Dozens held over ID fraud site Twenty-eight people", including a Briton, have been arrested after a global operation against a website allegedly involved in identity fraud. Those arrested are accused of operating Shadowcrew.com, which investigators claim was a global clearing house for criminals involved in credit card fraud. A 19-year-old man from Camberley, Surrey, was arrested by the National Hi-Tech Crime Unit but has been bailed. Operation Firewall, led by the US Secret Service, involved seven nations. The British teenager was arrested on Wednesday but details only emerged on Friday. He has now been bailed to return to a Surrey police station in December. All 28 people detained globally are suspected of being involved in an internet-based network which stole people's identities and used computers and websites to defraud credit card companies. The authorities in the US, who have indicted 19 people in Newark, New Jersey, estimate the fraud caused losses of more than \$4m. Assistant US Attorney Scott Christie said several people had been arrested in Argentina, Bulgaria, Canada, Estonia, Poland and Sweden. Mr Christie said one of the ringleaders was believed to be a Russian, Anatoly Tyukanov. Investigators from 30 law enforcement agencies worldwide spent 15 months looking into the activities of three websites - Shadowcrew, Carderplanet and Darkprofits. The US Secret Service was first tipped off in July 2003. An NHTCU spokeswoman said the American investigators went undercover on the Shadowcrew website and discovered some of the site's 4,000 members were using it for organised crime purposes. She said criminals were using the websites to traffic counterfeit credit cards and false identification information and documents such as credit cards, driver's licences, passports and birth certificates. The websites shared tips on how to commit fraud and provided a forum by which people could buy the information and tools they needed to commit such crime, she said. The Shadowcrew site, which has now been taken over by the US Secret Service, listed several discussion groups, in English and Russian, including one on hacking, spam and online anonymity tools. The head of the NHTCU, Acting Detective Chief Superintendent, Mick Deats, " said: " "This investigation has resulted in the significant disruption of organised criminals using the internet for profit. " "We believe that the suspects have trafficked at least 1.7 million stolen credit card numbers", " leading to losses by financial institutions running into the millions." " Chief Supt Deats went on to warn: " "The internet offers huge legitimate benefits for modern society; however with it brings powerful opportunities for those seeking to abuse those benefits for criminal gain. " "Your identity is one of the most precious commodities. Criminals who try to steal the personal and financial information of ordinary citizens as well as the confidential and proprietary information of companies engaged in e-commerce", " will be targeted by law enforcement." "

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"tech 121.txt Robots learn 'robotiquette' rules Robots are learning lessons on ""robotiquette"" - how to behave socially - so they can mix better with humans. By playing games", like pass-the-parcel, a University of Hertfordshire team is finding out how future robot companions should react in social situations. The study's findings will eventually help humans develop a code of social behaviour in human-robot interaction. The work is part of the European Cogniron robotics project," and was on show at London's Science Museum. ""We are assuming a situation in which a useful human companion robot already exists", said Professor Kerstin Dautenhahn, project leader at Hertfordshire. Our mission is to look at how such a robot should be programmed to respect personal spaces of humans." The research also focuses on human perception of robots", including how they should look," and how a robot can learn new skills by imitating a human demonstrator. ""Without such studies", you will build robots which might not respect the fact that humans are individuals, have preferences and come from different cultural backgrounds, Professor Dautenhahn told BBC News Online. And I want robots to treat humans as human beings, and not like other robots," she added. In most situations, a companion robot will eventually have to deal not only with one person, but also with groups of people. To find out how they would react, the Hertfordshire Cogniron team taught one robot to play pass-the-parcel with children. Showing off its skills at the Science Museum, the unnamed robot had to select, approach, and ask different children to pick up a parcel with a gift, moving its arm as a pointer and its camera as an eye. It even used speech to give instructions and play music. However, according to researchers, it will still take many years to build a robot which would make full use of the robotiquette"" for human interaction. ""If you think of a robot as a companion for the human being", you can think of 20 years into the future, concluded Professor Dautenhahn. It might take even longer because it is very," very hard to develop such a robot." You can hear more on this story on the BBC World Service's Go Digital programme.

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"tech 122.txt Concerns over Windows ATMs Cash machine networks could soon be more susceptible to computer viruses", a security firm has warned. The warning is being issued because many banks are starting to use the Windows operating system in machines. Already there have been four incidents in which Windows viruses have disrupted networks of cash machines running the Microsoft operating system. But banking experts say the danger is being overplayed and that the risks of infection and disruption are small. For many years the venerable IBM operating system, known as OS/2, has been the staple software used to power many of the 1.4m cash machines in operation around the world. But IBM will end support for OS/2 in 2006 which is forcing banks to look for alternatives. There are also other pressures making banks turn to Windows said Dominic Hirsch, managing director of financial analysis firm Retail Banking Research. He said many cash machines will also have to be upgraded to make full use of the new Europay, Mastercard and Visa credit cards that use computer chips instead of magnetic stripes to store data. US laws that demand disabled people get equal access to information will also force banks to make their cash machines more versatile and able to present information in different ways. Todd Thiemann, spokesman for anti-virus firm Trend Micro, said the move to Windows in cash machines was not without risks. Mr Thiemann said research by the TowerGroup showed that 70% of new cash machines being installed were Windows based. Already, he said, there have been four incidents in which cash machines have been unavailable for hours due to viruses affecting the network of the bank that owns them. In January 2003 the Slammer worm knocked out 13,000 cash machines of the Bank of Ameri

ca and many of those operated by the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce. In August of the same year, cash machines of two un-named banks were put out of action for hours following an infection by the Welchia worm. Incidents like this happen, said Mr Thiemann, " because when banks start using Windows cash machines they also change the networking technology used to link the devices to their back office computers. This often means that all the cash machines and computers in a bank share the same data network. ""This could mean that cash machines get caught up in the viruses that are going around because they have a common transmission system", he said. Banks need to consider protection as part of the investment to maintain the security of that network," Mr Thiemann told BBC News Online. But Mr Hirsch from Retail Banking Research said the number of cash machines actually at risk was low because so few were upgraded every year. Currently, he said, a cash machine has a lifetime of up to 10 years which means that only about 10% of all ATMs get swapped for a newer model every year. Windows cash machines have been around for several years", he said. Most banks simply upgrade as part of their usual replacement cycle." "In theory there is a bigger threat with Windows than OS/2", he said, but I do not think that the banks are hugely concerned at the moment." "It's pretty unusual to hear about virus problems with ATMs", he said. The many different security systems built-in to cash machines meant there was no chance that a virus could cause them to start spitting out cash spontaneously, he said. Banks were more likely to be worried about internal networks being overwhelmed by worms and viruses and customers not being able to get cash out at all, he added. A spokesman for the Association of Payment and Clearing Services (Apacs) which represents the UK's payments industry said the risk from viruses was minimal. There's no concern that there's going to be any type of virus hitting the UK networks", he said. Risks of infection were small because the data networks that connect UK cash machines together and the operators of the ATMs themselves were a much smaller and tightly-knit community than in the US where viruses have struck.

tech 123.txt Attack prompts Bush site block The official re-election site of President George W Bush is blocking visits from overseas users for security reasons". The blocking began early on Monday so those outside the US and trying to view the site got a message saying they are not authorised to view it. But keen net users have shown that the policy is not being very effective. Many have found that the site can still be viewed by overseas browsers via several alternative net addresses. The policy of trying to stop overseas visitors viewing the site is thought to have been adopted in response to an attack on the georgewbush.com website. Scott Stanzel", a spokesman for the Bush-Cheney campaign said: ""The measure was taken for security reasons." He declined to elaborate any further on the blocking policy. The barring of non-US visitors has led to the campaign being inundated with calls and forced it to make a statement about why the blocking was taking place. In early October a so-called ""denial of service"" attack was mounted on the site that bombarded it with data from thousands of PCs. The attack made the site unusable for about five hours. About the same time the web team of the Bush-Cheney campaign started using the services of a company called Akamai that helps websites deal with the ebb and flows of visitor traffic. Akamai uses a web-based tool called EdgeScape that lets its customers work out where visitors are based. Typically this tool is used to ensure that webpages", video and images load quickly but it can also be used to block traffic. Geographic blocking works because the numerical addresses that the net uses to organise itself are handed out on a regional basis. Readers of the Boingboing weblog have found that viewers can still get at the site by using alternative forms of the George W Bush domain name. Ironically one of the working alternatives is for a supposedly more secure version of the sit

e. There are now at least three working alternative domains for the Bush-Cheney campaign that let web users outside the US visit the site. The site can also be seen using anonymous proxy services that are based in the US. Some web users in Canada also report that they can browse the site. The international exclusion zone around georgewbush.com was spotted by net monitoring firm Netcraft which keeps an eye on traffic patterns across many different sites. Netcraft said that since the early hours of 25 October attempts to view the site through its monitoring stations in London, Amsterdam and Sydney have failed. By contrast Netcraft's four monitoring stations in the US managed to view the site with no problems. Data gathered by Netcraft on the pattern of traffic to the site shows that the blocking is not the result of another denial of service attack. Mike Prettejohn, Netcraft president, speculated that the blocking decision might have been taken to cut costs, and traffic, in the run-up to the election on 2 November. He said the site may see no reason to distribute content to people who will not be voting next week. Managing traffic could also be a good way to ensure that the site stays working in the closing days of the election campaign. However, simply blocking non-US visitors also means that Americans overseas are barred to it. Most American soldiers stationed overseas will be able to see the site as they use the US military's own portion of the net. Akamai declined to comment, saying it could not talk about customer websites.

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"tech 124.txt Loyalty cards idea for TV addicts Viewers could soon be rewarded for watching TV as loyalty cards come to a screen near you. Any household hooked up to Sky could soon be using smartcards in conjunction with their set-top boxes. Broadcasters such as Sky and ITV could offer viewers loyalty points in return for watching a particular channel or programme. Sky will activate a spare slot on set-top boxes in January", marketing magazine New Media Age reported. Sky set-top boxes have two slots. One is for the viewer's decryption card, while the other has been dormant until now. Loyalty cards have become a common addition to most wallets," as High Street brands rush to keep customers with a series of incentives offered by store cards. Now similar schemes look set to enter the highly competitive world of multi-channel TV. Viewers who stay loyal to a particular TV channel could be rewarded by free TV content or freebies from retail partners. Broadcasters aiming content at children could offer smartcards which gives membership to exclusive content and clubs. ""Parents could pre-pay for some content", as a kind of TV pocket money card," said Nigel Whalley, managing director of media consultancy Decipher. Viewers could even be rewarded for watching ad breaks, with ideas such as ad bingo being touted by firms keen to make money out of the new market, said Mr Whalley. Credit cards that have been chipped could be used in set-top boxes to pay for movies, gambling and gaming. The idea of an intelligent card in boxes offers a lot of possibilities. It will be down to the ingenuity of the content players", "said Mr Whalley. For the BBC, revenue-generating activity will be of little interest but the new development may prompt changes to Freeview set-top boxes, said Mr Whalley. Currently most Freeview boxes do not have a slot which would allow viewers to use a smartcard. Some 7.4 million households have Sky boxes and Sky is hoping to increase this to 10 million by 2010. Loyalty cards could play a role in this, particularly in reducing the number of people who cancel their Sky subscriptions, said Ian Fogg, an analyst with Jupiter Research.

tech 125.txt The Force is strong in Battlefront The warm reception that has greeted Star Wars: Battlefront is a reflection not of any ingenious innovation in its gameplay, but of its back-to-basics approach and immense nostalgia quotient. Geared towards online gamers, it is based around littl

e more than a series of all-out gunfights, set in an array of locations all featured in, or hinted at during, the two blockbuster film trilogies. Previous Star Wars titles like the acclaimed Knights Of The Old Republic and Jedi Knight have regularly impressed with their imaginative forays into the far corners of the franchise's extensive universe, and their use of weird and wonderful new characters. Battlefront on the other hand wholeheartedly revisits the most recognisable elements of the hit movies themselves. The sights, sounds and protagonists on show here will all be instantly familiar to fans, who may well feel that the opportunity to relive Star Wars' most memorable screen skirmishes makes this the game they have always waited for. The mayhem can be viewed from either a third or first-person perspective, and you can either fight for the forces of freedom or join Darth Vader on the Dark Side, depending on the episode and type of campaign as well as the player's personal propensity for good or evil. There is ample chance to be a Wookie, shoot Ewoks and rush into battle alongside a fired-up Luke Skywalker. In each section, the task is simply to wipe out enemy troops, seize strategic waypoints and move on to the next planet. It really is no more complicated than that. Locations include the frozen wastes of Hoth, the ice planet from The Empire Strikes Back, complete with massive mechanical AT-ATs on the march. There are also the dusty, sinister deserts of Tatooine and Geonosis, as well as the forest moon of Endor, where Return Of The Jedi's much-maligned Ewoks lived. The feel of those places is well and truly captured, with both backdrops and characters looking good and very authentic. It is worth noting though that on the PlayStation 2, the game's graphics are a curiously long way behind those of the Xbox version. The pivotal element behind Battlefront's success is that it successfully gives you the feel of being plunged into the midst of large-scale war. The number of combatants, noise and abundance of laser fire see to that, and the sense of chaos really comes over. Speaking of noise, Battlefront is a real testament to the strength of the Star Wars galaxy's audio motifs. The multitude of distinctive weapon and vehicle noises are immensely familiar, as are the stirring John Williams symphonies that never let up. There is also a particularly snazzy remix of one of his themes in the menu section. It has to be said if the game did not have the boon of being Star Wars, it would not stand up for long. The gameplay is reliable, bog-standard stuff, short on originality. There are also odd annoyances, like the game's insistence on re-spawning you miles away from the action, an irritating price to pay for not getting blown up the second you appear. And some of the weapons and vehicles are not as responsive and fluid to operate as they might be. That said, it is still great fun to pilot a Scout Walker or Speeder Bike, however non user-friendly they prove. Whilst it is firmly designed with multiplayer action in mind, Battlefront is actually perfectly good fun as an offline game. The above-average AI of the enemy sees to that, although given the frenetic environments they operate in, their strategic behaviour does not need to be all that sophisticated. Battlefront's novelty value will doubtless wear off relatively fast, leaving behind a slightly empty one-trick-pony of a game. But for a while, it is an absolute blast, and one of the most immediately satisfying video game offerings yet from George Lucas' stable.

tech 126.txt 'Ultimate game' award for Doom 3 Sci-fi shooter Doom 3 has blasted away the competition at a major games ceremony, the Golden Joystick awards. It was the only title to win twice, winning Ultimate Game of the year and best PC game at the awards, presented by Little Britain star Matt Lucas. The much-anticipated sci-fi horror Doom 3 shot straight to the top of the UK games charts on its release in August. Other winners included Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas which took the Most Wanted for Christmas prize. Only released last week, it was closely followed by Halo 2 and Half-Life 2, which are expe

cted to be big hits when they are unleashed later this month. But they missed out on the prize for the Most Wanted game of 2005, which went to the Nintendo title, The Legend of Zelda. The original Doom, released in 1994, heralded a new era in computer games and introduced 3D graphics. It helped to establish the concept of the first-person shooter. Doom 3 was developed over four years and is thought to have cost around \$15m (£8.3m). The top honour for the best online game of the year went to Battlefield Vietnam. The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay was handed the Unsung Hero Game of 2004. Its release was somewhat eclipsed by Doom 3, which was released on the same week. It was, however, very well received by gamers and was praised for its storyline which differed from the film released around the same time. Electronic Arts was named top publisher of the year, taking the crown from Nintendo which won in 2003. The annual awards are voted for by more than 200,000 readers of computer and video games magazines. Games awards like this have grown in importance. Over the last six years, the UK market for games grew by 100% and was worth a record £1,152m in 2003, according to a recent report by analysts Screen Digest.

tech 127.txt Gadget show heralds MP3 season Partners of those who love their hi-tech gear may want to get their presents in early as experts predict a gadget shortage this Christmas. With Apple's iPod topping wish lists again, there may not be enough iPod minis to go round, predicts Oliver Irish, editor of gadget magazine Stuff. The iPod mini is likely to be this year's Tracey Island", said Mr Irish. Stuff has compiled a list of the top 10 gadgets for 2004 and the iPod is at number one. For anyone bewildered by the choice of gadgets on the market, Stuff and What Hi-Fi? are hosting a best-of gadget show in London this weekend. Star of the show will be Sony's Qrio Robot, an all-singing, all-dancing, football-playing man-machine who can even hold intelligent conversations. But he is not for sale and Sony has no commercial plans for the robot. He will greet visitors and is flying in from Japan. He probably has his own airplane seat", that is how highly Sony prize him," said Mr Irish. Also on display will be a virtual keyboard which projects itself onto any flat surface. The event will play host to a large collection of digital music players, from companies such as Creative, Sony and Philips as well as the ubiquitously fashionable iPod from Apple. Suggestions that it could be a gaming or wireless Christmas are unlikely to come true as MP3 players remain the most popular stocking filler, said Mr Irish. Demand is huge and Apple has promised that it can supply enough but people might struggle to get their hands on iPod minis", said Mr Irish. For those who like their gadgets to be multi-talented, the Gizmondo, a powerful gaming console with GPS and GPRS, that also doubles up as an MP3 player, movie player and camera, could be a must-have. What is impressive is how much it can do and how well it can do them", said Mr Irish. This Christmas, gadgets will not be an all-male preserve. Women will be getting gadgets from husbands and boyfriends as well as buying them for themselves", said Mr Irish. Gadgets nowadays are lifestyle products rather than just for geeks."

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"tech 128.txt Commodore finds new lease of life The once-famous Commodore computer brand could be resurrected after being bought by a US-based digital music distributor. New owner Yeahronimo Media Ventures has not ruled out the possibility of a new breed of Commodore computers. It also plans to develop a ""worldwide entertainment concept"" with the brand", although details are not yet known. The groundbreaking Commodore 64 computer elicits fond memories for those who owned one back in the 1980s. In the chronology of home computing, Commodore was one of the pioneers. The Commodore 64, launched in 1982, was one of the first affordable home PCs. It was followed a few years later

by the Amiga. The Commodore 64 sold more than any other single computer system, even to this day. The brand languished somewhat in the 1990s. Commodore International filed for bankruptcy in 1994 and was sold to Dutch firm Tulip Computers. In the late 1980s the firm was a great rival to Atari, which produced its own range of home computers and is now a brand of video games, formerly known as Infogrames. Tulip Computers sold several products under the Commodore name, including portable USB storage devices and digital music players. It had planned to relaunch the brand, following an upsurge of nostalgia for 1980s-era games. Commodore 64 enthusiasts have written emulators for Windows PC, Apple Mac and even PDAs so that the original Commodore games can be still run. The sale of Commodore is expected to be complete in three weeks in a deal worth over £17m.

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"tech 129.txt Broadband in the UK growing fast High-speed net connections in the UK are proving more popular than ever. BT reports that more people signed up for broadband in the last three months than in any other quarter. The 600,000 connections take the total number of people in the UK signing up for broadband from BT to almost 3.3 million. Nationally more than 5 million browse the net via broadband. Britain now has among the highest number of broadband connections throughout the whole of Europe. According to figures gathered by industry watchdog, Ofcom, the growth means that the UK has now surpassed Germany in terms of broadband users per 100 people. The UK total of 5.3 million translates into 7.5 connections per 100 people, compared to 6.7 in Germany and 15.8 in the Netherlands. The numbers of people signing up to broadband include those that get their service direct from BT or via the many companies that re-sell BT lines under their own name. Part of the surge in people signing up was due to BT stretching the reach of ADSL - the UK's most widely used way of getting broadband - beyond 6km. Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line technology lets ordinary copper phone lines support high data speeds. The standard speed is 512kbps," though faster connections are available. ""This breakthrough led to a dramatic increase in orders as we were suddenly able to satisfy the pent-up demand that existed in many areas"," said Paul Reynolds, chief executive of BT Wholesale which provides phone lines that other firms re-sell. BT Retail, which sells net services under its own name, also had a good quarter and provided about 30% of the new broadband customers. This was a slight increase on the previous three months. Despite the good news about growth in broadband, figures from telecommunications regulator Ofcom show that BT faces increasing competition, and dwindling influence, in other sectors. Local Loop Unbundling, (LLU), in which BT rivals install their hardware in exchanges and take over the line to a customer's home or office, is growing steadily. Cable & Wireless and NTL have announced that they are investing millions to start offering LLU services. By the end of September more than 4.2 million phone lines were using so-called Carrier Pre-Section (CPS) services, such as TalkTalk and One.Tel, which route phone calls across non-BT networks from a local exchange. There are now more than 300 different firms offering CPS services and the percentage of people using BT lines for voice calls has shrunk to 55.4%.

tech 130.txt Slim PlayStation triples sales Sony PlayStation 2's slimmer shape has proved popular with UK gamers, with 50,000 sold in its first week on sale. Sales have tripled since launch, outstripping Microsoft's Xbox, said market analysts Chart-Track. The numbers were also boosted by the release of the PS2-only game Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas. The title broke the UK sales record for video games in its first weekend of release. Latest figures suggest it has sold more than 677,000 copies. It is obviously very", very encouraging for Sony because Microsoft briefly outsold them last week," John Ho

ulihan, editor of Computerandvideogames.com told BBC News. And with Halo 2 [for Xbox] out next week", "it really is a head-to-head contest between them and Xbox." "Although Xbox sales over the last week also climbed", PS2 sales were more than double that. The figures mean Sony is reaching the seven million barrier for UK sales of the console. Edinburgh-based developer, Rockstar, which is behind the GTA titles, has seen San Andreas pull in an estimated £24m in gross revenues over the weekend. In comparison, blockbuster films like Harry Potter and The Prisoner Of Azkaban took £11.5m in its first three days at the UK box office. The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King took nearly £10m over its opening weekend, although games titles are four to five times more expensive than cinema tickets. Gangster-themed GTA San Andreas is the sequel to Grand Theft Auto Vice City which previously held the record for the fastest-selling video game ever. The Xbox game Halo 2, released on 11 November in the UK, is also widely tipped to be one of the best-selling games of the year. The original title won universal acclaim in 2001, and sold more than four million copies. Mr Houlihan added that Sony had done well with the PS2, but it definitely helped that the release of San Andreas coincided with the slimline PS2 hitting the shelves. The run-up to Christmas is a huge battlefield for games consoles and titles. Microsoft's Xbox had been winning the race up until last week in sales. The sales figures also suggest that it may be a largely adult audience driving demand," since GTA San Andreas has an 18 certificate. Sony and Microsoft have both reduced console prices recently and are preparing the way for the launches of their next generation consoles in 2005. ""Both have hit crucial price points at around £100 and that really does open up new consoles to new audience", plus the release of two really important games in terms of development are also driving those sales," said Mr Houlihan.

tech 131.txt Seamen sail into biometric future The luxury cruise liner Crystal Harmony, currently in the Gulf of Mexico, is the unlikely setting for tests of biometric technology. As holidaymakers enjoy balmy breezes, their ship's crew is testing prototype versions of the world's first internationally issued biometric ID cards, the seafarer's equivalent of a passport. Along with the owner's picture, name and personal details, the new Seafarers' Identity Document incorporates a barcode representing unique features of its holder's fingerprints. The cards are due to be issued in February next year, in line with the revised UN Convention on Seafarers' Identity Documents of June 2003. Tests currently under way in the Caribbean are designed to ensure that new cards and their machine readers, produced by different companies in different countries, are working to interoperable standards. Results of the current tests, which involve seafarers from a wide range of occupations and nationalities, will be published by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) by the end of November. Crystal Cruises, which operates the Crystal Harmony, is exploring the use of biometrics but has not yet committed to the technology. Authenti-corp, the US technology consultancy, has been working with the ILO on its technical specifications for the cards. If you're issued a seafarer's ID in your country", you want to be sure that when the ship lands in a port in, say, my country you can validate yourself using whatever equipment we have installed," Authenti-corp's CEO, Cynthia Musselman, told the BBC's Go Digital programme. She said French, Jordanian and Nigerian nationals would be the first seafarers to get the new ID cards since their countries have already ratified the convention. It aims to combat international terrorism whilst guaranteeing the welfare of the one million seafarers estimated to be at sea. The convention highlights the importance of access to shore facilities and shore leave as vital elements to a sailor's wellbeing and, therefore, it says, to safer shipping and cleaner oceans. By increasing security on the seas as well as border control and protection", the cards will ho

pefully reduce the number of piracy problems around the world, said Ms Musselma n. It should be a safer environment for seafarers to work in, and will allow pe ople protecting their borders to have confidence that the people getting off th e ship are, in fact," seafarers."

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"tech 132.txt US duo in first spam conviction A brother a nd sister in the US have been convicted of sending hundreds of thousands of uns olicited e-mail messages to AOL subscribers. It is the first criminal prosecut ion of internet spam distributors. Jurors in Virginia recommended that the ma n", Jeremy Jaynes, serve nine years in prison and that his sister, Jessica DeGr oot, be fined \$7,500. They were convicted under a state law that bars the sendi ng of bulk e-mails using fake addresses. They will be formally sentenced next year. A third defendant, Richard Rutkowski," was acquitted. Prosecutors said Ja ynes was ""a snake oil salesman in a new format""", using the internet to peddl e useless wares," news agency Associated Press reported. A ""Fed-Ex refund proc essor"" was supposed to allow people to earn \$75 an hour working from home. Ano ther item on sale was an ""internet history eraser"". His sister helped him pro cess credit card payments. Jaynes amassed a fortune of \$24m from his sales", p rosecutors said. ""He's been successful ripping people off all these years", A P quoted prosecutor Russell McGuire as saying. Jaynes was also found guilty of breaking a state law which prohibits the sending of more than 100,000 e-mails i n 30 days, Virginia State Attorney General Jerry Kilgore reportedly said. Prose cutors had asked for 15 years in jail for Jaynes, and a jail term for his siste r. But Jaynes' lawyer David Oblon called the nine-year recommended term outrage ous"" and said his client believed he was innocent. He pointed out that all thr ee of the accused lived in North Carolina and were unaware of the Virginia stat e law. Spam messages are estimated to account for at least 60% of all e-mails s ent.

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"tech 133.txt US blogger fired by her airline A US airlin e attendant suspended over ""inappropriate images"" on her blog - web diary - s ays she has been fired. Ellen Simonetti", known as Queen of the Sky, wrote an anonymous semi-fictional account of her life in the sky. She was suspended by D elta in September. In a statement," she said she was initiating legal action ag ainst the airline for ""wrongful termination"". A Delta spokesperson confirmed on Wednesday that Ms Simonetti was no longer an employee. Delta has repeatedly declined to elaborate on what it calls ""internal employee matters"". A spokesp erson reiterated this position on Wednesday", confirming only that Ms Simonett i was no longer with the company. The spokesperson also confirmed that there we re ""very clear rules"" attached to the unauthorised use of Delta branding", i ncluding uniforms. Ms Simonetti announced on her blog she had been fired on 1 N ovember. She said in an official statement: ""As a result of my suspension and subsequent termination without cause by Delta Airlines I am moving forward with filing a discrimination complaint with the Federal Government EEOC [US Equal Em ployment Opportunity Commission]."" She added she had also hired a Texas-based law firm to initiate legal action for ""wrongful termination", defamatio n of character and lost future wages." Ms Simonetti told the BBC News website she ha d received no warning or further explanation when she was suspended on 25 Septe mber. Queen of the Sky has received a lot of support and advice from the global blogging community since news of her suspension was brought to light on the BBC News website and others. Her story has highlighted concerns amongst the growin g blogging community about conflicts of interest", employment law and free spee

ch on personal websites. The blog, which she started in January as a way of getting over her mother's death, contains a mix of fictional and non-fictional accounts. Queen of the Sky developed over the months as a character in her own right, according to Ms Simonetti. In the postings," she made up fictional names for cities and other companies she mentioned to protect anonymity. But some postings contained images of herself in uniform. Of the 10 or so images only one showed Ms Simonetti's flight ""wings"". She removed them as soon as she was informed of her suspension. ""I never meant it as something to harm my company and don't understand how they think it did harm them", " Ms Simonetti said. A legal expert in the US speculated that Delta might be concerned that the fictional content on the blog may be linked back to the airline after the images were posted. Delta has been hit recently by pressures of rising fuel costs and fierce competition. It has said it needs to cut between 6,000 and 7,000 jobs and reduce costs by \$5bn (£2.7bn) a year. Analysts had warned recently that the airline might have to seek Chapter 11 bankruptcy prevention. Last week, it struck a \$1bn cost-cutting deal with its pilots which could save it from bankruptcy. The deal would see pilots accept a 32% pay cut in return for the right to buy 30 million Delta shares, unions said. And on Monday, it negotiated a deal to defer about \$135m in debt which was due next year, until 2007. The airline also said it had agreed the terms of a \$600m loan from American Express.

tech 134.txt Gates opens biggest gadget fair Bill Gates has opened the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas, saying that gadgets are working together more to help people manage multimedia content around the home and on the move. Mr Gates made no announcement about the next generation Xbox games console, which many gadget lovers had been hoping for. About 120,000 people are expected to attend the trade show which stretches over more than 1.5 million square feet and runs from 6 to 9 January. The latest trends in digital imaging, storage technologies, thinner flat screen and high-definition TVs, wireless and portable technologies, gaming, and broadband technologies will all be on show over the three days. Mr Gates said that a lot of work had been done in the last year to sort out usability and compatibility issues between devices to make it easier to share content. We predicted at the beginning of the decade that the digital approach would be taken for granted - but there was a lot of work to do. ""What is fun is to come to the show and see what has been done. It is going even faster than we expected and we are excited about it." He highlighted technology trends over the last year that had driven the need to make technology and transferring content across different devices ""seamless"". ""Gaming is becoming more of a social thing and all of the social genres will use this rich communications. ""And if we look at what has been going on with e-mail", instant messaging, blogging, entertainment - if we can make this seamless," we can create something quite phenomenal." Mr Gates said the PC", like Microsoft's Media Centre, had a central role to play in how people would be making the most out of audio," video and images but it would not be the only device. ""It is the way all these devices work together which will make the difference", " he said. He also cited the success of the Microsoft Xbox video game Halo 2, released in November, which pushed Xbox console sales past PlayStation in the last two months of 2004 for the first time in 2004. The game, which makes use of the Xbox Live online games service, has sold 6.23 million copies since its release. People are online and playing together and that really points to the future", " he said. Several partnerships with device and hardware manufacturers were highlighted during Mr Gates' speech, but there were few major groundbreaking new technology announcements. Although most of these affected largely US consumers, the technologies highlighted the kind of trends to come. These included what Mr Gates called an ecosystem of technologies""", like SBC's IPTV, a high-definition TV a

nd digital video recorder that worked via broadband to give high-quality and fast TV. There were also other deals announced which meant that people could watch and control content over portable devices and mobile phones. CES features several more key speeches from major technology players, such as Intel and Hewlett Packard, as well as parallel conference sessions on gaming, storage, broadband and the future of digital music. About 50,000 new products will be unleashed at the tech-fest, which is the largest yet. Consumer electronics and gadgets had a phenomenal year in 2004, according to figures released by CES organisers the CEA on Tuesday. The gadget explosion signalled the strongest growth yet in the US in 2004. That trend is predicted to continue with wholesale shipments of consumer technologies expected to grow by 11% again in 2005.

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"tech 135.txt GTA sequel is criminally good The Grand Theft Auto series of games have set themselves the very highest of standards in recent years", but the newest addition is more than able to live up to an increasingly grand tradition. The 18 certificate GTA: San Andreas for the PlayStation 2 could have got away with merely revisiting a best-selling formula with a more-of-the-same approach. Instead, it builds and expands almost immeasurably upon the last two games and stomps, carefree, over all the Driv3r and True Crime-shaped opposition. Even in the year that will see sequels to Halo and Half-Life, it is hard to envisage anything topping this barnstorming instant classic. The basic gameplay remains familiar. You control a character, on this occasion a youth named CJ, who sets out on a series of self-contained missions within a massive 3D environment. CJ can commandeer any vehicle he stumbles across from a push-bike to a city bus to a plane. All come in handy as he seeks to establish his presence in a tough urban environment and avenge the dreadful deeds waged upon his family. To make things worse, he is framed for murder the moment he arrives in town, and blackmailed by crooked cops played by Samuel L Jackson and Chris Penn. The setting for all this rampant criminality is the fictional US state of San Andreas, comprising three major cities: Los Santos, which is a thinly-disguised Los Angeles, San Fierro, aka San Francisco and Las Venturas, a carbon copy of Las Vegas. San Andreas sucks you in with its sprawling range, cast of characters and incredibly sharp writing. Its ability to capture the ambience of the real-world versions of these cities is something to behold, assisted no end by the monumental graphical advances since Vice City. The streets, and vast swathes of countryside, are by turns gloriously menacing, grungy and preppy. Flaunting awesome levels of graphical detail, the game's overall look, particularly during the many unusual weather conditions and dramatic sunsets, is stupendous. The outstanding bread-and-butter gameplay mechanics provide a solid grounding for the elaborate plot to hang on. Cars handle more convincingly than ever, a superb motion blur kicks in when you hit high speeds, and there's more traffic to navigate than before. Park your vehicle across the lanes of a freeway, and within seconds there will be a huge pile-up. Pedestrians are also out in force, and are a loquacious bunch. CJ can interact with them using a simple system on the control pad. They will pass comments on his appearance and credibility, aspects that the player now has control over. Clothes, tattoos and haircuts can all be purchased, and funding these habits can be achieved by criminal means or by indulging in mini-games like betting on horses and challenging bar patrons to games of pool. The character will put on or lose weight according to how long he spends on foot or in the gym. He will have to pause regularly in restaurants to keep energy levels up, but will swell up as a result of over-eating. And at last, this is a GTA hero who can swim. At a time when games are once again under fire for their supposed potential to corrupt the young, San Andreas' violence, or

specifically the freedom it gives the player to commit violence, are sure to inflame the pro-censorship brigade. Developers Rockstar have not shied away from brutality, and in some respects ramp it up from past outings. When hijacking a car, for example, CJ will gratuitously shove the driver's head into the steering wheel rather than just fleeing with the vehicle. Indeed, the tone is darker than the jokey Vice City. The grim subject matter here hardly lends itself to gags in quite the same way as the cheesy 80s setting of the last game. This title, incidentally, is set in 1992, but that is really neither here nor there apart from the influence it has on the radio playlists. The wit is still present, just more restrained than in previous outings. A further reason for this is that the incredible range of in-vehicle radio stations available means you will spend less time happening upon the hilarious talk radio options, where GTA games' trademark humour is anchored. The quality of voice acting and motion capture is simply off-the-chart. The game's rather odious gangland lowlifes swagger and mouth off in a way that rings very true indeed. It is a testament to San Andreas' magnificence that it has a number of prominent flaws, but plus-points are so numerous that the niggles don't detract. The on-screen map, for instance, is needlessly fiddly, an unwelcome change from past editions. There is also a very jarring slowdown at action-packed moments. And the game suffers from the age-old problem that can be relied upon to blight all games of this genre, setting you back a vast distance when you fail right at the very end of a long mission. But the gameplay experience in its entirety is overwhelmingly positive. You simply will not be bothered by these minor failings. San Andreas is among the few unmissable games of 2004.

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"tech 136.txt BT offers free net phone calls BT is offering customers free internet telephone calls if they sign up to broadband in December. The Christmas give-away entitles customers to free telephone calls anywhere in the UK via the internet. Users will need to use BT's internet telephony software", known as BT Communicator, and have a microphone and speakers or headset on their PC. BT has launched the promotion to show off the potential of a broadband connection to customers. People wanting to take advantage of the offer will need to be a BT Together fixed-line customer and will have to sign up to broadband online. The offer will be limited to the first 50,000 people who sign up and there are limitations - the free calls do not include calls to mobiles, non-geographical numbers such as 0870," premium numbers or international numbers. BT is keen to provide extra services to its broadband customers. "People already using BT Communicator have found it by far the most convenient way of making a call if they are at their PC"," said Andrew Burke, director of value-added services at BT Retail. As more homes get high-speed access, providers are increasingly offering add-ons such as cheap net calls. Broadband and telephony are attractive to customers and BT wants to make sure it is in the first wave of services"," said Ian Fogg, an analyst with Jupiter Research. BT Communicator had a quiet launch in the summer and now BT is waving the flag a bit more for it"," he added. BT has struggled to maintain its market share of broadband subscribers as more competitors enter the market. Reports say that BT has lost around 10% of market share over the last year, down from half of broadband users to less than 40%. BT is hoping its latest offer can persuade more people to jump on the broadband bandwagon. It currently has 1.3 million broadband subscribers.

tech 137.txt When invention turns to innovation It is unlikely that future technological inventions are going to have the same kind of transformative impact that they did in the past. When history takes a look back at great inventions like the car and transistor, they were defining technologie

s which ultimately changed people's lives substantially. But, says Nick Donofrio, senior vice-president of technology and manufacturing at IBM, it was not the thing"" itself that actually improved people's lives. It was all the social and cultural changes that the discovery or invention brought with it. The car brought about a crucial change to how people lived in cities", giving them the ability to move out into the suburbs," whilst having mobility and access. ""When we talk about innovation and creating real value in the 21st Century", we have to think more like this, but faster," Mr Donofrio told the BBC News website, after giving the Royal Academy of Engineering 2004 Hinton Lecture. The invention", "discovery is likely not to have the same value as the transistor had or the automobile had. ""The equivalent of those things will be invented or discovered", but by themselves," they are just not going to be able to generate real business value or wealth as these things did." "These are not altogether new ideas", and academics have been exploring how technologies impact wider society for years. But what it means for technology companies is that a new idea, method, or device, will have to have a different kind thinking behind it so that people see the value that innovative technology has for them. We are in a different phase now when it comes to technology, argues Mr Donofrio, Industry Week's 2003 Technology Leader of the Year. The hype and over-promise is over and now technology leaders have to demonstrate that things work, make sense," make a difference and life gets better as a result. ""In the dotcom era", "there was something that was jumping up in your face every five minutes. ""Somebody had a new thing that would awe you. You weren't quite sure that it did anything", you weren't quite sure if you needed it, you weren't quite sure if it had value for it," but it was cool." "But change and innovation in technology that people will see affecting their daily lives", he says, will come about slowly, subtlety," and in ways that will no longer be ""in your face"". It will creep in pervasively. Nanotechnologies will play a key part in this kind of pervasive environment in all sorts of ways", through new superconducting materials, to coatings, power," and memory storage. ""I am a very big believer in the evolution of this industry into a pervasive environment", in an incredible network infrastructure," says Mr Donofrio. Pervasive computing is where wireless computing rules, and where jewellery, clothes, and everyday objects become the interfaces instead of bulky wires, screens and keyboards. The net becomes a true network that is taken for granted and just there, like air. People will not have to do anything to stay connected. People will know their lives are just better", "says Mr Donofrio. Trillions of devices will be connected to the net in ways people will not know." "Natural interfaces will develop", devices will shape your persona, and our technologically underused voices could be telling our jewellery to sort out the finances. Ultimately, there will be, says Mr Donofrio," no value in being ""computer illiterate"". To some", it sounds like a technological world gone mad. To Mr Donofrio," it is a vision innovation that will happen. Behind this vision should be a rich robust network capability and ""deep computing""", says Mr Donofrio. Deep computing is the ability to perform lots of complex calculations on massive amounts of data, and integral to this concept is supercomputing. It has value, according to IBM, because it helps humans work out extremely complex problems to come up with valuable solutions, like how to refine millions of net search results, finding cures for diseases, or understanding of exactly how a gene or protein operates. But pervasive computing presumably means having technologies that are aware of diversity of contexts, commands, and requirements of a diverse world. As computing and technologies become part of the environment, part of furniture, walls, and clothing," physical space becomes a more important consideration. This is going to need a much broader range of skills and experience. ""I am confident that the SET [science", engineering and technology] industry is goi

ng to be short on skills, he says. If I am right about what innovation is," you need to be multidisciplinary and collaborative. ""Women tend to have those traits a lot better than men." " Eventually", women could win out in both life and physical sciences, he says. In the UK, a DTI-funded resource centre for women has set a target to have 40% representation on SET industry boards. IBM, according to Mr Donofrio," has 30%. ""Our goal is for our research team to become the preferred organisation for women in science and technology to begin their career." " The whole issue of global diversity is as much a business matter as it is a moral and social concern to Mr Donofrio. ""We believe in the whole issue of global diversity", he says. Our customers are diverse," our clients are diverse. They expect us to look like them. ""As more and more women or underrepresented minorities succeed into leadership positions", it becomes and imperative for us to constantly look like them."

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"tech 138.txt Firefox browser takes on Microsoft Microsoft's Internet Explorer has a serious rival in the long-awaited Firefox 1.0 web browser", which has just been released. Few people get excited when some new software is released, especially when the program is not a game or a music or movie player. But the release of the first full version of Firefox has managed to drum up a respectable amount of pre-launch fervour. Fans of the software have banded together to raise cash to pay for an advert in the New York Times announcing that version 1.0 of the browser is available. The release of Firefox 1.0 on 9 November might even cause a few heads to turn at Microsoft because the program is steadily winning people away from the software giant's Internet Explorer browser. Firefox has been created by the Mozilla Foundation which was started by former browser maker Netscape back in 1998. Much of the development work done since then has gone into Firefox which made its first appearance under this name in February. Earlier incarnations, but which had the same core technology, were called Phoenix and Firebird. Since then the software has been gaining praise and converts, not least because of the large number of security problems that have come to light in Microsoft's Internet Explorer. Rivals to IE got a boost in late June when two US computer security organisations warned people to avoid the Microsoft program to avoid falling victim to a serious vulnerability. Internet monitoring firm WebSideStory has charted the growing population of people using the Firefox browser and says it is responsible for slowly eroding the stranglehold of IE. Before July this year, according to WebSideStory, Internet Explorer was used by about 95% of web surfers. That figure had remained static for years. In July the IE using population dropped to 94.7% and by the end of October stood at 92.9%. The Mozilla Foundation claims that Firefox has been downloaded almost eight million times and has publicly said it would be happy to garner 10% of the Windows- using, net-browsing population. Firefox is proving popular because, at the moment, it has far fewer security holes than Internet Explorer and has some innovations lacking in Microsoft's program. For instance, Firefox allows the pages of different websites to be arranged as tabs so users can switch easily between them. It blocks pop-ups, has a neat way of finding text on a page and lets you search through the pages you have browsed. One of the most powerful features of Firefox is the many hundreds of extras, or extensions, produced for it. The Mozilla Foundation is an open source organisation which means that the creators of the browser are happy for others to play around with the core code for the program. This has resulted in many different add-ons or extensions for the browser which now include everything from a version of the familiar Google toolbar to a Homeland Security monitor that keep users aware of current threat levels. Firefox, which used to be called Firebird and before that Phoe

nix, also has a growing number of vocal net-based fans. A campaign co-ordinated by the Spread Firefox website attempted to raise the \$50,000 needed for a full page advert in the New York Times. The campaign set itself a target of recruiting 2500 volunteers. Ten days in to the campaign 10,000 people had signed up and now about \$250,000 has been raised. The ad is due to run sometime in a three-week period in late November/early December. The surplus cash will be used to help keep the Mozilla Foundation running. Microsoft is facing a growing challenge to IE's hold on the web using population. from alternative browsers such as Opera, Safari, Amaya and even Netscape.

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"tech 139.txt Halo fans' hope for sequel Xbox video game  
Halo 2 has been released in the US on 9 November", with a UK release two days later. Why is the game among the most anticipated of all time? Halo is considered by many video game pundits to be one of the finest examples of interactive entertainment ever produced and more than 1.5 million people worldwide have pre-ordered the sequel. A science fiction epic, Halo centred the action on a human cyborg, controlled by the player, who had to save his crew from an alien horde after a crash landing on a strange and exotic world contained on the interior surface of a giant ring in space. Remembrance of Things Past it was not - but as a slice of schlock science fiction inspired by works such as Larry Niven's Ringworld and the film Starship Troopers, it fit the bill perfectly. Halo stood out from a crowd of similar titles - it was graphically impressive, had tremendous audio, using Dolby Digital, a decent storyline, instant playability and impressive physics. But what marked Halo as a classic were the thousands of details which brought a feeling of polish and the enormously-high production values not usually associated with video gaming. Produced by Bungie software, renowned for their innovation in gaming, it caused a stir among the gaming fraternity when the developer was bought by Microsoft and became an Xbox exclusive. Claude Errera, editor of fansite [Halo.Bungie.Org](http://Halo.Bungie.Org), said: ""Bungie got everything right. They were really careful to make sure everything worked the way it was supposed to. ""Nothing distracts you when you were playing. There was nothing in Halo that had not been done before but everything in there was as good as it could be." He added: ""Graphically it was superior to everything else out there. ""It also had a depth to it that made it stand out." Halo was unusually immersive, sucking the player into the action and blurring the interface between screen and controller. It also capitalised on the growing popularity of LAN gaming in the PC world - for the first time it became easy to link multiple game consoles together, allowing up to 16 players to battle against each other at the same time. The game instantly cultivated an online following, which continues today with a score of Halo fan websites following every aspect of the sequel, Halo 2. Errera spends three to fours hours a day of his own time maintaining the hugely popular website, which attracts 600,000 page views a day from Halo fans eager for the latest news. When the Xbox launched on November 15 2001 in the US," Halo was one of the launch titles and had an immediate impact on critics and consumers. ""Halo is the most important launch game for any console ever," wrote the influential Edge magazine in its review, giving it a rare 10 out of 10 mark. The game had its critics and while it is not a one-off original as a game, it brought many original touches and flourishes to the genre which have defined all other first person shooters since. The first time I played it I just stood there watching the spent shells fall out of my gun", said Errera, remarking on the level of detail in the game. The game also inspired thousands of people to write their own fiction based on the storyline and produce downloadable video clips of the many weird and wonderful things that can be done in the game. It blew

me away the first time someone managed to climb to the top of Halo", " said Errera, referring to a fan who had created a video of Master Chief scaling the landscape of the graphical world. Video clips of the more outrageous stunts that are possible thanks to the game's amazing physics engine are incredibly popular and some have attained a cult following. Speculation about the sequel has seen every titbit analysed and pored over with all the intent of a forensic scientist examining a body. When early screenshots of the game were released some people wrote essay-length articles highlighting everything from the texture of graphics to clues about the story line. Errera said expectations of the sequel among fans were sky high. It does not feel like a game release any more. Somebody told me this was the biggest single release of any product in Microsoft's history. " "We're all just hoping that Bungie has got it right again." " Halo 2 is out on 9 November in the US and 11 November in the UK

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tech 140.txt Players sought for \$1m prize UK gamers are getting a chance to take part in a \$1m tournament thanks to one of the country's top teams. The Four-Kings clan is staging a Pop Idol type competition to find new members who can take on the world's best in the lucrative tournament. Four-Kings hopes the open qualifiers will turn up gamers good enough to beat all comers at the Painkiller game. Top players also get a contract with the Four-Kings team which will pay travelling expenses for the contest. UK gamers have until 12 November to register their interest in taking part and can sign up via the Four-Kings", Jolt.co.uk and Painkiller tournament websites. Philip Wride, who co-manages the Four-Kings team," said online qualifiers will be held from 16-28 November to find the best eight players of the Painkiller game. He said the clan was running the contest because Four-Kings does not currently have any players that excel at Painkiller. These eight players will be brought together in London on 3-5 December for the Bloodline Tournament that will find the best two players. The event will be filmed and the final cut made available online for others to watch. The movie is being put together by Simon Bysshe who has shot many other films about pro-gaming that have been widely shared online. Said Mr Bysshe: " "Painkiller is a new game and the opportunity is there for a new player to step up." " Painkiller has been described as a game that adds a few modern touches", such as improved graphics, to the old-fashioned first-person shooter. These two players will be put forward as the UK's entrants to the Cyberathlete Professional League \$1m Painkiller contest that will take place throughout 2005. The event is being billed as the CPL World Tour and will be arranged around ten separate tournaments at different locations around the world. Travel expenses to all the stops on the tour will be paid by Four-Kings for the two UK players who make the grade. The top prize at each stop on the world tour will be \$15,000. A further \$150,000 will be given to the winner of the Grand Final due to be held in December 2005. Mr Wride said any gamer that wins a few tour stop tournaments and the grand final will have a very good year. The first stop on the world tour will be Istanbul, Turkey from 10-13 February. A total of \$50,000 in cash prizes is on offer. The CPL has said that it picked a one-on-one game such as Painkiller to make it easier for spectators to follow the action. Counter-Strike, by far the most popular online game, pits teams against each other and can be confusing to follow if those watching are not familiar with the layout of the maps on which it is played. The decision to pick Painkiller was greeted with surprise by many gamers, as it was widely expected that Doom 3 would be chosen as the one-on-one title.

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"tech 141.txt US top of supercomputing charts The US has pushed Japan off the top of the supercomputing chart with IBM's prototype Blue Gene/L machine. It is being assembled for the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory", under the US Department of Energy. IBM test results show that Blue Gene/L has managed speeds of 70.72 teraflops. The previous top machine, Japan's NEC Earth Simulator, clocked up 35.86. The Top 500 list was announced on Monday and officially charts the fastest computers in the world. It is announced every six months and is worked out using an officially recognised mathematical speed test called Linpack which measures calculations per second. Once completed in 2005," Blue Gene/L will be more powerful than its current prototype. ""Next year with the final Blue Gene", four times what it is this year, it is going to be a real step up and will be hard to beat," said Erich Strohmaier, one of the co-founders of the Top500 list. It will help scientists work out the safety, security and reliability requirements for the US's nuclear weapons stockpile, without the need for underground nuclear testing. It will also cut down on the amount of heat generated by the massive power, a big problem for supercomputers. In second place was Silicon Graphics' Columbia supercomputer based at the US space agency's (Nasa) Ames Research Center in California. The Linux-based machine was reported to have reached a top speed of 42.7 trillion calculations per second (teraflops) in October. It will be used to model flight missions, climate research, and aerospace engineering. The defeated Japanese contender, the Earth Simulator, which was listed in third place, losing the top spot it had held since June 2002. It is dedicated to climate modelling and simulating seismic activity. Since the first supercomputer, the Cray-1, was installed at Los Alamos National Laboratory, US, in 1976, computational speed has leaped 500,000 times. The Cray-1 was capable of 80 megaflops (80 million operations a second). The Blue Gene/L machine that will be completed next year will be five million times faster. Started in 1993, the Top 500 list is decided by a group of computer science academics from around the world. It is presented at the International Supercomputer Conference in Pittsburgh.

tech 142.txt Text messages aid disaster recovery Text messaging technology was a valuable communication tool in the aftermath of the tsunami disaster in Asia. The messages can get through even when the cell phone signal is too weak to sustain a spoken conversation. Now some are studying how the technology behind SMS could be better used during an emergency. Sanjaya Senanayake works for Sri Lankan television. The blogging world, though, might know him better by his online name, Morquendi. He was one of the first on the scene after the tsunami destroyed much of the Sri Lankan coast. Cell phone signals were weak. Land lines were unreliable. So Mr Senanayake started sending out text messages. The messages were not just the latest news they were also an on-the-ground assessment of who needs what and where". Blogging friends in India took Mr Senanayake's text messages and posted them on a weblog called Dogs without Borders. Thousands around the world followed the story that unfolded in the text messages that he sent. And that's when Mr Senanayake started to wonder if SMS might be put to more practical use. ""SMS networks can handle so much more traffic than the standard mobile phone call or the land line call", he says. In every rural community, there's at least one person who has access to a mobile phone, or has a mobile phone," and can receive messages." Half a world away", in the Caribbean nation of Trinidad and Tobago, Taran Rampersad read Morquendi's messages. Mr Rampersad, who used to work in the military, knew how important on the ground communication can be in times of disaster. He wondered if there might be a way to automatically centralise text messages," and then redistribute them to agencies and people who might be able to help. Mr Rampersad said: ""Imagine if an aid worker in the field spotted a need for water purification tablet

s," and had a central place to send a text message to that effect. ""He can message the server," so the server can send out an e-mail message and human or machine moderators can e-mail aid agencies and get it out in the field." He added: ""Or", send it at the same time to other people who are using SMS in the region, and they might have an excess of it," and be able to shift supplies to the right places."" Mr Rampersad and others had actually been thinking about such a system since Hurricane Ivan ravaged the Caribbean and the southern United States last September. Last week", he sent out e-mail messages asking for help in creating such a system for Asia. In only 72 hours, he found Dan Lane, a text message guru living in Britain. The pair, along with a group of dedicated techies," are creating what they call the Alert Retrieval Cache. The idea is to use open-source software - software can be used by anyone without commercial restraint - and a far-flung network of talent to create a system that links those in need with those who can help. ""This is a classic smart mobs situation where you have people self-organizing into a larger enterprise to do things that benefit other people", says Paul Saffo, a director at the California-based Institute for the Future. You may be halfway around the world from someone", but in cyber space you're just one click or one e-mail away," he said, That's put a whole new dimension on disaster relief and recovery", where often people halfway around the world can be more effective in making something happen precisely because they're not right on top of the tragedy." It is still very early days for the project", though. In an e-mail," Dan Lane calls it ""an early proof of concept." Right now", the Alert Retrieval Cache can only take a text message and automatically upload it to a web-page, or distribute it to an e-mail list. In the near future, the group says it hopes to take in messages from people in affected areas," and use human moderators to take actions based on the content of those messages. But there's still another challenge. You have to get people to know that the system is there for them to use. ""It's amazing how difficult it is to find someone to pass it along to", and say, look this is what we're trying to do and everything like that," says Mr Rampersad. So the big problem right now is the same problem we're trying to solve - human communication." He is optimistic", however. He thinks that the Alert Retrieval Cache is an idea whose time has come and he hopes governments, too, will sit up and take notice. And he stands by his motto, courtesy of Michelangelo: criticise by creating. Clark Boyd is technology correspondent for The World, a BBC World Service and WGBH-Boston co-production.

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"tech 143.txt Putting a face to 'Big Brother' Literally putting a face on technology could be one of the keys to improving our interaction with hi-tech gadgets. Imagine a surveillance system that also presents a virtual embodiment of a person on a screen who can react to your behaviour", and perhaps even alert you to new e-mails. Basic versions of these so-called avatars already exist. Together with speech and voice recognition systems, they could replace the keyboard and mouse in the near future. Some of these ideas have been showcased at the London's Science Museum, as part of its Future Face exhibition. One such avatar is Jeremiah. It is a virtual man, which you can download for free and install in your computer. His creator, Richard Bowden, lecturer at the Centre for Vision, Speech and Signal Processing at the University of Surrey," refers to Jeremiah as ""him""", rather than it. ""Jeremiah is a virtual face that attempts to emulate humans in the way it responds to activity. He is very childlike", he likes visual stimulus, he told the BBC News website. When he sees children running and laughing and waving at him, he smiles at them. If you ignore him, he gets angry. If you leave," he gets sad. And you can also even su

rprise him. "" Jeremiah is not actually intelligent. It works on vision", reacting in a preset way to the information provided by a surveillance tracker system. It is not able to talk or to hear you, at least not yet. The Surrey team is already working on Jeremiah's next version," that will replace the human face with an underwater and more interactive creature: Finn the fish. ""I am interested in the interaction", providing the ability of a system to watch what's going on and make decisions based on that," explained Dr Bowden. The research comes at a time when people are having to cope with an increasing number of hi-tech gadgets. Experts say a much more natural way to interact with these devices, such as a virtual human, could make it much easier to make the most of all those new gizmos. If you get up at three o'clock in the morning", and you go downstairs, there are probably two things you are going to do: either going to the bathroom, or maybe you are going to make a cup of tea, said Dr Bowden. Now if the system can watch your behaviour over time, it can learn this, so it would predict what you are going to do, turn on the lights for you, or, before you even get to the kettle," it could have switched it on." You might even be able to tell your home surveillance system that you will be going away on holiday", and ask if it could make sure that the house is secure once you have left. This might sound like a scary vision of an Orwellian future. But it might all depend on the face that is watching you. ""When we put the surveillance cameras in our centre", a lot of people were very unhappy about the fact that there was a system watching them, said Dr Bowden. But when Jeremiah's camera went in, nobody minded, because although it's still watching them," they could see what it was watching. ""

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"tech 144.txt Football Manager scores big time For the past decade or so the virtual football fans among us will have become used to the annual helping of Championship Manager (CM). Indeed", it seems like there has been a CM game for as many years as there have been PCs. However, last year was the final time that developers Sports Interactive (SI) and publishers Eidos would work together. They decided to go their separate ways, and each kept a piece of the franchise. SI kept the game's code and database, and Eidos retained rights to the CM brand, and the look and feel of the game. So at the beginning of this year, fans faced a new situation. Eidos announced the next CM game, with a new team to develop it from scratch, whilst SI developed the existing code further to be released, with new publishers Sega, under the name Football Manager. So what does this mean? Well, Football Manager is the spiritual successor to the CM series, and it has been released earlier than expected. At this point CM5 looks like it will ship early next year. But given that Football Manager 2005 is by and large the game that everybody knows and loves, how does this new version shape up? A game like FM2005 could blind you with statistics. It has an obscene number of playable leagues, an obscene number of manageable teams and a really obscene number of players and staff from around the world in the database, with stats faithfully researched and compiled by a loyal army of fans. But that does not do justice to the game really. What we are talking about is the most realistic and satisfying football management game to ever grace the Earth. You begin by picking the nations and leagues you want to manage teams from, for instance England and Scotland. That will give you a choice not just of the four main Scottish leagues, but the English Premiership all the way down to the Conference North and South. Of course you might be looking for European glory, or to get hold of Abramovich's millions, in which case you can take control at Chelsea, or even Barcelona, Real Madrid, AC Milan ... the list goes on a very long way. Once in a team you will be told by the board what they expect of you. Someti

mes it is promotion, or a place in Europe, sometimes it is consolidation or a brave relegation battle. It might even be a case of Champions or else. Obviously the expectations are linked to the team you choose, so choose wisely. Then it is time to look at your squad, work out your tactics, seeing how much cash, if any, you have got to splash, having a look at the transfer market, sorting out the training schedule and making sure your backroom staff are up to it. Then bring on the matches, which are once more available in the ever-improving top down 2D view. With the exception of the improved user interface on the surface, not much else seems to have changed. However, there have been a lot of changes under the bonnet as well - things like the manager mind-games, which let you talk to the media about the opposition bosses. The match engine is also much improved, and it is more of a joy than ever to watch. In fact just about every area of the game has been tweaked, and it leads to an ever more immersive experience. With a game that is so complex and so open-ended, there are of course a few glitches, but nowhere near the sorts of problems that have blighted previous releases. With so many calculations to perform the game can take some time to process in between matches, though there have been improvements in this area. And a sport like football, which is so high profile and unpredictable itself, can never be modelled quite to everybody's satisfaction. But this time around a great deal of hard work has been put in to ensure that any oddities that do crop up are cosmetic only, and do not affect gameplay. And if there are problems further down the line, Sports Interactive have indicated their usual willingness to support and develop the game as far as possible. In all there are many more tweaks and improvements. If you were a fan of the previous CM games, then FM2005 might make you forget there was anything else before it. If you are new to the genre but like the idea of trying to take Margate into the Premiership, Spurs into Europe, or even putting Rangers back on the top of the tree, FM2005 could be the best purchase you ever made. Just be warned that the family might not see you much at Christmas. Football Manager 2005 out now for the PC and the Mac

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"tech 145.txt Musicians 'upbeat' about the net Musicians are embracing the internet as a way of reaching new fans and selling more music", a survey has found. The study by US researchers, Pew Internet, suggests musicians do not agree with the tactics adopted by the music industry against file-sharing. While most considered file-sharing as illegal," many disagreed with the lawsuits launched against downloaders. ""Even successful artists don't think the lawsuits will benefit musicians", said report author Mary Madden. For part of the study, Pew Internet conducted an online survey of 2,755 musicians, songwriters and music publishers via musician membership organisations between March and April 2004. They ranged from full-time, successful musicians to artists struggling to make a living from their music. We looked at more of the independent musicians", rather than the rockstars of this industry but that reflects more accurately the state of the music industry," Ms Madden told the BBC News website. We always hear the views of successful artists like the Britneys of the world but the less successful artists rarely get represented." "The survey found that musicians were overwhelming positive about the internet", rather than seeing it as just a threat to their livelihood. Almost all of them used the net for ideas and inspiration, with nine out of 10 going online to promote, advertise and post their music on the web. More than 80% offered free samples online, while two-thirds sold their music via the net. Independent musicians, in particular," saw the internet as a way to get around the need to land a record contract and reach fans directly. ""Musicians are embracing the internet enthusiastically", said Ms Madden. They are using the internet to gain inspiration, sell it

online, tracking royalties," learning about copyright." " Perhaps surprisingly", opinions about online file-sharing were diverse and not as clear cut as those of the record industry. Through the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), it has pursued an aggressive campaign through the courts to sue people suspected of sharing copyrighted music. But the report suggests this campaign does not have the wholehearted backing of musicians in the US. It found that most artists saw file-sharing as both good and bad," though most agreed that it should be illegal. "Free downloading has killed opportunities for new bands to break without major funding and backing", said one musician quoted by the report. It's hard to keep making records if they don't pay for themselves through sales." However 60% said they did not think the lawsuits against song swappers would benefit musicians and songwriters. Many suggested that rather than fighting file-sharing", the music industry needed to recognise the changes it has brought and embrace it. "Both successful and struggling musicians were more likely to say that the internet has made it possible for them to make more money from their music", rather than make it harder for them to protect their material from piracy," said Ms Madden.

tech 146.txt Broadband takes on TV viewing The number of Europeans with broadband has exploded over the past 12 months, with the web eating into TV viewing habits, research suggests. Just over 54 million people are hooked up to the net via broadband, up from 34 million a year ago, according to market analysts Nielsen/NetRatings. The total number of people online in Europe has broken the 100 million mark. The popularity of the net has meant that many are turning away from TV, say analysts Jupiter Research. It found that a quarter of web users said they spent less time watching TV in favour of the net. The report by Nielsen/NetRatings found that the number of people with fast internet access had risen by 60% over the past year. The biggest jump was in Italy, where it rose by 120%. Britain was close behind, with broadband users almost doubling in a year. The growth has been fuelled by lower prices and a wider choice of always-on, fast-net subscription plans. Twelve months ago high speed internet users made up just over one third of the audience in Europe; now they are more than 50% and we expect this number to keep growing", said Gabrielle Prior, Nielsen/NetRatings analyst. As the number of high-speed surfers grows", websites will need to adapt," update and enhance their content to retain their visitors and encourage new ones." The total number of Europeans online rose by 12% to 100 million over the past year", the report showed, with the biggest rise in France, Italy, Britain and Germany. The ability to browse web pages at high speed, download files such as music or films and play online games is changing what people do in their spare time. A study by analysts Jupiter Research suggested that broadband was challenging television viewing habits. In homes with broadband, 40% said they were spending less time watching TV. The threat to TV was greatest in countries where broadband was on the up, in particular the UK, France and Spain, said the report. It said TV companies faced a major long-term threat over the next five years," with broadband predicted to grow from 19% to 37% of households by 2009. "Year-on-year we are continuing to see a seismic shift in where", when and how Europe's population consume media for information and entertainment and this has big implications for TV, newspaper and radio," said Jupiter Research analyst Olivier Beauvillian.

tech 147.txt Freeze on anti-spam campaign A campaign by Lycos Europe to target spam-related websites appears to have been put on hold. Earlier this week the company released a screensaver that bombarded the sites with data to try to bump up the running costs of the websites. But the site hosting the screensaver now displays a pink graphic and the words Stay tuned"". No one at Lycos was available for comment on latest developments in its controvers

ial anti-spam campaign. Lycos Europe's ""Make love not spam"" campaign was intended as a way for users to fight back against the mountain of junk mail flooding inboxes. People were encouraged to download the screensaver which", when the ir PC was idle, would then send lots of data to sites that peddle the goods and services mentioned in spam messages. Lycos said the idea was to get the spam sites running at 95% capacity and generate big bandwidth bills for the spammers behidn the sites. But the plan has proved controversial. Monitoring firm Netcraft analysed response times for some of the sites targeted by the screensaver and found that a number were completely knocked offline. The downing of the sites could dent Lycos claims that what it is doing does not amount to a distributed denial of service attack. In such attacks thousands of computers bombard sites with data in an attempt to overwhelm them. Laws in many countries do not explicitly outlaw such attacks but many nations are re-drafting computer use laws to make them specific offences. Lycos Europe now appears to have put the plan on hold. The site hosting the screensaver currently shows a holding page, with the words, " "Stay tuned"". The numerical internet address of the site has also changed. This is likely to be in response to spammers who have reportedly redirected traffic from their sites back to the Lycos screensaver site. The campaign has come under fire from some corners of the web. Many discussion groups have said that it set a dangerous precedent and could incite vigilantism. ""Attacking a spammer's website is like poking a grizzly bear sleeping in your back garden with a pointy stick", said Graham Cluley, senior technology consultant for Sophos. Not only is this screensaver similar in its approach to a potentially illegal distributed denial of service attack", but it also is in danger of turning innocent computer users into vigilantes," who may not be prepared for whatever retaliation the spammers care to dream up.""

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"tech 148.txt ITunes user sues Apple over iPod A user of Apple's iTunes music service is suing the firm saying it is unfair he can only use an iPod to play songs. He says Apple is breaking anti-competition laws in refusing to let other music players work with the site. Apple", which opened its online store in 2003 after launching the iPod in 2001," uses technology to ensure each song bought only plays on the iPod. Californian Thomas Slattery filed the suit in the US District Court in San Jose and is seeking damages. ""Apple has turned an open and interactive standard into an artifice that prevents consumers from using the portable hard drive digital music player of their choice", the lawsuit states. The key to such a lawsuit would be convincing a court that a single brand like iTunes is a market in itself separate from the rest of the online music market, according to Ernest Gellhorn, an anti-trust law professor at George Mason University. As a practical matter", the lower courts have been highly sceptical of such claims," Prof Gellhorn said. Apple has sold more than six million iPods since the gadget was launched and has an 87% share of the market for portable digital music players, market research firm NPD Group has reported. More than 200 million songs have been sold by the iTunes music store since it was launched. Apple has unlawfully bundled", tied, and/or leveraged its monopoly in the market for the sale of legal online digital music recordings to thwart competition in the separate market for portable hard drive digital music players, and vice-versa," the lawsuit said. Mr Slattery called himself an iTunes customer who was also forced to purchase an Apple iPod"" if he wanted to take his music with him to listen to. A spokesman for Apple declined to comment. Apple's online music store uses a different format for songs than Napster", Musicmatch, RealPlayer and others. The rivals use the MP3 format or Microsoft's WMA format while Apple uses AAC, which it says helps thwart piracy. The WMA for

mat also includes so-called Digital Rights Management which is used to block piracy.

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"tech 149.txt Microsoft gets the blogging bug Software giant Microsoft is taking the plunge into the world of blogging. It is launching a test service to allow people to publish blogs", or online journals, called MSN Spaces. Microsoft is trailing behind competitors like Google and AOL, which already offer services which make it easy for people to set up web journals. Blogs, short for web logs, have become a popular way for people to talk about their lives and express opinions online. MSN Spaces is free to anyone with a Hotmail or MSN Messenger account. People will be able to choose a layout for the page," upload images and share photo albums and music playlists. The service will be supported by banner ads. ""This is a simple tool for people to express themselves", said MSN's Blake Irving. This is Microsoft's first foray into blogging, which has taken off as a web phenomenon in the past year. Competitors like Google already offer free services through its Blogger site, while AOL provides its members with journals. Accurate figures for the number of blogs in existence are hard to come by. According to blog analysis firm Technorati, the so-called blogosphere, has doubled every five and a half months for the last 18 months. It now estimates that the number of blogs in existence has exceeded 4.8 million, although some speculate that less than a quarter are regularly maintained.

tech 150.txt Broadband fuels online change Fast web access is encouraging more people to express themselves online, research suggests. A quarter of broadband users in Britain regularly upload content and have personal sites, according to a report by UK think-tank Demos. It said that having an always-on, fast connection is changing the way people use the internet. More than five million households in the UK have broadband and that number is growing fast. The Demos report looked at the impact of broadband on people's net habits. It found that more than half of those with broadband logged on to the web before breakfast. One in five even admitted to getting up in the middle of the night to browse the web. More significantly, argues the report, broadband is encouraging people to take a more active role online. It found that one in five post something on the net everyday, ranging from comments or opinions on sites to uploading photographs. Broadband is putting the 'me' in media as it shifts power from institutions and into the hands of the individual", said John Craig, co-author of the Demos report. From self-diagnosis to online education", broadband creates social innovation that moves the debate beyond simple questions of access and speed." The Demos report", entitled Broadband Britain: The End Of A Symmetry?", was commissioned by net provider AOL. ""Broadband is moving the perception of the internet as a piece of technology to an integral part of home life in the UK", said Karen Thomson, Chief Executive of AOL UK, with many people spending time on their computers as automatically as they might switch on the television or radio." According to analysts Nielsen//NetRatings", more than 50% of the 22.8 million UK net users regularly accessing the web from home each month are logging on at high speed They spend twice as long online than people on dial-up connections, viewing an average of 1,444 pages per month. The popularity of fast net access is growing, partly fuelled by fierce competition over prices and services.

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"tech 151.txt 'Blog' picked as word of the year The term "blog"" has been chosen as the top word of 2004 by a US dictionary publisher. Merriam-Webster said ""blog"" headed the list of most looked-up terms on its si

te during the last twelve months. During 2004 blogs", or web logs," have become hugely popular and some have started to influence mainstream media. Other words on the Merriam-Webster list were associated with major news events such as the US presidential election or natural disasters that hit the US. Merriam-Webster defines a blog as: ""a Web site that contains an online personal journal with reflections", " comments and often hyperlinks"". Its list of most looked-up words is drawn up every year and it discounts terms such as swear words", that everyone likes to look up, or those that always cause problems," such as ""affect"" and ""effect"". Merriam-Webster said ""blog"" was the word that people have asked to be defined or explained most often over the last 12 months. The word will now appear in the 2005 version of Merriam-Webster's printed dictionary. However", the word is already included in some printed versions of the Oxford English Dictionary. A spokesman for the Oxford University Press said that the word was now being put into other dictionaries for children and learners," reflecting its mainstream use. ""I think it was the word of last year rather than this year", he said. Now we're getting words that derive from it such as 'blogosphere' and so on, he said. But," he added, it's a pretty recent thing and in the way that this happens these days it's got established very quickly." Blogs come in many different forms. Many act as news sites for particular groups or subjects", some are written from a particular political slant and others are simply lists of interesting sites. Other terms in the top 10 were related to natural disasters that have struck the US," such as ""hurricane"" or were to do with the US election. Words such as ""incumbent""", ""electoral"" and ""partisan"" reflected the scale of interest in the vote. Blogs also proved very useful to both sides in the US election battle because many pundits who maintain their own journals were able to air opinions that would never appear in more mainstream media. Speculation that President Bush was getting help during debates via a listening device was first aired on web logs. Online journals also raised doubts about documents used by US television news organisation CBS in a story about President Bush's war record. The immediacy of many blogs also helped some wield influence over topics that made it into national press. This is despite the fact that the number of people reading even the most influential blogs is tiny. Statistics by web influence ranking firm HitWise reveal that the most popular political blog racks up only 0.0051% of all net visits per day. One of the reasons that blogs and regularly updated online journals have become popular is because the software used to put them together make it very easy for people to air their views online. According to blog analysis firm Technorati the number of blogs in existence", the blogosphere, has doubled every five and a half months for the last 18 months. Technorati now estimates that the number of blogs in existence has exceeded 4.8 million. Some speculate that less than a quarter of this number are regularly maintained. According to US research firm Pew Internet & American Life a blog is created every 5.8 seconds. Another trend this year has been the increasing numbers of weblogs that detail the daily lives of many ordinary workers in jobs that few people know much about. In many repressive regimes and developing nations, blogs have been embraced by millions of people keen to give their plight a voice.

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"tech 152.txt New Year's texting breaks record A mobile phone was as essential to the recent New Year's festivities as a party mood and Auld Lang Syne", if the number of text messages sent is anything to go by. Between midnight on 31 December and midnight on 1 January, 133m text messages were sent in the UK. It is the highest ever daily total recorded by the Mobile Data Association (MDA). It represents an increase of 20% on last year's figures. Wi

shing a Happy New Year to friends and family via text message has become a staple ingredient of the year's largest party. While texting has not quite overtaken the old-fashioned phone call, it is heading that way, said Mike Short, "chairman of the MDA. ""In the case of a New Years Eve party", texting is useful if you are unable to speak or hear because of a noisy background," he said. There were also lots of messages sent internationally, where different time zones made traditional calls unfeasible, he said. The British love affair with texting shows no signs of abating and the annual total for 2004 is set to exceed 25bn, according to MDA. The MDA predicts that 2005 could see more than 30bn text messages sent in the UK. We thought texting might slow down as MMS took off but we have seen no sign of that", said Mr Short. More and more firms are seeing the value in mobile marketing. Restaurants are using text messages to tell customers about special offers and promotions. Anyone in need of a bit of January cheer now the party season is over, can use a service set up by Jongleurs comedy club, which will text them a joke a day. For those still wanting to drink and be merry as the long days of winter draw in, the Good Pub Guide offers a service giving the location and address of their nearest recommended pub. Users need to text the word GOODPUB to 85130. If they want to turn the evening into a pub crawl, they simply text the word NEXT. And for those still standing at the end of the night, a taxi service in London is available via text, which will locate the nearest available black cab.

tech 153.txt DS aims to touch gamers The mobile gaming industry is set to explode in 2005 with a number of high-profile devices offering a range of gaming and other features such as movie and music playback. Market leader Nintendo, however, is releasing a handheld console that it says will revolutionise the way games are played. The first striking thing about the DS is how retro it looks. Far from looking like a mould-breaking handheld, it looks more like Nintendo dug out a mould from a 1980s handheld prototype. The lightweight clam shell device opens up to reveal two screens, and when switched on it instantly reveals its pedigree. Both screens are crisp and clear while the bottom of the two is touch sensitive. Nintendo has given developers free rein to utilise the dual screens and ability to control the action by simply touching the screen. The Japanese gaming giant hopes the DS will maintain the firm's pre-eminence in an increasingly-competitive mobile gaming market. Nintendo first launched its GameBoy console in 1989 and has dominated the market ever since. But its lead can no longer be taken for granted. Sony will enter the market later this year with its PlayStation Portable, while start-up companies Gizmondo and Tapwave Zodiac are also offering hybrid devices. We believe the DS will appeal to all ages", both genders and gamers of any skill," said David Yarnton, Nintendo Europe's general manager said at the recent press launch for the handheld. With its two screens, wireless connectivity and backwards compatibility with the GameBoy Advance, the DS certainly has a number of unique selling points. It went on sale in the US in mid-November priced \$150 and Nintendo says sales have exceeded expectations, without giving detailed figures. Japan and Europe will have to wait until the first quarter of 2005 to get the device. With more than two million pre-orders for the device in Japan, Nintendo is confident it will keep its number one spot. But will the device prove to be as revolutionary as claimed? The game ships with a demo of Metroid Hunters - a 3D action title which can be played alone or with a group of friends using the machine's wireless capabilities. It certainly looks impressive on the small machine and plays smoothly even with a group of people. The game can be controlled by using the supplied stylus to aim. The top screen is used to navigate the action while the bottom screen offers a top-down map and the ability to switch weapons. It is certainly a unique control method and while it makes aiming more controlled it can be a little

disorientating. Super Mario 64 DS is a faithful re-creation of the Nintendo 64 classic with a host of new mini-games and new levels. The game looks stunning on the portable machine and the sound too is impressive for such a small machine. One thing is for certain. Hardened gamers will have to learn to adapt to a new way of playing while it could prove to be an accessible way in to gaming for novices, Ultimately the success or failure of the device lies in the hands of developers. If they manage to create titles which use the Nintendo DS's key features then a whole new market of gamers could open up. The fear is that the touch screen and voice recognition are treated as little more than gimmicks.

tech 154.txt No half measures with Half-Life 2 Could Half-Life 2 possibly live up to the hype? After almost two years of tantalising previews and infuriating delays it's safe to say that this is the most highly-anticipated computer game of all time. Fortunately, it doesn't merely live up to its promise, but exceeds it. No-one who plays the finished product will wonder why it took so long. The impression is of a game that has been endlessly refined to get as close to perfection as could realistically be hoped. All the money - or indeed time - is on the screen. The player sees things through the eyes of Gordon Freeman, the bespectacled scientist who starred in the original 1998 Half-Life. Having survived that skirmish in an desolate monster-infested research facility, he's back in another foreboding troublespot - the enigmatic City 17. It has the look of a beautiful Eastern European city, but as soon as your train pulls in to the station, it's clear that all is not well here. Sinister police patrol the unkempt streets, and the oppressive atmosphere clobbers you like a sledgehammer. A casual smattering of the nightmarish creatures from the first game makes this an even less pleasant place to be. You are herded around like a prisoner and have to mingle with a few freedom-fighting civilians to gather information and progress in your task. It is not immediately explained what your objectives are, nor precisely why everything is so ravaged. Finding out step-by-step is all part of the experience, although you never fully get to understand what it was all about. That does not really matter. HL2 does not waste energy blinding you with plot. Underplaying the narrative in this way is gloriously effective, and immerses the player in the most vivid, convincing and impressive virtual world they are likely to have seen. There are no cut-scenes to interrupt the flow. Exposition is accomplished by other characters stopping to talk directly to you. Whereas the highly impressive Doom III felt like a top-notch theme park thrill-ride, wandering through Half-Life's world truly does feel like being part of a movie. Considering its sophistication, the game runs surprisingly well on computers that only just match the modest minimum specifications. But if ever there was an incentive to upgrade your PC's components, this is it. On our test machine - an Alienware system with an Athlon 3500+ processor and ATI's Radeon X800 video card - everything ran at full quality without trouble, and the visual experience was simply jaw-dropping. It is not simply that the surfaces, textures and light effects push the technical envelope without mercy, but that such care and artistic flair has gone into designing them. The haunting, grim landscapes become strangely beautiful. Luckily you get time to pause mid-task and marvel at the awesome graphical flourishes of your surroundings. So impressive are the physics that you'll find yourself hurling bits of rubbish around and prodding floating corpses just to marvel at the lifelike way they move. There are puzzles to be solved along the way, pitched at about the right difficulty, but most progress is achieved by force. Freeman is quickly reunited with the original game's famous crowbar, and an array of more sophisticated weapons soon follow. Virtually anything not nailed to the floor can be interacted with, and in realistic fashion. You will be wowed by the attention-to-detail as you chip bits of plaster off walls, chase a pigeon out of your way, or dodge exploding b

arrels as they ping around at deadly speed. At times Half-Life 2 feels like one of those annoying people who are unfeasibly brilliant at everything they turn their hand to, and in a curious way, its unrelenting goodness actually becomes almost tiresome. Running around on foot is great enough, but jumping into vehicles proves even more fun. Human foes are rendered just as well as alien ones. The stealth sections are as exhilarating as the open gun battles. In gameplay terms, HL2 somehow gets almost everything perfect. And without resorting to the zombies-leaping-out-of-shadows approach of Doom III, it's all incredibly unsettling. The vacant environment is distinctly eerie, and at one point I even caught myself hesitating to go down a murky tunnel for fear of what might be inside. The game does have a couple of problems. Firstly, the carefully-scripted way that you progress through each level might irk some people. A lot of things are meticulously choreographed to happen on cue, which makes for exciting moments, but may be an annoyance to some players and limit the appeal of playing again once you've completed it. If you like things open-ended and free-ranging, Far Cry will be a lot more pleasing. But the real downside is the hassle of getting the game to run. Installing it proved a life-draining siege that would test a saint's patience. Developer Valve has rashly assumed that everyone wanting to play the game will have an internet connection and it forces you to go online to authenticate your copy. The box does warn you of this anti-piracy measure, but does not say just how many components have to be downloaded. The time spent doing this will depend on your connection speed, the temperamental Valve servers and the time of day, but it can take hours. It would take a mighty piece of work to feel worthwhile after such annoyances - but luckily, Half-Life 2 is up to the challenge. It is surely the best thing in its genre, and possibly, many will feel, of any genre. The bar has been raised, and so far out of sight that you have to sympathise with any game that tries to do anything remotely similar in the near future. Half-Life 2 is out now for the PC

tech 155.txt Games win for Blu-ray DVD format The next-generation DVD format Blu-ray is winning more supporters than its rival, according to its backers. Blu-ray, backed by 100 firms including Sony, is competing against Toshiba and NEC-backed HD-DVD to be the format of choice for future films and games. The Blu-Ray Association said on Thursday that games giants Electronic Arts and Vivendi would both support its DVD format. The next generation of DVDs will hold high-definition video and sound. This offers incredible 3D-like quality of pictures which major Hollywood studios and games publishers are extremely keen to exploit in the coming year. In a separate press conference at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, Toshiba announced that DVD players for its technology would be on the market by the end of 2005. As we move from standard definition video images to high-definition images", we have a much greater need for storage," Richard Doherty, from Panasonic's Hollywood Laboratories, one of the pioneers of Blu-ray, told the BBC news website. So by utilising blue laser-based technology we can make an optical laser disc that can hold six times as much as today's DVD." A Blu-ray disc will be able to store 50GB of high-quality data", while Toshiba's HD-DVD will hold 30GB. Mr Doherty added that it was making sure the discs could satisfy all high-definition needs, including the ability to record onto the DVDs and smaller discs to fit into camcorders. Both Toshiba and Blu-ray are hopeful that the emerging DVD format war, akin to the Betamax and VHS fight in the 1980s, can be resolved over the next year when next-generation DVD players start to come out. When players do come out, they will be able to play standard DVDs too, which is good news for those who have huge libraries of current DVDs. But the support from Vivendi and Electronics Arts is a big boost to Blu-ray in the battle for supremacy. Gaming is a \$20 billion industry worldwide," so is as crucial as the film industry in terms of money to be

made. "The technical requirement for game development today demands more advanced optical-disc technologies," said Michael Heilmann, chief technology officer for Vivendi Universal. Blu-ray offers the capacity, performance and high-speed internet connectivity to take us into the future of gaming." EA, a leading games developer and publisher, added that the delivery of high-definition games of the future was vital and Blu-ray had the capacity, functionality and interactivity needed for the kinds of projects it was planning. Sony recently announced it would be using the technology in its next generation of PlayStations. Mr Doherty said gamers were "ravenous" for high-quality graphics and technology for the next generation of titles. "Gamers", especially those working on PCs, are always focused on more capacity to deliver textures, deeper levels, for delivering higher-resolution playback." He added: "The focus for games moving forward on increased immersion. "Gaming companies really like to focus on creating a world which involves creating complicated 3D models and textures and increasing the resolution", increasing the frame rate - all of these are part of getting a more immersive experience." Fitting these models on current DVD technologies means compressing the graphics so much that much of this quality is lost. As games move to more photo-real capability", the current technology is limiting. "They are thrilled at the advanced capacity to start to build these immersive environments", said Mr Doherty. Currently, graphics-intensive PC games also require multiple discs for installation. High-definition DVDs will cut down on that need. Likewise, consoles rely on single discs, so DVDs that can hold six times more data mean much better, high-resolution games. Blu-ray has already won backing from major Hollywood studios, such as MGM Studios, Disney, and Buena Vista, as well as top technology firms like Dell, LG, Samsung and Phillips amongst others. While Toshiba's HD-DVD technology has won backing from Paramount, Universal and Warner Bros. The real world benefits (of HD-DVD) are apparent and obvious", said Jim Cardwell, president of Warner Home Video. Mr Cardwell added that rapid time to market and dependability were significant factors in choosing to go with HD-DVD. Both formats are courting Microsoft to be the format of choice for the next generation Xbox, but discussions are still on-going. Next generation DVDs will also be able to store images and other data. CES is the largest consumer electronics show in the world, and runs from 6 to 9 January.

tech 156.txt File-swappers ready new network Legal attacks on websites that help people swap pirated films have forced the development of a system that could be harder to shut down. One site behind the success of the BitTorrent file-swapping system is producing its own software that avoids the pitfalls of the earlier program. A test version of the new Exeem program will be released in late January. But doubts remain about the new networks ability to ensure files being swapped are quality copies". In late December movie studios launched a legal campaign against websites that helped people swap pirated movies using the BitTorrent network. The legal campaign worked because of the way that BitTorrent is organised. That file-sharing system relies on links called "trackers" that point users to others happy to share the file they are looking for. Shutting down sites that listed trackers crippled the BitTorrent network. One of the sites shut down by the legal campaign was suprnova.org which helped boost the popularity of the BitTorrent system by checking that trackers led to the movies or TV programmes they claimed to. Now the man behind suprnova.org, who goes by the nickname Sloncek, is preparing to release software for a new file-swapping network dubbed Exeem. In an interview with Novastream web radio, Sloncek said Exeem would combine ideas from the BitTorrent and Kazaa file-sharing systems. Like BitTorrent, Exeem will have trackers that help point people toward the file they want. Like Kazaa these trackers will be held by everyone. There will be no centrally maintained list. This, said Sloncek, should make the

system less vulnerable to legal action aimed at stopping people swapping pirate movies and music. The Exeem software has been under development for a few months and is currently being tested by a closed group of users. An early public version of the software should be available before February. Sloncek said that currently only a Windows version of the software was in development. There were no plans for a Linux or Mac version. He said that costs of writing the software will be paid for by adverts appearing in the finished version of the program. Despite Suprnova administrator Sloncek's involvement with Exeem, the basic technology appears to have been developed by a firm called Swarm Systems that is based on Caribbean island Saint Kitts and Nevis. Users of the Exeem system will be able to rate files being swapped to help stop the spread of fake files, Sloncek told Novastream. Dr Johan Pouwelse, a researcher at the Delft University of Technology who studies peer-to-peer networks, said Exeem was the next evolution in file-sharing systems. But, he said, "it would struggle to be as popular as BitTorrent and Suprnova because early versions were not taking enough care to make sure good copies of files were being shared. ""Exeem cannot prevent pollution", he said. The rating system in Exeem seems flawed because it is easy to insert both fake files and fake ratings, he said. Studies have shown that organisations working for record labels and movie studios have worked to undermine Kazaa by putting in fakes. By contrast moderators on Suprnova made sure files being shared were high quality. The moderators are the difference between having a system that works and one that's full of crap like Kazaa, he said. There is a fundamental tension between distribution and integrity," he said. Mr Pouwelse said that future versions of file-sharing systems are likely to incorporate some kind of distributed reputation system that lets moderators prove who they are to the network and rate which files are worth downloading. When big files were being shared moderation systems were key, said Mr Pouwelse. He added that the legal attacks on BitTorrent had driven people away from sites such as Suprnova but many users had simply migrated to other tracker listing sites many of which have seen huge increases in traffic. It's hard to compete with free", he said. No-one from the Motion Picture Association of America was immediately available for comment on the file-sharing development.

tech 157.txt Online games play with politics After bubbling under for some time, online games broke through onto the political arena in 2004. The US presidential election provided a showcase for many, aimed at talking directly to a generation that has grown up with joysticks and gamepads. Experts say this reflects how video games are becoming a mainstream part of culture and society. The first official political campaign game was technically launched during the last week of 2003: the Iowa Game, commissioned by the Democrat hopeful Howard Dean. More than 20 followed suit, including Frontrunner, eLectrons, President Forever and The Political Machine, which allowed players to run an entire presidential campaign, including having to cope with the media. Others helped raise the stakes during the Bush/Kerry contest by highlighting a candidate's virtues or his vices. The phenomenon has astonished the forefathers of political games, a handful of multi-discipline games enthusiasts keen to push frontiers. When I started researching political games at the university", about five years ago, I thought it was going to be something that would take decades to happen," said Gonzalo Frasca, computer games specialist at the Information Technology University of Copenhagen. I must admit that I was the first person to be surprised at seeing how fast they have evolved", added the Uruguayan-born reseacher, who has so far created games for two political campaigns. Many artists and designers are experimenting with this form of gaming with an agenda in projects such as newsgaming.com. The aim is to comment on international news events via games. The ability of games to simulate reality makes them a powerful mode

lling tool to interact with actual situations in an original way. Video games generate strong reactions mainly because they are new", but also because our culture needs to learn how to deal with simulation," Mr Frasca told the BBC News website. This was the case with the one he created for a political party in Uruguay, Cambios, an online puzzle game that offered a view on how the country's problems could be solved by working together. It's up to us to explore what we can learn from ourselves through play and video games." "Ultimately", Dr Frasca sees games as a small laboratory where we can play with our hopes," fears and beliefs. " "Children learn a lot about the world through play. There is no reason why we adults should stop doing it as we grow up." " But experts estimate it will still take at least about a decade until this new breed of video gaming communication become a common tool for political campaigns. This is hardly surprising", compared to other forms of mass media like the worldwide web. Only a few years ago, most politicians did not have a webpage," while now it is almost a must-have. Dr Frasca said: " "Political campaigns will continue to experiment with video games. They represent a new tool of communication that can reach a younger audience in a language that can clearly speak to them." " "It will not replace other forms of political propaganda", " but it will integrate itself on to the media ecology of political campaigns."

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"tech 158.txt Broadband challenges TV viewing The number of Europeans with broadband has exploded over the past 12 months", with the web eating into TV viewing habits, research suggests. Just over 54 million people are hooked up to the net via broadband, up from 34 million a year ago, according to market analysts Nielsen/NetRatings. The total number of people online in Europe has broken the 100 million mark. The popularity of the net has meant that many are turning away from TV, say analysts Jupiter Research. It found that a quarter of web users said they spent less time watching TV in favour of the net. The report by Nielsen/NetRatings found that the number of people with fast internet access had risen by 60% over the past year. The biggest jump was in Italy, where it rose by 120%. Britain was close behind, with broadband users almost doubling in a year. The growth has been fuelled by lower prices and a wider choice of always-on," fast-net subscription plans. " "Twelve months ago high speed internet users made up just over one third of the audience in Europe; now they are more than 50% and we expect this number to keep growing", " said Gabrielle Prior, Nielsen/NetRatings analyst. As the number of high-speed surfers grows", websites will need to adapt," update and enhance their content to retain their visitors and encourage new ones." " The total number of Europeans online rose by 12% to 100 million over the past year", the report showed, with the biggest rise in France, Italy, Britain and Germany. The ability to browse web pages at high speed, download files such as music or films and play online games is changing what people do in their spare time. A study by analysts Jupiter Research suggested that broadband was challenging television viewing habits. In homes with broadband, 40% said they were spending less time watching TV. The threat to TV was greatest in countries where broadband was on the up, in particular the UK, France and Spain, said the report. It said TV companies faced a major long-term threat over the next five years," with broadband predicted to grow from 19% to 37% of households by 2009. " "Year-on-year we are continuing to see a seismic shift in where", when and how Europe's population consume media for information and entertainment and this has big implications for TV, newspaper and radio," said Jupiter Research analyst Olivier Beauvillian.

tech 159.txt Freeze on anti-spam campaign A campaign by Lycos Europe to target spam-related websites appears to have been put on hold.

Earlier this week the company released a screensaver that bombarded the sites with data to try to bump up the running costs of the websites. But the site hosting the screensaver now displays a pink graphic and the words Stay tuned"". No one at Lycos was available for comment on latest developments in its controversial anti-spam campaign. Lycos Europe's ""Make love not spam"" campaign was intended as a way for users to fight back against the mountain of junk mail flooding inboxes. People were encouraged to download the screensaver which", when their PC was idle, would then send lots of data to sites that peddle the goods and services mentioned in spam messages. Lycos said the idea was to get the spam sites running at 95% capacity and generate big bandwidth bills for the spammers behind the sites. But the plan has proved controversial. Monitoring firm Netcraft analysed response times for some of the sites targeted by the screensaver and found that a number were completely knocked offline. The downing of the sites could dent Lycos claims that what it is doing does not amount to a distributed denial of service attack. In such attacks thousands of computers bombard sites with data in an attempt to overwhelm them. Laws in many countries do not explicitly outlaw such attacks but many nations are re-drafting computer use laws to make them specific offences. Lycos Europe now appears to have put the plan on hold. The site hosting the screensaver currently shows a holding page, with the words," ""Stay tuned"". The numerical internet address of the site has also changed. This is likely to be in response to spammers who have reportedly redirected traffic from their sites back to the Lycos screensaver site. The campaign has come under fire from some corners of the web. Many discussion groups have said that it set a dangerous precedent and could incite vigilantism. ""Attacking a spammer's website is like poking a grizzly bear sleeping in your back garden with a pointy stick", said Graham Cluley, senior technology consultant for Sophos. Not only is this screensaver similar in its approach to a potentially illegal distributed denial of service attack", but it also is in danger of turning innocent computer users into vigilantes," who may not be prepared for whatever retaliation the spammers care to dream up.""

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"tech 160.txt Halo 2 sells five million copies Microsoft is celebrating bumper sales of its Xbox sci-fi shooter", Halo 2. The game has sold more than five million copies worldwide since it went on sale in mid-November, the company said. Halo 2 has proved popular online, with gamers notching up a record 28 million hours playing the game on Xbox Live. According to Microsoft, nine out of 10 Xbox Live members have played the game for an average of 91 minutes per session. The sequel to the best-selling Need for Speed: Underground has inched ahead of the competition to take the top slot in the official UK games charts. The racing game moved up one spot to first place, nudging GTA: San Andreas down to second place. Halo 2 dropped one place to five, while Half-Life 2 fell to number nine. Last week's new releases, GoldenEye: Rogue Agent and Killzone, both failed to make it into the top 10, debuting at number 11 and 12 respectively. Record numbers of Warcraft fans are settling in the games online world. On the opening day of the World of Warcraft massive multi-player online game more than 200,000 players signed up to play. On the evening of the first day more than 100,000 players were in the world, forcing Blizzard to add another 34 servers to cope with the influx. The online game turns the stand alone Warcraft games into a persistent world that players can inhabit not just visit Europe's gamers could be waiting until January to hear when they can get their mitts on Nintendo's handheld device, Nintendo DS, says gamesindustry.biz. David Yarnton, Nintendo UK general manager, told a press conference to look out for details in the New Year. Its US launch was on Sunday and it goes on sale in Japan on 2 Dec

ember. Nintendo has a 95% share of the handheld gaming market and said it expected to sell around five million of the DS by March 2005.

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"tech 161.txt When technology gets personal In 2020", whipping out your mobile phone to make a call will be quaintly passé. By then phones will be printed directly onto wrists, or other parts of the body, says Ian Pearson," BT's resident futurologist. It's all part of what's known as a ""pervasive ambient world""", where ""chips are everywhere"". Mr Pearson does not have a crystal ball. His job is to formulate ideas based on what science and technology are doing now", to guide industries into the future. Inanimate objects will start to interact with us: we will be surrounded - on streets, in homes, in appliances," on our bodies and possibly in our heads - by things that ""think"". Forget local area networks - these will be body area networks. Ideas about just how smart", small, or even invisible, technology will get are always floating around. Images of devices clumsily bolted on to heads or wrists have pervaded thinking about future technology. But now a new vision is surfacing, where smart fabrics and textiles will be exploited to enhance functionality, form, or aesthetics. Such materials are already starting to change how gadgets and electronics are used and designed. So MP3 players - the mass gadget of the moment - will disappear and instead become integrated into one's clothing," says Mr Pearson. ""So the gadgets that fill up your handbag", when we integrate those into fabric," we can actually get rid of all that stuff. You won't necessarily see the electronics." Wearable technology could exploit body heat to charge it up", while ""video tattoos""", or intelligent electronic contact lenses, might function as TV screens for those on the move. However, this future of highly personal devices, where technology is worn, or even fuses with the body itself, raises ethical questions. If technology is going to be increasingly part of clothing, jewellery, and skin, there needs to be some serious thinking about what it means for us as humans, says Baroness Susan Greenfield. At a recent conference for technology, engineering, academic and fashion industry experts, at the Royal Society in London," neuroscientist Baroness Greenfield cautioned we ""can't just sleepwalk into the future"". Yet this technology is already upon us. Researchers have developed computers and sensors worn in clothing. MP3 jackets", based on the idea that electrically conductive fabric can connect to keyboard sewn into sleeves," have already appeared in shops. These ""smart fabrics"" have come about through advances in nano- and micro-engineering - the ability to manipulate and exploit materials at micro or molecular scale. At the nanoscale," materials can be ""tuned"" to display unusual properties that can be exploited to build faster", lighter, stronger and more efficient devices and systems. The textile and clothing industry has been one of the first to exploit nanotechnology in quite straightforward ways. Many developments are appearing in real products in the fields of medicine, defence, healthcare, sports, and communications. Professional swimming suits reduce drag by incorporating tiny structures similar to shark skin. Nanoscale titanium dioxide (TiO<sub>2</sub>) coatings give fabrics antibacterial and anti-odour properties. These have special properties which can be activated in contact with the air or UV light. Such coatings have already been used to stop socks smelling for instance, to turn airline seats into super stain-resistant surfaces, and applied to windows so they clean themselves. Dressings for wounds can now incorporate nanoparticles with biocidal properties and smart patches are being developed to deliver drugs through the skin. But Baroness Greenfield is concerned about how far this more personal contact with technology might affect our very being. If our clothing, skin," and ""personal body networks"" do the talking and the monitoring", everywhere we go, we have to think a

bout what that means for our concept of privacy. Mr Pearson picks up the theme," pointing out there are a lot of issues humans have to iron out before we become ""cyborgian"". His main concern is ""privacy""." "We are looking at electronics which are really in deep contact with your body and a lot of that information you really don't want every passer-by to know. ""So we have to make sure we build security in this. If you are wearing smart make-up", where electronics are controlling the appearance," you don't want people hacking in and writing messages on your forehead." "As technology infiltrates our biology", how will our brains function differently? ""We cannot arrogantly assume that the human brain will not change with this", warns Baroness Greenfield. There have already been successful experiments to grow human nerve cells on circuit boards. This paves the way for brain implants to help paralysed people interface directly with computers. Clearly, the organic, carbon of our bodies and silicon is increasingly merging. The cyborg - a very familiar part-human, part-inorganic science fiction and academic idea - is on its way.

tech 162.txt Microsoft gets the blogging bug Software giant Microsoft is taking the plunge into the world of blogging. It is launching a test service to allow people to publish blogs, or online journals, called MSN Spaces. Microsoft is trailing behind competitors like Google and AOL, which already offer services which make it easy for people to set up web journals. Blogs, short for web logs, have become a popular way for people to talk about their lives and express opinions online. MSN Spaces is free to anyone with a Hotmail or MSN Messenger account. People will be able to choose a layout for the page, upload images and share photo albums and music playlists. The service will be supported by banner ads. This is a simple tool for people to express themselves", said MSN's Blake Irving. This is Microsoft's first foray into blogging, which has taken off as a web phenomenon in the past year. Competitors like Google already offer free services through its Blogger site, while AOL provides its members with journals. Accurate figures for the number of blogs in existence are hard to come by. According to blog analysis firm Technorati, the so-called blogosphere, has doubled every five and a half months for the last 18 months. It now estimates that the number of blogs in existence has exceeded 4.8 million, although some speculate that less than a quarter are regularly maintained.

tech 163.txt Doors open at biggest gadget fair Thousands of technology lovers and industry experts have gathered in Las Vegas for the annual Consumer Electronics Show (CES). The fair showcases the latest technologies and gadgets that will hit the shops in the next year. About 50,000 new products will be unveiled as the show unfolds. Microsoft chief Bill Gates is to make a pre-show keynote speech on Wednesday when he is expected to announce details of the next generation Xbox. The thrust of this year's show will be on technologies which put people in charge of multimedia content so they can store, listen to, and watch what they want on devices any time, anywhere. About 120,000 people are expected to attend the trade show which stretches over more than 1.5 million square feet. Highlights will include the latest trends in digital imaging, storage technologies, thinner flat screen and high-definition TVs, wireless and portable technologies, gaming, and broadband technologies. The show also includes several speeches from key technology companies such as Intel, Microsoft, and Hewlett Packard among others. The story this year remains all about digital and how that is completely transforming and revolutionising products and the way people interact with them", Jeff Joseph, from the Consumer Electronics Association (CEA) told the BBC News website. It is about personalisation - taking your MP3 player and creating your own playlist", taking your digital video recorder and watch what you want to watch when - you are no longer at the whim of the broadcasters." Consumer electronics and gadgets had a phenomenal year in 20

04", according to figures released by CES organisers, the CEA, on Tuesday. The gadget explosion signalled the strongest growth yet in the US in 2004. Shipments of consumer electronics rose by almost 11% between 2003 and 2004. That trend is predicted to continue, according to CEA analysts, with wholesale shipments of consumer technologies expected to grow by 11% again in 2005. The fastest-growing technologies in 2004 included blank DVD media, Liquid Crystal Display (LCD) TVs, digital video recorders (DVRs), "and portable music players. " "This year we will really begin to see that come to life in what we call place shifting - so if you have your PVR [personal video recorder] in your living room", "you can move that content around the house. " "Some exhibitors will be showcasing how you can take that content anywhere", "said Mr Joseph. He said the products which will be making waves in the next year will be about the democratisation" of content - devices and technologies that will give people the freedom to do more with music", video, and images. There will also be more focus on the design of technologies, following the lead that Apple's iPod made, with ease of use and good looks which appeal to a wider range of people a key concern. The CEA predicted that there would be several key technology trends to watch in the coming year. Gaming would continue to thrive, especially on mobile devices, and would reach out to more diverse gamers such as women. Games consoles sales have been declining, but the launch of next generation consoles, such as Microsoft's Xbox and PlayStation, could buoy up sales. Although it has been widely predicted that Mr Gates would be showcasing the new Xbox, some media reports have cast doubt on what he would be talking about in the keynote. Some have suggested the announcement may take place at the Games Developers Conference in the summer instead. With more than 52% of US homes expected to have home networks, the CEA suggested hard drive boxes - or media servers - capable of storing thousands of images, video and audio files to be accessed through other devices around the home, will be more commonplace. Portable devices that combine mobile telephony, digital music and video players, will also be more popular in 2005. Their popularity will be driven by more multimedia content and services which will let people watch and listen to films, TV, and audio wherever they are. This means more storage technologies will be in demand, such as external hard drives, and flash memory like SD cards. CES runs officially from 6 to 9 January.

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"tech 164.txt Who do you think you are? The real danger is not what happens to your data as it crosses the net", argues analyst Bill Thompson. It is what happens when it arrives at the other end. The Financial Services Authority has warned banks and other financial institutions that members of criminal gangs may be applying for jobs which give them access to confidential customer data. The fear is not that they will steal money from our bank accounts but that they will instead steal something far more valuable in our digital society - our identities. Armed with the personal details that a bank holds, plus a fake letter or two, it is apparently easy to get a loan, open a bank account with an overdraft or get a credit card in someone else's name. And it is then a simple matter to move the money into another account and leave the unwitting victim to sort out the mess when statements and demands for payment start arriving. Identity theft is an increasingly significant economic crime, and we are all becoming more aware of the dangers of leaving bills, receipts and bank statements unshredded in our rubbish. But, however careful you may be, if the organisations you trust with your personal data, bank accounts and credit cards are not able to look after their databases properly then you are in trouble. It is surprising that it has taken the gangs so long to realise that a well-placed insider is by far the simplest way to break the security of a computer system. In fact, I suspect that the FSA is probably very late to this particular party and

that this sort of thing has been going on for rather a long time. Has anyone checked Bob Cratchit's family links to the criminal underworld, I wonder? And it is hardly likely to be only banks that are being targeted. Health authorities, government agencies and of course the big e-commerce sites like Amazon must also offer rich pickings for the fraudsters. The good news is that better auditing is likely to catch out those who access account details that they are not supposed to. And as we all become aware of the danger of identity theft and look more carefully for unexpected transactions on our statements, banks should have good enough records and logs to trace the people who might have accessed the account details. Fortunately there are now ways to keep bank systems more secure from the sort of data theft that involves taking a portable hard drive or flash memory card into the office, plugging it into a USB slot and sucking down customer files. Companies like SecureWave, for example, can restrict the use of USB ports just to authorised devices or even to an individual's personal memory card. These solutions are not perfect, but it does not feel like a wave of fraud is about to wash away the entire financial system. However the warning does highlight one of the major issues with e-commerce and online trading - the security or otherwise of the servers and other systems that make up the 'back office'. It has been clear for years that the real danger in paying for goods online with a credit card is not that the number will be intercepted in transit but that the shop you are dealing with will be hacked. In fact I do not know of a single case where an e-mail containing payment details has led to card fraud. There are simply too many e-mails passing over the net for interception to be a sensible tool for anyone out to commit fraud. CD Universe, Powergen and many other companies have left their databases open and suffered the consequences. And just last week the online bank Cahoot admitted that its customer account details could be read by anyone who could guess a login name. Whether it is external hackers breaking in because of poor system security or internal staff abusing the access they get as part of their job, the issue is the same: how do we make sure that our personal data is not abused? Any organisation that processes personal data is, of course, bound by the Data Protection Act and must take proper care of it. Unauthorised disclosure is not allowed, but the penalties are small and the process of prosecuting under the Act so convoluted as to be worthless in practice. This is not something we can just leave it to the market. The consequences of having one's identity stolen are too serious, and markets respond too slowly. After all, I bank with Cahoot but it would be so much hassle to move my accounts that I did not even consider it when I heard about their security problems. I doubt many others have closed their accounts, especially when there is little guarantee that other banks are not going to make the same sort of mistake in future. The two options would seem to be more stringent data protection law, so that companies really feel the pressure to improve their internal processes, or a wave of civil lawsuits against financial institutions with sloppy practices whose customers suffer from identity theft. I have never felt comfortable with the US practice of suing everything that moves, partly because it seems to make lawyers richer than their clients, so I know which I'd prefer. Bill Thompson is a regular commentator on the BBC World Service programme Go Digital.

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"tech 165.txt 'Brainwave' cap controls computer A team of US researchers has shown that controlling devices with the brain is a step closer. Four people", two of them partly paralysed wheelchair users," successfully moved a computer cursor while wearing a cap with 64 electrodes. Previous research has shown that monkeys can control a computer with electrodes implanted into their brain. The New York team reported their findings in the Proceedings of the

e National Academy of Sciences. ""The results show that people can learn to use scalp-recorded electroencephalogram rhythms to control rapid and accurate movement of a cursor in two directions",," said Jonathan Wolpaw and Dennis McFarlane. The research team, from New York State Department of Health and State University of New York in Albany, said the research was another step towards people controlling wheelchairs or other electronic devices by thought. The four people faced a large video screen wearing a special cap which, meant no surgery or implantation was needed. Brain activity produces electrical signals that can be read by electrodes. Complex algorithms then translate those signals into instructions to direct the computer. Such brain activity does not require the use of any nerves of muscles, so people with stroke or spinal cord injuries could use the cap effectively. The impressive non-invasive multidimensional control achieved in the present study suggests that a non-invasive brain control interface could support clinically useful operation of a robotic arm",, a motorised wheelchair or a neuroprosthesis," said the researchers. The four volunteers also showed that they could get better at controlling the cursor the more times they tried. Although the two partially-paralysed people performed better overall, the researchers said this could be because their brains were more used to adapting or that they were simply more motivated. It is not the first time researchers have had this sort of success in brain-control experiments. Some teams have used eye motion and other recording techniques. Earlier this year, a team at the MIT Media Labs Europe demonstrated a wireless cap which read brain waves to control a computer character.

tech 166.txt 'Brainwave' cap controls computer A team of US researchers has shown that controlling devices with the brain is a step closer. Four people, two of them partly paralysed wheelchair users, successfully moved a computer cursor while wearing a cap with 64 electrodes. Previous research has shown that monkeys can control a computer with electrodes implanted into their brain. The New York team reported their findings in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. The results show that people can learn to use scalp-recorded electroencephalogram rhythms to control rapid and accurate movement of a cursor in two directions",," said Jonathan Wolpaw and Dennis McFarlane. The research team, from New York State Department of Health and State University of New York in Albany, said the research was another step towards people controlling wheelchairs or other electronic devices by thought. The four people faced a large video screen wearing a special cap which, meant no surgery or implantation was needed. Brain activity produces electrical signals that can be read by electrodes. Complex algorithms then translate those signals into instructions to direct the computer. Such brain activity does not require the use of any nerves of muscles, so people with stroke or spinal cord injuries could use the cap effectively. The impressive non-invasive multidimensional control achieved in the present study suggests that a non-invasive brain control interface could support clinically useful operation of a robotic arm",, a motorised wheelchair or a neuroprosthesis," said the researchers. The four volunteers also showed that they could get better at controlling the cursor the more times they tried. Although the two partially-paralysed people performed better overall, the researchers said this could be because their brains were more used to adapting or that they were simply more motivated. It is not the first time researchers have had this sort of success in brain-control experiments. Some teams have used eye motion and other recording techniques. Earlier this year, a team at the MIT Media Labs Europe demonstrated a wireless cap which read brain waves to control a computer character.

tech 167.txt Europe backs digital TV lifestyle How people receive their digital entertainment in the future could change, following the l

aunch of an ambitious European project. In Nice last week, the European Commission announced its Networked & Electronic Media (NEM) initiative. Its broad scope stretches from the way media is created, through each of the stages of its distribution, to its playback. The Commission wants people to be able to locate the content they desire and have it delivered seamlessly, when on the move, at home or at work, no matter who supplies the devices, network, content, or content protection scheme. More than 120 experts were in Nice to share the vision of interconnected future and hear pledges of support from companies such as Nokia, Intel, Philips, Alcatel, France Telecom, Thomson and Telefonica. It might initially appear to be surprising that companies in direct competition are keen to work together. But again and again, speakers stated they could not see incompatible, stand-alone solutions working. A long-term strategy for the evolution and convergence of technologies and services would be required. The European Commission is being pragmatic in its approach. They have identified that many groups have defined the forms of digital media in the areas that NEM encompasses. The NEM approach is to take a serious look at what is available and what is in the pipeline, pick out the best, bring them together and identify where the gaps are. Where it finds holes, it will develop standards to fill them. What is significant is that such a large and powerful organisation has stated its desire for digital formats to be open to all and work on any gadget. This is bound to please, if not surprise, many individuals and user organisations who feel that the wishes of the holder of rights to content are normally considered over and above those of the consumer. Many feel that the most difficult and challenging area for the Commission will be to identify a solution for different Digital Rights Management (DRM) schemes. Currently DRM solutions are incompatible, locking certain types of purchased content, making them unplayable on all platforms. With the potential of having a percentage of every media transaction that takes place globally, the prize for being the supplier of the world's dominant DRM scheme is huge. Although entertainment is an obvious first step, it will encompass the remote provisions of healthcare, energy efficiency and control of the smart home. The 10-year plan brings together the work of many currently running research projects that the EC has been funding for a number of years. Simon Perry is the editor of the Digital Lifestyles website, which covers the impact of technology on media

tech 168.txt A decade of good website design The web looks very different today than it did 10 years ago. Back in 1994, Yahoo had only just launched, most websites were text-based and Amazon, Google and eBay had yet to appear. But, says usability guru Dr Jakob Nielsen, some things have stayed constant in that decade, namely the principles of what makes a site easy to use. Dr Nielsen has looked back at a decade of work on usability and considered whether the 34 core guidelines drawn up back then are relevant to the web of today. Roughly 80% of the things we found 10 years ago are still an issue today", "he said. Some have gone away because users have changed and 10% have changed because technology has changed." "Some design crimes", such as splash screens that get between a user and the site they are trying to visit, and web designers indulging their artistic urges have almost disappeared," said Dr Nielsen. "But there's great stability on usability concerns", "he told the BBC News website. Dr Nielsen said the basic principles of usability, centring around ease of use and clear thinking about a site's total design, were as important as ever. It's necessary to be aware of these things as issues because they remain as such", he said. They are still important because the net has not changed as much as people thought it would. A lot of people thought that design and usability was only a temporary problem because broadband was taking off," he said. But there are a very small number of cases where usability issues go away because you h

ave broadband." Dr Nielsen said the success of sites such as Google", Amazon," eBay and Yahoo showed that close attention to design and user needs was important. "Those four sites are extremely profitable and extremely successful", said Dr Nielsen, adding that they have largely defined commercial success on the net. All are based on user empowerment and make it easy for people to do things on the internet", he said. They are making simple but powerful tools available to the user. "None of them have a fancy or glamorous look", he added, declaring himself surprised that these sites have not been more widely copied. In the future, Dr Nielsen believes that search engines will play an even bigger part in helping people get to grips with the huge amount of information online. They are becoming like the operating system to the internet", he said. But, he said, the fact that they are useful now does not mean that they could not do better. Currently, he said, search sites did not do a very good job of describing the information that they return in response to queries. Often people had to look at a website just to judge whether it was useful or not. Tools that watch the behaviour of people on websites to see what they actually find useful could also help refine results. Research by Dr Nielsen shows that people are getting more sophisticated in their use of search engines. The latest statistics on how many words people use on search engines shows that, on average, they use 2.2 terms. In 1994 only 1.3 words were used. I think it's amazing that we have seen a doubling in a 10-year period of those search terms", said Dr Nielsen. You can hear more from Jakob Nielsen and web design on the BBC World Service programme, Go Digital

tech 169.txt 2D Metal Slug offers retro fun Like some drill sergeant from the past, Metal Slug 3 is a wake-up call to today's gamers molly-coddled with slick visuals and fancy trimmings. With its hand-animated sprites and 2D side-scrolling, this was even considered retro when released in arcades four years ago. But a more frantic shooter you will not find at the end of your joypad this year. And yes, that includes Halo 2. Simply choose your grunt and wade through five 2D side-scrolling levels of the most hectic video game blasting you will ever encounter. It is also the toughest game you are likely to play, as hordes of enemies and few lives pile the pressure on. Players must battle soldiers, snowmen, zombies, giant crabs and aliens, not to mention the huge, screen-filling bosses that guard each of the five levels. The shoot-anything-that-moves gameplay is peppered with moments of old-school genius. Fans of robotic gastropods should note the title refers, instead, to the vast array of vehicles on offer in a game stuffed with bizarre hardware. Tanks, jets and submarines can be commandeered, as well as cannon-toting camels, elephants and ostriches - more weaponry on offer than in an acre of Iraq. Doling out justice is a joy thanks to ultra responsive controls, and while this is a tough nut to crack, it is addictive enough to have you gagging for that one last go. And at a mere £20, Metal Slug 3 is as cheap as sliced, fried spuds, as the man says. Of course, most of you will ignore this, lacking as it does the visual fireworks of modern blasters. But at a time when blockbuster titles offer only a fresh lick of paint in favour of real innovation, Metal Slug 3 is a fresh gasp of air from an era when the Xbox was not even a twinkle in Bill Gates' eye.

tech 170.txt Casual gaming to 'take off' Games aimed at casual players"" are set to be even bigger in 2005", according to industry experts. Easy-to-play titles that do not require too much time and that are playable online or downloadable to mobile devices will see real growth in the coming year. The trend shows that gaming is not just about big-hitting, games console titles," which appeal more to ""hardcore"" gamers", said a panel of experts. They were speaking before the annual Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas which showcases the latest trends in gadgets and technologies for 2005. The panel als

o insisted that casual gamers were not just women, a common misconception which pervades current thinking about gamer demographics. Casual games like poker, pool, bridge, bingo and puzzle-based titles, which can be played online or downloaded onto mobile devices," were ""gender neutral"" and different genres attracted different players. Greg Mills", program director at AOL, said its figures suggested that sports-based games attracted 90% of 18 to 24-year-old males, while puzzle games were played by 80% of females. Games like bridge tended to attract the over-50 demographic of gamers. But hardcore gamers who are more attracted to blockbuster gamers which usually require hi-spec PCs, like Half-Life 2, or Halo 2 on Xbox," also liked to have a different type of gaming experience. ""When hardcore gamers are not playing Halo", they are playing poker and pool, based on our research," said Geoff Graber, director of Yahoo Games, which attracts about 12 million gamers a month. With the growth of powerful PC technology and ownership, broadband take-up, portable players and mobile devices, as well as interactive TV, casual gaming is shaping up to be big business in 2005, according to the panel. The focus for the coming year should be about attracting third-party developers into the field to offer more innovative and multiplayer titles, they agreed. We are at a time where we are on the verge of something much bigger", said Mr Graber. Casual games will get into their stride in 2005," will be really big in 2006 and will be about community." With more people finding more to do with their gadgets and high-speed connections", casual games would start to open up the world of gaming as a form of mass-market entertainment to more people. Key to these types of titles is the chance they give people who may not see themselves as gamers to dip in and out of games when they liked. Portal sites which offer casual games, like AOL, Yahoo, and RealArcade, as well as other games-on-demand services," allow people to build up buddy lists so they can return and play against the same people. This aspect of ""community"" is crucial for gamers who just want to have quick access to free or cheap games without committing long periods of time immersed in £30 to £40 console or PC titles", said the panel. About 120,000 people are expected to attend the CES trade show which stretches over more than 1.5 million square feet and which officially runs from 6 to 9 January. The main theme is how new devices are getting better at talking to each other, allowing people to enjoy digital content, like audio, video and images, when they want, and where they want.

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"tech 171.txt 'Ultimate game' award for Doom 3 Sci-fi shooter Doom 3 has blasted away the competition at a major games ceremony", the Golden Joystick awards. It was the only title to win twice, winning Ultimate Game of the year and best PC game at the awards, presented by Little Britain star Matt Lucas. The much-anticipated sci-fi horror Doom 3 shot straight to the top of the UK games charts on its release in August. Other winners included Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas which took the Most Wanted for Christmas prize. Only released last week, it was closely followed by Halo 2 and Half-Life 2, which are expected to be big hits when they are unleashed later this month. But they missed out on the prize for the Most Wanted game of 2005, which went to the Nintendo title, The Legend of Zelda. The original Doom, released in 1994, heralded a new era in computer games and introduced 3D graphics. It helped to establish the concept of the first-person shooter. Doom 3 was developed over four years and is thought to have cost around \$15m (£8.3m). The top honour for the best online game of the year went to Battlefield Vietnam. The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay was handed the Unsung Hero Game of 2004. Its release was somewhat eclipsed by Doom 3, which was released on the same week. It was, however, very well received by gamers and was praised for its storyline which differed fr

om the film released around the same time. Electronic Arts was named top publisher of the year, taking the crown from Nintendo which won in 2003. The annual awards are voted for by more than 200,000 readers of computer and video games magazines. Games awards like this have grown in importance. Over the last six years, the UK market for games grew by 100% and was worth a record £1,152m in 2003, according to a recent report by analysts Screen Digest.

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"tech 172.txt Gadget show heralds MP3 Christmas Partners of those who love their hi-tech gear may want to get their presents in early as experts predict a gadget shortage this Christmas. With Apple's iPod topping wish lists again", there may not be enough iPod minis to go round, predicts Oliver Irish," editor of gadget magazine Stuff. ""The iPod mini is likely to be this year's Tracey Island"," said Mr Irish. Stuff has compiled a list of the top 10 gadgets for 2004 and the iPod is at number one. For anyone bewildered by the choice of gadgets on the market, Stuff and What Hi-Fi? are hosting a best-of gadget show in London this weekend. Star of the show will be Sony's Qrio Robot, an all-singing, all-dancing, football-playing man-machine who can even hold intelligent conversations. But he is not for sale and Sony has no commercial plans for the robot. He will greet visitors and is flying in from Japan. He probably has his own airplane seat", that is how highly Sony prize him," said Mr Irish. Also on display will be a virtual keyboard which projects itself onto any flat surface. The event will play host to a large collection of digital music players, from companies such as Creative, Sony and Philips as well as the ubiquitously fashionable iPod from Apple. Suggestions that it could be a gaming or wireless Christmas are unlikely to come true as MP3 players remain the most popular stocking filler, said Mr Irish. Demand is huge and Apple has promised that it can supply enough but people might struggle to get their hands on iPod minis", said Mr Irish. For those who like their gadgets to be multi-talented, the Gizmondo, a powerful gaming console with GPS and GPRS, that also doubles up as an MP3 player, movie player and camera, could be a must-have. What is impressive is how much it can do and how well it can do them", said Mr Irish. This Christmas, gadgets will not be an all-male preserve. Women will be getting gadgets from husbands and boyfriends as well as buying them for themselves", said Mr Irish. Gadgets nowadays are lifestyle products rather than just for geeks.""

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"tech 173.txt Supercomputer breaks speed record The US is poised to push Japan off the top of the supercomputing chart with IBM's prototype Blue Gene/L machine. It is being assembled for the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory", a US Department of Energy (DOE) lab. DOE test results show that Blue Gene/L has managed speeds of 70.72 teraflops. The current top machine, Japan's NEC Earth Simulator, clocks up 35.86. Due next week, the Top 500 list officially charts the fastest computers in the world. It is announced every six months and is worked out using an officially recognised mathematical speed test called Linpack which measures calculations per second. The speeds will most likely make it the fastest computer system on the planet, yet the chip technology powering the machine is the kind which can be found in familiar devices such as games consoles. The US Secretary of Energy Spencer Abraham confirmed that the machine had reached the breakneck speed, according to the Linpack benchmark. Until the official list is published, however, Blue Gene/L's position will not be confirmed, and there are expected to be some other new entries. But the test results raise the bar of supercomputing enormously and signal a remarkable achievement. Surpassing the 40 trillion calculations per second (teraflop) mark has b

een considered a landmark for some time. The IBM Blue Gene/L is only a prototype and is one fifth the speed of the full version, due to be completed for the Livermore labs in 2005. Its peak theoretical performance is expected to be 360 teraflops, and will fit into 64 full racks. It will also cut down on the amount of heat generated by the massive power, a big problem for supercomputers. The final machine will help scientists work out the safety, security and reliability requirements for the US's nuclear weapons stockpile, without the need for underground nuclear testing. The Earth Simulator has held on to the top spot since June 2002. It is dedicated to climate modelling and simulating seismic activity. But in September, IBM said that another Blue Gene/L machine clocked up 36.01 teraflops, marginally surpassing the Earth Simulator's performance. This was achieved during internal testing at IBM's production facility in Rochester, Minnesota, though, so was not an official record. Another giant to enter the fray is Silicon Graphics' Columbia supercomputer based at Nasa's Ames Research Center in California. It would be used to model flight missions, climate research, and aerospace engineering. The Linux-based machine was reported to have reached a top speed of 42.7 teraflops in October. Supercomputers are hugely important for working out very complex problems across science and society. Their massive simulation and processing power means they can improve the accuracy of weather forecasts, help design better cars, and improve disease diagnosis. IBM's senior vice president of technology and manufacturing, Nick Donofrio, believes that by 2006, Blue Gene will be capable of petaflop computing. This means it would be capable of doing 1,000 trillion operations a second. ""When you get a computer as large as a petaflop", you can start to think of simulations that might complement the physical world, Mr Donofrio recently told the BBC News website. You can start to be more proactive," more interactive and more innovative." One area where Mr Donofrio sees supercomputing - and Blue Gene machines in particular - as crucial is health. He believes the machines can help scientists understand one of the greatest challenges of the 21st Century: protein folding. ""Health is one of the most important problems", not just mapping the human genome," but also protein structures. ""We are a great believer in simulation. It gives you another tool", he said. Once the structures of proteins are understood fully, then drugs can be tailor-made to fight diseases more effectively. Compared with the current fastest supercomputers, Blue Gene is designed to consume one 15th the power and be 10 times more compact. Since the first supercomputer, the Cray-1, was installed at Los Alamos National Laboratory in 1976, computational speed has leaped 500,000 times. The Cray-1 was capable of 80 megaflops (80 million operations a second). The Blue Gene/L machine that will be completed next year will be five million times faster. Started in 1993, the Top 500 list is decided by a group of computer science academics from around the world. It is presented at the International Supercomputer Conference in Pittsburgh.

tech 174.txt Gadgets galore on show at fair The 2005 Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas is a geek's paradise with more than 50,000 new gadgets and technologies launched during the four-day event. Top gadgets at the show are highlighted in the Innovations Showcase, which recognises some of the hottest developments in consumer electronics. The BBC News website took an early pre-show look at some of those technologies that will be making their debut in 2005. One of the key issues for keen gadget users is how to store all their digital images, audio and video files. The 2.5GB and 5GB circular pocket hard drive from Seagate might help. The external USB drive won a CES best innovations design and engineering award and is small enough to slip into a pocket. It is the kind of storage that appeals to people who want their PCs to look cool", said Seagate. It is all about style but it also has lots of functionality." "It is the first time you can say a hard drive is sexy", it said. In th

e centre of the device is a blue light that flashes while data is being written to ensure users do not unplug it when it is busy saving those precious pictures.

Universal Electronics' NevoSL is a universal controller that lets people use one device to get at their multimedia content, such as photos, no matter where it is in their house. It can also act as a remote for home theatre and stereo systems. Working with home broadband networks and PCs, the gadget has built-in wireless and a colourful, simple interface. Paul Arling, UEI chief, said consumers face real problems when trying to get at all the files they own that are typically spread across several different devices. He said the Nevo gave people a simple, single way to regain some control over digital media in the home. The Nevo won two awards at CES, one as a Girl's Best Friend award and another for innovation, design and engineering. The gadget is expected to go on sale before the summer and will cost about \$799 (£425).

Hotseat is targeting keen gamers with money to spend with its Solo Chassis gaming chair. The specially-designed chair lets gamers play in surround-sound while stretching out in their own space". It is compatible with all the major games consoles", "DVD players and PCs. "We found that kids love playing in surround sound", said Jay LeBoff from Hotseat. We are looking at offering different types of seats," depending on the market success of this one." The chair also lets people experience surround sound while watching videos", with wireless control for six surround sound speakers. And a drinks holder. The chair, which looks like a car seat on a skeletal frame, should go on sale in April and is expected to cost \$399 (£211).

Satellite radio is big business in the US. In the UK, the digital radio technology is known as DAB and works on slightly different technology. Eton Corporation's Porsche designed P7131 digital radio set will be launched both as a DAB radio in the UK as well as a satellite radio set in the US. DAB sets have been slow to take-off in the UK," but this one concentrates on sleek looks as much as technology. "It is for the risqué consumer", "said an Eton spokesperson. We are proud of it because it has the sound quality for the audiophile and the looks for the design-conscious consumer." The Porsche radio is set to go on sale at the end of January in the US and in the first quarter of 2005 in the UK. In the US is it expected to cost \$250 (£133).

The average person has a library of 600 digital images estimates the Consumer Electronics Association", the organisation behind CES. This is expected to grow to a massive 3,420 images - or 7.2GB - in five years' time. One gadget that might help swell that collection is Sanyo's tiny handheld VPC-C4 camcorder which is another innovation in design and engineering award winner. It combines high quality video and stills in a very small device. It takes MPEG4 video quality at 30 frames a second and has a four megapixel still camera. Images and video are stored on SD cards, which have come down in price in recent months. A 512MB card will store about 30 minutes of video and 420 stills. The device is so tiny it can be controlled with one thumb. Because images and video are stored on SD memory, it is portable to other devices and means other data like audio can be stored on the card too.

Wearable technology has always promised much but failed to deliver because of lack of storage capability and poor design. MPIO's tiny digital USB music players come in an array of fashionable colours, taking a leaf out of the Apple iPod mini book of design and reflecting the desire for gadgets that look good. Slung on a cord, the player would not look too geeky dangling discreetly from the neck. Although the pendant design was launched three months ago, the device emphasises large storage as well as good looks for fashion-conscious gadget fiends. An even dinkier model, the FY500, comes out in May and will store about 256MB of music. The range of players recently won an International Forum design award 2005.

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"tech 175.txt Broadband in the UK growing fast High-speed net connections in the UK are proving more popular than ever. BT reports that more people signed up for broadband in the last three months than in any other quarter. The 600",000 connections take the total number of people in the UK signing up for broadband from BT to almost 3.3 million. Nationally more than 5 million browse the net via broadband. Britain now has among the highest number of broadband connections throughout the whole of Europe. According to figures gathered by industry watchdog, Ofcom, the growth means that the UK has now surpassed Germany in terms of broadband users per 100 people. The UK total of 5.3 million translates into 7.5 connections per 100 people, compared to 6.7 in Germany and 15.8 in the Netherlands. The numbers of people signing up to broadband include those that get their service direct from BT or via the many companies that re-sell BT lines under their own name. Part of the surge in people signing up was due to BT stretching the reach of ADSL - the UK's most widely used way of getting broadband - beyond 6km. Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line technology lets ordinary copper phone lines support high data speeds. The standard speed is 512kbps," though faster connections are available. ""This breakthrough led to a dramatic increase in orders as we were suddenly able to satisfy the pent-up demand that existed in many areas"," said Paul Reynolds, chief executive of BT Wholesale which provides phone lines that other firms re-sell. BT Retail, which sells net services under its own name, also had a good quarter and provided about 30% of the new broadband customers. This was a slight increase on the previous three months. Despite the good news about growth in broadband, figures from telecommunications regulator Ofcom show that BT faces increasing competition, and dwindling influence, in other sectors. Local Loop Unbundling, (LLU), in which BT rivals install their hardware in exchanges and take over the line to a customer's home or office, is growing steadily. Cable & Wireless and NTL have announced that they are investing millions to start offering LLU services. By the end of September more than 4.2 million phone lines were using so-called Carrier Pre-Section (CPS) services, such as TalkTalk and One.Tel, which route phone calls across non-BT networks from a local exchange. There are now more than 300 different firms offering CPS services and the percentage of people using BT lines for voice calls has shrunk to 55.4%.

tech 176.txt US duo in first spam conviction A brother and sister in the US have been convicted of sending hundreds of thousands of unsolicited e-mail messages to AOL subscribers. It is the first criminal prosecution of internet spam distributors. Jurors in Virginia recommended that the man, Jeremy Jaynes, serve nine years in prison and that his sister, Jessica DeGroot, be fined \$7,500. They were convicted under a state law that bars the sending of bulk e-mails using fake addresses. They will be formally sentenced next year. A third defendant, Richard Rutkowski, was acquitted. Prosecutors said Jaynes was a snake oil salesman in a new format "", using the internet to peddle useless wares," news agency Associated Press reported. A ""Fed-Ex refund processor"" was supposed to allow people to earn \$75 an hour working from home. Another item on sale was an ""internet history eraser"". His sister helped him process credit card payments. Jaynes amassed a fortune of \$24m from his sales," prosecutors said. ""He's been successful ripping people off all these years," AP quoted prosecutor Russell McGuire as saying. Jaynes was also found guilty of breaking a state law which prohibits the sending of more than 100,000 e-mails in 30 days, Virginia State Attorney General Jerry Kilgore reportedly said. Prosecutors had asked for 15 years in jail for Jaynes, and a jail term for his sister. But Jaynes' lawyer David Oblon called the nine-year recommended term outrageous" and said his client believed he was innocent. He pointed out that all three of the accused lived in North Carolina and were unaware of the Virginia state law. Spam

messages are estimated to account for at least 60% of all e-mails sent.

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"tech 177.txt Microsoft debuts security tools Microsoft is releasing tools that clean up PCs harbouring viruses and spyware. The virus-fighting program will be updated monthly and is a precursor to Microsoft releasing dedicated anti-virus software. Also being released is a software utility that will help users find and remove any spyware on their home computer. Although initially free it is thought that soon Microsoft will be charging users for the anti-spyware tool. The anti-spyware tool is available now and the anti-virus utility is expected to be available later this month. Microsoft's Windows operating system has long been a favourite of people who write computer viruses because it is so ubiquitous and has many loopholes that can be exploited. It has proved such a tempting target that there are now thought to be more than 100",000 viruses and other malicious programs in existence. Latest research suggests that new variants of viruses are being cranked out at a rate of up to 200 per week. Spyware is surreptitious software that sneaks on to home computers, often without users' knowledge. In its most benign form it just bombards users with pop-up adverts or hijacks web browser settings. The most malicious forms steal confidential information or log every keystroke that users make. Surveys have shown that most PCs are infested with spyware. Research by technology firms Earthlink and Webroot revealed that 90% of Windows machine have the malicious software on board and, on average, each one harbours 28 separate spyware programs. Before now Microsoft has left the market for PC security software to specialist firms such as Symantec, McAfee, Trend Micro and many others. It said that its virus cleaning program would not stop machines being infected nor remove the need for other anti-virus programs. On spyware freely available programs such as Ad-Aware and Spybot have become widely used by people keen to keep the latest variants at bay. Microsoft's two security tools have emerged as a result of acquisitions the company has made over the last two years. In 2003 it bought Romanian firm GeCAD Software to get hold of its anti-virus technology. In December 2004 it bought New York-based anti-spyware firm Giant Company Software. Last year Microsoft also released the SP2 upgrade for Windows XP that closed many security loopholes in the software and made it easier for people to manage their anti-virus and firewall programs.

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"tech 178.txt Slimmer PlayStation triple sales Sony PlayStation 2's slimmer shape has proved popular with UK gamers", with 50,000 sold in its first week on sale. Sales have tripled since launch, outstripping Microsoft's Xbox, said market analysts Chart-Track. The numbers were also boosted by the release of the PS2-only game Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas. The title broke the UK sales record for video games in its first weekend of release. Latest figures suggest it has sold more than 677,"000 copies. ""It is obviously very", very encouraging for Sony because Microsoft briefly outsold them last week," John Houlahan, editor of Computerandvideogames.com told BBC News. And with Halo 2 [for Xbox] out next week", "it really is a head-to-head contest between them and Xbox." "Although Xbox sales over the last week also climbed", PS2 sales were more than double that. The figures mean Sony is reaching the seven million barrier for UK sales of the console. Edinburgh-based developer, Rockstar, which is behind the GTA titles, has seen San Andreas pull in an estimated £24m in gross revenues over the weekend. In comparison, blockbuster films like Harry Potter and The Prisoner Of Azkaban took £11.5m in its first three days at the UK box office. The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King took nearly £10m over its o

pening weekend, although games titles are four to five times more expensive than cinema tickets. Gangster-themed GTA San Andreas is the sequel to Grand Theft Auto Vice City which previously held the record for the fastest-selling video game ever. The Xbox game Halo 2, released on 11 November in the UK, is also widely tipped to be one of the best-selling games of the year. The original title won universal acclaim in 2001, and sold more than four million copies. Mr Houlihan added that Sony had done well with the PS2, but it definitely helped that the release of San Andreas coincided with the slimline PS2 hitting the shelves. The run-up to Christmas is a huge battlefield for games consoles and titles. Microsoft's Xbox had been winning the race up until last week in sales. The sales figures also suggest that it may be a largely adult audience driving demand, "since GTA San Andreas has an 18 certificate. Sony and Microsoft have both reduced console prices recently and are preparing the way for the launches of their next generation consoles in 2005. ""Both have hit crucial price points at around £100 and that really does open up new consoles to new audience", plus the release of two really important games in terms of development are also driving those sales," said Mr Houlihan.

tech 179.txt Seamen sail into biometric future The luxury cruise liner Crystal Harmony, currently in the Gulf of Mexico, is the unlikely setting for tests of biometric technology. As holidaymakers enjoy balmy breezes, their ship's crew is testing prototype versions of the world's first internationally issued biometric ID cards, the seafarer's equivalent of a passport. Along with the owner's picture, name and personal details, the new Seafarers' Identity Document incorporates a barcode representing unique features of its holder's fingerprints. The cards are due to be issued in February next year, in line with the revised UN Convention on Seafarers' Identity Documents of June 2003. Tests currently under way in the Caribbean are designed to ensure that new cards and their machine readers, produced by different companies in different countries, are working to interoperable standards. Results of the current tests, which involve seafarers from a wide range of occupations and nationalities, will be published by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) by the end of November. Crystal Cruises, which operates the Crystal Harmony, is exploring the use of biometrics but has not yet committed to the technology. Authenti-corp, the US technology consultancy, has been working with the ILO on its technical specifications for the cards. If you're issued a seafarer's ID in your country", you want to be sure that when the ship lands in a port in, say, my country you can validate yourself using whatever equipment we have installed," Authenti-corp's CEO, Cynthia Musselman, told the BBC's Go Digital programme. She said French, Jordanian and Nigerian nationals would be the first seafarers to get the new ID cards since their countries have already ratified the convention. It aims to combat international terrorism whilst guaranteeing the welfare the one million seafarers estimated to be at sea. The convention highlights the importance of access to shore facilities and shore leave as vital elements to a sailor's wellbeing and, therefore, it says, to safer shipping and cleaner oceans. By increasing security on the seas as well as border control and protection", the cards will hopefully reduce the number of piracy problems around the world, said Ms Musselman. It should be a safer environment for seafarers to work in, and will allow people protecting their borders to have confidence that the people getting off the ship are, in fact," seafarers."

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"tech 180.txt US blogger fired by her airline A US airline attendant suspended over ""inappropriate images"" on her blog - web diary - says she has been fired. Ellen Simonetti", known as Queen of the Sky, wrote an

anonymous semi-fictional account of her life in the sky. She was suspended by Delta in September. In a statement," she said she was initiating legal action against the airline for ""wrongful termination"". A Delta spokesperson confirmed on Wednesday that Ms Simonetti was no longer an employee. Delta has repeatedly declined to elaborate on what it calls ""internal employee matters"". A spokesperson reiterated this position on Wednesday", confirming only that Ms Simonetti was no longer with the company. The spokesperson also confirmed that there were ""very clear rules"" attached to the unauthorised use of Delta branding", including uniforms. Ms Simonetti announced on her blog she had been fired on 1 November. She said in an official statement: ""As a result of my suspension and subsequent termination without cause by Delta Airlines I am moving forward with filing a discrimination complaint with the Federal Government EEOC [US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission]."" She added she had also hired a Texas-based law firm to initiate legal action for ""wrongful termination", defamation of character and lost future wages."" Ms Simonetti told the BBC News website she had received no warning or further explanation when she was suspended on 25 September. Queen of the Sky has received a lot of support and advice from the global blogging community since news of her suspension was brought to light on the BBC News website and others. Her story has highlighted concerns amongst the growing blogging community about conflicts of interest", employment law and free speech on personal websites. The blog, which she started in January as a way of getting over her mother's death, contains a mix of fictional and non-fictional accounts. Queen of the Sky developed over the months as a character in her own right, according to Ms Simonetti. In the postings," she made up fictional names for cities and other companies she mentioned to protect anonymity. But some postings contained images of herself in uniform. Of the 10 or so images only one showed Ms Simonetti's flight ""wings"". She removed them as soon as she was informed of her suspension. ""I never meant it as something to harm my company and don't understand how they think it did harm them", Ms Simonetti said. A legal expert in the US speculated that Delta might be concerned that the fictional content on the blog may be linked back to the airline after the images were posted. Delta has been hit recently by pressures of rising fuel costs and fierce competition. It has said it needs to cut between 6,000 and 7,000 jobs and reduce costs by \$5bn (£2.7bn) a year. Analysts had warned recently that the airline might have to seek Chapter 11 bankruptcy prevention. Last week, it struck a \$1bn cost-cutting deal with its pilots which could save it from bankruptcy. The deal would see pilots accept a 32% pay cut in return for the right to buy 30 million Delta shares, unions said. And on Monday, it negotiated a deal to defer about \$1.35m in debt which was due next year, until 2007. The airline also said it had agreed the terms of a \$600m loan from American Express.

tech 181.txt Mobiles double up as bus tickets Mobiles could soon double up as travel cards, with Nokia planning to try out a wireless ticket system on German buses. Early next year travellers in the city of Hanau, near Frankfurt, will be able to pay for tickets by passing their phone over a smart-card reader already installed on the buses. Passengers will need to own a Nokia 3220 handset which will have a special shell attached to it. The system would reduce queues and make travelling easier, said Nokia. Transport systems around the world are seeing the advantage of using ticketless smartcards. Using a mobile phone is the next step, said Gerhard Romen, head of market development at Nokia. The ticketless trial will start early in 2005 and people will also be able to access transport information and timetables via their phones. Nokia has worked with electronics giant Philips to develop a shell for the mobile phone that will be compatible with Hanau's existing ticketing system. The system opens up possibilities for mobile devices to interact with everyday environments

ts, said Mr Romen. It could be used in shops to get product information", at bus-stops to get information about the next bus or, for example, by being passed over an advert of a rock star to find out details of concerts or get ringtones, he told the BBC News website. He is confident that the trial being run in Germany could be extended to transport systems in other countries. The technology offers access to a lot of services and makes it easy to get the information you want," he said.

tech 182.txt Mobile gig aims to rock 3G Forget about going to a crowded bar to enjoy a gig by the latest darlings of the music press. Now you could also be at a live gig on your mobile, via the latest third generation (3G) video phones. Rock outfit Rooster are playing what has been billed as the first ever concert broadcast by phone on Tuesday evening from a London venue. The 45-minute gig is due to be "phone cast" by the 3G mobile phone operator", 3. 3G technology lets people take, watch and send video clips on their phones, as well as swap data much faster than with 2G networks like GSM. People with 3G phones in the UK can already download football and music clips on their handsets. Some 1,000 fans of the London-based band will have to pay five pounds for a ticket and need a 3G handset. ""Once you have paid", you can come and go as much as you like, because we expect the customers to be mobile, said 3 spokesman Belinda Henderson. It's like going to a concert hall," except that you are virtually there." The company behind the trial hopes to learn more about how people use their video phones. ""We are looking on how long people will stay on average on the streams. Some people may stay the whole time", some may dip in and out," said Ms Henderson. We actually expect people to dip in and out because they are mobile and they will be doing other things." 3 is looking to music as a way of persuading more people to take up the latest video phones. It is already planning regular gigs throughout 2005. And during the intermission", of course, you would still be able to make a phone call.

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tech 183.txt Consumers 'snub portable video' Consumers want music rather than movies while on the move", says a report. Produced by Jupiter Research the analysis of the portable media player market found only 13% of Europeans want to watch video while out and about. By contrast, almost a third are interested in listening to music on a portable player such as an iPod. The firm said gadget makers should avoid hybrid devices and instead make sure music reproduction was as good as possible. The report concluded that the driving force behind the growth of Europe's portable player market was likely to be music," rather than films or any combination of the two. Barely 5% of those questioned said they wanted a player that could play back both music and movies. Only 7% wanted a player that could handle games and video. ""Dedicated music players are the only established digital media players in Europe today despite their high prices", said Ian Fogg, Jupiter analyst. Mr Fogg said although video players and smartphones were trying to cash in on this success they faced a tough job because of the compromises that had to be made when creating a dual-purpose device. Europeans care most about music playback", he said. The report showed that 27% of consumers asked are interested in portable music players. The research revealed that French, 39%, and British, 31%, consumers were most interested in music players. Mr Fogg said portable video players were likely to remain a niche product that would not be able to compete with devices dedicated to music playback. A separate report by Jupiter forecasts that the European digital music market will grow to 836m euros (£581m) by 2009. At the end of 2003, the market was worth 10.6m euros (£7.36m). Digital music players will be behind this market growth said Jupiter . Apple's iPod was launched in October 2001, but the

portable music player market has been growing steadily since the launch of the Creative Nomad Jukebox in mid-2000. Now consumers face an almost overwhelming choice of high-capacity portable music players that let them store every track on every CD that they own.

tech 184.txt Learning to love broadband We are reaching the point where broadband is a central part of daily life, at least for some, argues technology analyst Bill Thompson. One of the nice things about being a writer is that I rarely have to go to an office to work. I can sit in a cafe or a library, with or without a wi-fi connection, and research and write articles. If I am passing through Kings Cross station on my way to a meeting then I can log on from the platform. And I can spend the day working with my girlfriend Anne, a children's writer, at her house in Cambridge, sharing her wireless network. But just over a week ago I arrived at her house to find that there was no network connection. We checked the cable modem and noticed that it had no power, and when she changed the power lead it sparked at her in a way which made it abundantly clear that it was never going to talk to the internet again. She called her service provider, and they told her it would be five days before an engineer would show up with a new cable modem. This did not seem too bad, but in fact she really suffered until her connection was restored on Wednesday. With no modem installed in her computer, she had to borrow internet access from friends or use the dial-up connection on her daughter's laptop, so she had to choose between copying her files onto her USB memory card or accepting a slower and flakier net connection. As a result she did not submit the pictures she wanted to use for a book on earthquakes because they were too big to send over dial-up. She could not research other material because she is used to having easy access to a fast link that lets her search quickly and effectively. But the impact spread into her personal life too. She did not take her children to the cinema during half-term because she could not find out which films were showing at the local cinemas. She planned a trip to Norfolk but did not check the weather because the only place she knows to look for weather information is the BBC website. And she did not know where to go fossil-hunting on the trip because she could not type "fossils Norfolk" into Google. Of course, she readily admits, she could have answered these questions if she had looked in the local paper, listened to the radio or found a book on fossils. But she did not, because having fast, always on, and easy access to the net has become part of the routine of her daily life, and when it was taken away it was too much effort to go back to the old ways of doing things. She may be unusual, but I do not think Anne is alone. According to Ofcom there were almost four million broadband users in the UK in April 2004, and numbers are climbing fast. There will certainly be five million by the end of the year. Dial-up users are switching to broadband. My dad finally made the change earlier this month and new net users are selecting broadband from the start. More and more of these broadband users are beginning to mould their daily lives around the availability of broadband internet connections, and they too will find it difficult to cope if they cannot get online for any reason. It is part of the process of adaptation, and it is a vital step in the growth of broadband in the UK and elsewhere. People who have integrated net access into their daily lives tell their friends about it, and show off the cool stuff they can do. They encourage other people to get broadband so that they can share digital photos and do all of the other things that need fast and reliable connectivity. Of course, broadband in the UK is laughably slow compared to other parts of the world. In South Korea, Japan and Hong Kong normal connection speeds are measured in megabits, or millions of bits, a second rather than the thousands that we are supposed to be happy with. But speed is only a small part of the attraction of broadband, and when it comes to checking websites for film times,

looking at weather forecasts, or all of the other small things that make a real difference to the routines and habits of our daily lives, even UK speeds are sufficient. It may not be the brave new world of streaming full-screen video and superfast file downloads, but it will do for now. And it is certainly better than slow access or no access. Just ask Anne. Bill Thompson is a regular commentator on the BBC World Service programme Go Digital.

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"tech 185.txt Nintendo DS aims to touch gamers The mobile gaming industry is set to explode in 2005 with a number of high-profile devices offering a range of gaming and other features such as movie and music playback. Market leader Nintendo", however, is releasing a handheld console that it says will revolutionise the way games are played. The first striking thing about the DS is how retro it looks. Far from looking like a mould-breaking handheld, it looks more like Nintendo dug out a mould from a 1980s handheld prototype. The lightweight clam shell device opens up to reveal two screens, and when switched on it instantly reveals its pedigree. Both screens are crisp and clear while the bottom of the two is touch sensitive. Nintendo has given developers free rein to utilise the dual screens and ability to control the action by simply touching the screen. The Japanese gaming giant hopes the DS will maintain the firm's pre-eminence in an increasingly-competitive mobile gaming market. Nintendo first launched its GameBoy console in 1989 and has dominated the market ever since. But its lead can no longer be taken for granted. Sony will enter the market later this year with its PlayStation Portable," while start-up companies Gizmondo and Tapwave Zodiac are also offering hybrid devices. ""We believe the DS will appeal to all ages", both genders and gamers of any skill," said David Yarnton, Nintendo Europe's general manager said at the recent press launch for the handheld. With its two screens, wireless connectivity and backwards compatibility with the GameBoy Advance, the DS certainly has a number of unique selling points. It went on sale in the US in mid-November priced \$150 and Nintendo says sales have exceeded expectations, without giving detailed figures. Japan and Europe will have to wait until the first quarter of 2005 to get the device. With more than two million pre-orders for the device in Japan, Nintendo is confident it will keep its number one spot. But will the device prove to be as revolutionary as claimed? The game ships with a demo of Metroid Hunters - a 3D action title which can be played alone or with a group of friends using the machine's wireless capabilities. It certainly looks impressive on the small machine and plays smoothly even with a group of people. The game can be controlled by using the supplied stylus to aim. The top screen is used to navigate the action while the bottom screen offers a top-down map and the ability to switch weapons. It is certainly a unique control method and while it makes aiming more controlled it can be a little disorientating. Super Mario 64 DS is a faithful re-creation of the Nintendo 64 classic with a host of new mini-games and new levels. The game looks stunning on the portable machine and the sound too is impressive for such a small machine. One thing is for certain. Hardened gamers will have to learn to adapt to a new way of playing while it could prove to be an accessible way into gaming for novices, Ultimately the success or failure of the device lies in the hands of developers. If they manage to create titles which use the Nintendo DS's key features then a whole new market of gamers could open up. The fear is that the touch screen and voice recognition are treated as little more than gimmicks.

tech 186.txt China 'blocks Google news site' China has been accused of blocking access to Google News by the media watchdog, Reporters Without Borders. The Paris-based pressure group said the English-language news

site had been unavailable for the past 10 days. It said the aim was to force people to use a Chinese edition of the site which, according to the watchdog, does not include critical reports. Google told the BBC News website it was aware of the problems and was investigating the causes. China is believed to extend greater censorship over the net than any other country in the world. A net police force monitors websites and e-mails, and controls on gateways connecting the country to the global internet are designed to prevent access to critical information. Popular Chinese portals such as Sina.com and Sohu.com maintain a close eye on content and delete politically sensitive comments. And all 110,000 net cafes in the country have to use software to control access to websites considered harmful or subversive. China is censoring Google News to force internet users to use the Chinese version of the site which has been purged of the most critical news reports", said the group in a statement. By agreeing to launch a new service that excludes publications disliked by the government, Google has let itself be used by Beijing," it said. For its part, the search giant said it was looking into the issue. It appears that many users in China are having difficulty accessing Google News sites in China and we are working to understand and resolve the issue", said a Google spokesperson. Google News gathers information from some 4,500 news sources. Headlines are selected for display entirely by a computer algorithm, with no human editorial intervention. It offers 15 editions of the service, including one tailored for China and one for Hong Kong. Google launched a version in simplified Chinese in September. The site does not filter news results to remove politically sensitive information. But Google does not link to news sources which are inaccessible from within China as this would result in broken links.

tech 187.txt A question of trust and technology A major government department is without e-mail for a week, and technology analyst Bill Thompson wants to know what happened. A couple of weeks ago I wrote about how my girlfriend had suffered when her cable modem blew up and she was offline for several days. It seems that thousands of civil servants at the UK's Department of Work and Pensions went through the same thing last week. It has emerged that the internal network crashed in a particularly horrible way, depriving staff of e-mail and access to the application software they use to calculate people's benefit and pension entitlement or note changes in personal circumstances. Senior consultants from EDS, the computer firm which manage the system, and Microsoft, which supplied the software, were running around trying to figure out what had to be done to fix it all, while staff resorted to phone, fax and probably carrier pigeon to get work done. Fortunately the back-office systems which actually pay people their money were still working, so only new claims and updates were affected done properly. This is bad enough for those affected, but it does mean that the impact is not devastating for millions of pensioners. I am sure regular readers will be expecting one of my usual diatribes against poor software, badly specified systems and inadequate disaster recovery plans. Although the full story has not yet been told, it seems that the problem started when a plan to upgrade some of the computers from Windows 2000 to Windows XP went wrong, and XP code was inadvertently copied to thousands of machines across the network. This is certainly unfortunate, but I have a lot of sympathy for the network managers and technology staff involved. Today's computer networks are large, complex and occasionally fragile. The interconnectedness that we all value also gives us a degree of instability and unpredictability that we cannot design out of the systems. It is the network equivalent of Godel's Theorem - any system sufficiently complex to be useful is also able to collapse catastrophically. So I will reserve judgment on the technology aspects until we all know what actually happened and whether it was a consequence of software failure or just bad luck. Wha

t is really disturbing, and cannot be excused, is the fact that it took four days for news of this systems failure to leak out into the technical press. It is, without a doubt, a major story and was the second or third lead item on BBC Radio 4's Today programme throughout Friday morning. So why did not the prime minister's official spokesman mention it at any lobby briefings before Friday? Why was not the pensions minister in Parliament to make an emergency statement on Tuesday, when it was clear that there was a serious problem? If there had been an outbreak of Legionnaire's disease in the air conditioning system we would have been told, but it seems that major technology problems do not merit the same treatment. While EDS and Microsoft will no doubt be looking for technical lessons to learn from their week of pain, we can learn some political lessons too. And the most important is that in this digital world, technology failures are matters of public interest, not something that can be ignored in the hope that nobody will notice, care or understand. That means we need a full report on what went wrong and what was done to fix it. It would be unacceptable for any of the parties involved to hide behind commercial confidentiality or even parliamentary privilege. A major system has evidently collapsed and we need to know what went wrong and what is being done differently. Anything less is a betrayal of public trust. Bill Thompson is a regular commentator on the BBC World Service programme Go Digital.

tech 188.txt Call for action on internet scam Phone companies are not doing enough to warn customers about internet rogue-dialling "scams", according to premium phone line regulator Icstis. It has received 45,000 complaints in recent months about dial-up internet connections diverting to premium rate numbers without users' knowledge. Phone companies refuse to pay compensation because they say calls must be paid for. They must warn people earlier about possible fraud, Icstis said. People who use dial-up connections can be affected by the scams. Without realising, "a program can be downloaded which diverts internet calls via a premium phone line. Victims often fail to notice until they receive an unusually high bill. Icstis spokesman Rob Dwight said: "Phone companies should get in touch with their customers sooner. "If my bill goes over the usual £50 a month I want to know about it straight away - I don't want to be told when it's hit £750." Phone companies had the systems in place to spot fraudulent activity and artificially-inflated traffic", he said. "We alert them to the numbers that we have under investigation and they should be looking out for these numbers", he added. Telecoms ombudsman Elizabeth France said: Certainly I would not be surprised to find my credit card company phoning me if I do something out of the ordinary. "So I would expect phone companies to be looking to see if they can have a similar approach." The biggest phone company BT says it is doing what it can to monitor fraud and warn people about rogue dialling. Its advice to customers is to use call barring if they want to prevent calls to premium lines because", under the current system, once the call has been made there's little that can be done. Gavin Patterson, group managing director for BT Consumer, "said "We do look at customer's calling patterns and we do make interventions when they are out of the ordinary. "We're looking at the moment at whether we can improve this." But as BT handled 180 million calls a day monitoring was "quite a task in itself"", he added. The government has ordered a review of premium line services and is likely to say Icstis should have more power to deal with rogue diallers in future. At the moment, it cannot demand pay-outs on the behalf of customer - it can only close illegal services down. I use free anti-virus software (AVG) and free firewall protection (ZoneAlarm). Both of these tools have prevented unauthorised access and outgoing calls inadvertently and innocently caused by my daughter's love of music sites. How about ISPs informing all customers of such facilities? The responsibility clearly

falls with the customer but many fall prey through simply not knowing how to avoid these issues. Ignorance is and always has been an expensive business. Does any one know what happens once this fraud has been committed and recognised? The phone companies pay the people who obtaining money fraudulently, so are these people followed up and prosecuted? These diallers are mainly downloaded from sites offering illegal MP3s, porn and pirated software. If people didn't visit such sites they'd be considerably less at risk. Whatever happened to personal responsibility? It seems everyone has to be a 'victim' these days! Part of the blame has to rest with the manufacturers of home computer operating systems. A secure system should not allow a web page or email to download and install anything without the user's knowledge. These scams are illegal and telephone companies should have nothing to do with them. They should refuse to pay money over to the perpetrators. Or are they themselves receiving such good returns that it is in their interest to keep the scam going? Why don't BT et al block all premium numbers by default and only turn it off at the customer's request? To anyone who falls foul of this scam - refuse to pay your telephone provider for these calls. After you notify your telephone provider of these fraudulent transactions, they cannot insist on you paying the bill. To do so would be to knowingly assist the fraudsters to commit the fraud. No customers have yet been taken to court for refusing to pay these bills. Disable or remove your modem and use broadband instead - then you have nothing to worry about. Or buy some decent firewall software and anti-virus. You would not walk out in the freezing cold without a coat - you would not drive your car without any insurance - so why not protect your PC? Stop blaming the phone companies - it's not their fault! I was very impressed with our phone company recently. I had kept ringing a hotline number for Kylie tickets and next day they rang back to ask if I was aware there were 40-odd calls to the same number. Great service. And I got the tickets as well! I have a colleague who has fallen victim to this kind of scam. He informed the phone company about it, they subsequently put a block on premium rate numbers. Three months later another huge bill of over £1,000 came in - the block apparently didn't work and he still has to pay for it, even though a block was in place. Phone companies are probably quite happy for their customers to be hit with a huge bill, otherwise they'd be taking extra steps to prevent this kind of problem. I have been scammed of £139. The operator will do nothing about this and, to add insult to injury, I was charged VAT by the government. Premium rate numbers have been subject to various scams ever since they were invented. One example was where thieves would set up a premium rate number and then dial it day and night from phones whose quarterly bills were never paid. The telephone company was the victim here and you can bet that loophole was blocked very quickly. I know people who have run up large bills, despite being IT-literate. From talking to BT in Belfast, I believe that they will shortly be giving out a free application that can stop you dialling expensive numbers without knowing. It's not the fault of phone companies, and at last they are doing something about it. It's about time that the profiteering by the 'legitimate' phone companies came to an end," mainly by doing away with dial-up altogether and bring broadband down to the same price as dial-up! Not only will this ruin things for the dialler scammers but also allow people to update and upgrade their security more easily and quickly. I haven't ""fallen victim to a rogue-dialling scam"" but I think you're seriously remiss in not pointing out that the vast majority of these scams arise from people trying to access services purporting to provide free pornography. In most cases the user is entirely at fault", which is probably why the telephone companies are rightly unwilling to refund them. My telephone supplier did not inform me that my monthly bill had risen from its normal £3 to £5, to £320. This was because of the scam. They simply billed me. What particul

arly galls me, over and above having over £300 stolen, is that the supplier and the government (through VAT) are profiting from this crime and will not reimburse me their portion of my losses. How about an automatic monthly cap of say £20 on premium rate calls that you would have to contact your provider to have lifted? That way you could use legitimate premium rate numbers while limiting fraudulent usage. At least any disputed amount would be limited, far easier for a telecoms operator to write off £20 than it is £750. A few years back I was also the target of such scams but thank God I have already upgraded to broadband and nothing was connected to my modem so all I heard was the sound of an attempted connection. How about home users take some responsibility and ensure their anti-virus and firewall software is up to date? That should prevent the vast majority of these scams.

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"tech 189.txt Screensaver tackles spam websites Net users are getting the chance to fight back against spam websites Internet portal Lycos has made a screensaver that endlessly requests data from sites that sell the goods and services mentioned in spam e-mail. Lycos hopes it will make the monthly bandwidth bills of spammers soar by keeping their servers running flat out. The net firm estimates that if enough people sign up and download the tool", "spammers could end up paying to send out terabytes of data. ""We've never really solved the big problem of spam which is that its so damn cheap and easy to do", " said Malte Pollmann, spokesman for Lycos Europe. In the past we have built up the spam filtering systems for our users", " he said, but now we are going to go one step further." "We've found a way to make it much higher cost for spammers by putting a load on their servers." " By getting thousands of people to download and use the screensaver", " Lycos hopes to get spamming websites constantly running at almost full capacity. Mr Pollmann said there was no intention to stop the spam websites working by subjecting them with too much data to cope with. He said the screensaver had been carefully written to ensure that the amount of traffic it generated from each user did not overload the web. ""Every single user will contribute three to four megabytes per day", " he said, about one MP3 file." " But", he said, if enough people sign up spamming websites could be forced to pay for gigabytes of traffic every single day. Lycos did not want to use e-mail to fight back," said Mr Pollmann. ""That would be fighting one bad thing with another bad thing", " he said. The sites being targeted are those mentioned in spam e-mail messages and which sell the goods and services on offer. Typically these sites are different to those that used to send out spam e-mail and they typically only get a few thousand visitors per day. The list of sites that the screensaver will target is taken from real-time blacklists generated by organisations such as Spamicop. To limit the chance of mistakes being made, Lycos is using people to ensure that the sites are selling spam goods. As these sites rarely use advertising to offset hosting costs, the burden of high-bandwidth bills could make spam too expensive, said Mr Pollmann. Sites will also slow down under the weight of data requests. Early results show that response times of some sites have deteriorated by up to 85%. Users do not have to be registered users of Lycos to download and use the screensaver. While working, the screensaver shows the websites that are being bothered with requests for data. The screensaver is due to be launched across Europe on 1 December and before now has only been trialled in Sweden. Despite the soft launch, Mr Pollmann said that the screensaver had been downloaded more than 20,000 times in the last four days. There's a huge user demand to not only filter spam day-by-day but to do something more", " he said Before now users have never had the chance to be a bit more offensive." "

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"tech 190.txt First look at PlayStation 3 chip Some details of the chip inside Sony's PlayStation 3 have been revealed. Sony", IBM and Toshiba have released limited data about the so-called Cell chip that will be able to carry out trillions of calculations per second. The chip will be made of several different processing cores that work on tasks together. The PlayStation 3 is expected in 2006 but developers are expecting to get prototypes early next year to tune games that will appear on it at launch. The three firms have been working on the chip since 2001 but before now few details have been released about how it might function. In a joint statement the three firms gave hints about how the chip will work but fuller details will be released in February next year at the International Solid State Circuits Conference in San Francisco. The three firms claim that the Cell chip will be up to 10 times more powerful than existing processors. When put inside powerful computer servers, the Cell consortium expects it to be capable of handling 16 trillion floating point operations, or calculations, every second. The chip has also been refined to be able to handle the detailed graphics common in games and the data demands of films and broadband media. IBM said it would start producing the chip in early 2005 at manufacturing plants in the US. The first machines off the line using the Cell processor will be computer workstations and servers. A working version of the PS3 is due to be shown off in May 2005 but a full launch of the next generation console is not expected to start until 2006. As well as being inside the PlayStation 3," the chip will also be used inside high-definition TVs and powerful computers. ""In the future", all forms of digital content will be converged and fused onto the broadband network," said Ken Kutaragi, Chief Operating Officer of Sony. Current PC architecture is nearing its limits."  
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"tech 191.txt Online commons to spark debate Online communities set up by the UK government could encourage public debate and build trust", says the Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR). Existing services such as eBay could provide a good blueprint for such services, says the think-tank. Although the net is becoming part of local and central government," its potential has not yet been fully exploited to create an online ""commons"" for public debate. In its report", Is Online Community A Policy Tool?", the IPPR also asks if ID cards could help create safer online communities. Adopting an eBay-type model would let communities create their own markets for skills and services and help foster a sense of local identity and connection. ""What we are proposing is a civic commons", Will Davies, senior research fellow at the IPPR told the BBC News website. A single publicly funded and run online community in which citizens can have a single place to go where you can go to engage in diversity and in a way that might have a policy implication - like a pre-legislation discussion." The idea of a ""civic commons"" was originally proposed by Stephen Coleman", professor of e-democracy at the Oxford Internet Institute. The IPPR report points to informal, small scale examples of such commons that already exist. It mentions good-practice public initiatives like the BBC's iCan project which connects people locally and nationally who want to take action around important issues. But he adds, government could play a bigger role in setting up systems of trust for online communities too. Proposals for ID cards, for instance," could also be widened to see if they could be used online. They could provide the basis for a secure authentication system which could have value for peer-to-peer interaction online. ""At the moment they have been presented as a way for government to keep tabs on people and ensuring access to public services","

said Mr Davies. But what has not been explored is how authentication technology may potentially play a role in decentralised online communities." "The key idea to take from systems such as eBay and other online communities is letting members rate each other's reputation by how they treat other members. Using a similar mechanism", trust and cooperation between members of virtual and physical communities could be built. This could mean a civic commons would work within a non-market system which lets people who may disagree with one another interact within publicly-recognised rules. E-government initiatives over the last decade have very much been about putting basic information and service guides online as well as letting people interact with government via the web. Many online communities, such as chatrooms, mailing lists, community portals, message boards and weblogs often form around common interests or issues. With 53% of UK households now with access to the net, the government, suggests Mr Davies," could act as an intermediary or ""middleman"" to set up public online places of debate and exchange to encourage more ""cosmopolitan politics"" and public trust in policy. ""Government already plays a critical role in helping citizens trade with each other online. ""But it should also play a role in helping citizens connect to one another in civic", non-market interactions," said Mr Davies. There is a role for public bodies like the BBC, libraries, and government to bring people back into public debate again instead of millions of cliques"" talking to each other", he added. The paper is part of the IPPR's Digital Society initiative which is producing a number of conferences and research papers leading up to the publication of A Manifesto For A Digital Britain.

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"tech 192.txt Mobile gaming takes off in India Gaming on the move is one of the fastest-growing activities among the tech-savvy in India", says a report. The Indian mobile gaming market is expected to generate about \$26m (£13.8m) by the end of 2004, according to market analysts In-Stat/MDR. In October, mobile phone users grew by 1.4 million to 44.9 million, overtaking the number of landlines, said the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India. Analysts say cheap rates and a huge youth market is driving the market. India has a large population of under-25s, and many in urban areas are fast adopting mobiles as must-have gadgets. India's mobile gaming market will bring in about \$336m (£178m) by 2009, according to the report. Mobile gaming is expected to explode globally over the next few years. Analysts predict that 220 million people will be playing games on phones by 2009, generating billions for mobile companies. Services other than just voice calls which are offered by mobile operators in India have, as a result of the huge rise in subscribers," grown significantly and rapidly. ""The growth of this market sector has attracted publishers", developers, animators, musicians, and content providers, and is also stimulating the development of innovative business models," said Clint Wheelock, director of In-Stat/MDR's wireless research group. Mobile gaming is not just about fun; it also represents one key element of a rich mobile entertainment experience for consumers", and a lucrative market opportunity for industry players." "Currently", India has six big games developers and four mobile operators that offer games to their subscribers, said the report. According to In-Stat/MDR, it is tipped to make up one of the most important markets in the next wave of mobile multimedia growth. In January 2003, there were only 10 million mobile subscribers in India. Many choose mobiles in rural areas in order to bypass poorer telecoms infrastructure. Despite this, the penetration rate is still much lower than other countries. Less than 20% of India's total population own a mobile in India, compared to well over 50% in most European countries. The trend echoes the uptake of mobiles in many developing economies, which continues to grow as people o

pt to leapfrog slower and more expensive state-run fixed-line operators.

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"tech 193.txt Gadget market 'to grow in 2005' The explosion in consumer technology is to continue into 2005", delegates at the world's largest gadget show, in Las Vegas, have been told. The number of gadgets in the shops is predicted to grow by 11%, " while devices which talk to each other will become increasingly important. ""Everything is going digital", " Kirsten Pfeifer from the Consumer Electronics Association, told the BBC News website. The Consumer Electronics Show (CES) featured the pick of 2005's products. Consumers are controlling what they want and technologies like HDTVs [high-definition TVs]", digital radio," and digital cameras will remain strong in 2005. ""All the products on show really showed the breadth and depth of the industry." " Despite showing diversity", " some delegates attending complained that the showcase lacked as much ""wow factor"" as in previous years. The portable technologies on show also reflected one of the buzzwords of CES", " which was the ""time and place shifting"" of multimedia content - being able to watch and listen to video and music anywhere", at any time. At the start of last year's CES, the CEA predicted there would be an average growth of 4% in 2004. That figure was surpassed with the rise in popularity of portable digital music players, personal video recorders and digital cameras. It was clear also that gadgets are becoming a lot more about lifestyle choice," with fashion and personalisation becoming increasingly key to the way gadgets are designed. Part of this has been the rise in spending power of the ""generation X-ers"" who have grown up with technology and who now have the spending power and desire for more devices that suit them. More than 57% of the consumer electronics market is made up of female buyers", according to CEA research. Hybrid devices, which combine a number of multimedia functions," were also in evidence on the show floor. ""A lot of this is driven by just the ability to do it", " said Stephen Baker, a consumer electronics analyst with retail research firm NPD Group. Some of these functions cost next to nothing to add." " As well as the show floor showcasing everything from tiny wearable MP3 players to giant high-definition TVs", several keynote speeches were made by industry leaders, such as Microsoft chief Bill Gates. Despite several embarrassing technical glitches during Mr Gate's pre-show speech, he announced several new partnerships - mainly for the US market. He unveiled new ways of letting people take TV shows recorded on personal video recorders and watch them back on portable devices. He disappointed some, however, by failing to announce any details of the next generation of the Xbox games console. Another disappointment was the lack of exposure Sony's new portable games device, the PSP," had at the show. Sony said the much-anticipated gadget would most likely start shipping in March for the US and Europe. It went on sale in Japan before Christmas. There were only two PSPs embedded in glass cabinets at the show though and no representatives to discuss further details. A Sony representative told the BBC News website this was because Sony did not consider it to be part of their ""consumer technology"" offering. Elsewhere at the show", there was a plethora of colour and plasma screens, including Samsung's 102-inch (2.6 metre) plasma - the largest in the world. Industry experts were also excited about high-definition technologies coming to the fore in 2005, with new formats for DVDs coming out which will hold six times as much data as conventional DVDs. With so many devices on the move there were a lot of products on show offering external storage, like Seagate's 5GB pocket sized external hard drive, which won an innovation for engineering and design prize. More than 120,000 trade professionals attended CES in Las Vegas, which officially ran from 6 to 9 January.

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"tech 194.txt Swap offer for pirated Windows XP Computer  
giant Microsoft has launched a pilot scheme to replace counterfeit versions of  
Windows XP with legal ones. The first-time initiative is restricted to the UK  
and to users with pre-installed copies of the operating system in PCs bought before November. Until December Microsoft said software can be sent to it for analysis if there are doubts about its legitimacy. The company aims to detect illegal traders and turn users of fake versions of Windows into legitimate ones. The Windows XP Counterfeit Project will mean that software that is found to be counterfeit will be replaced for free", subject to certain conditions, until the end of the year. It is the first time Microsoft has launched a counterfeit product replacement scheme in the world, the company told the BBC News website. In June, the software giant said that the major security update to Windows XP, Service Pack 2, would not work with the most widely pirated versions of its operating system. The upgrade closed security loopholes in XP and added features that made it easier to keep machines safe from viruses and other types of malicious computer code. The US company invited anyone who had suspicions about their version of Windows XP to submit it for testing as soon as possible. The procedure consists of a series of computer checks, collating documents," and filling out a witness statement. ""This is a great opportunity for users to confirm the authenticity of Windows XP software whilst helping gather vital information about illegal traders""", said Alex Hilton," licence compliance manager at Microsoft. The scheme has also been welcomed by the technology and commerce industry. ""It is important that users ensure that they are legally licensed to avoid the risks of purchasing and using counterfeit products""", said David Frost, director general of the British Chambers of Commerce. The plan would enable Microsoft to gather intelligence about illegal traders in a prompt way, which would allow it to take action against software pirates. Microsoft said it would evaluate the results of the UK programme before setting up similar schemes in other countries.

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"tech 195.txt Ban hits Half-Life 2 pirates hard About 2  
0,000 people have been banned from playing the Half-Life 2 game. Game maker Valve shut down the online accounts of the players because it had evidence that their copy of the game had been obtained illegally. Copies of Half-Life 2 had been circulating on file-sharing systems soon after it was officially released. Experts said the success of the Half-Life 2 anti-piracy system might tempt other game makers into creating their own version. Half-Life 2 was officially released on 16 November but before gamers could get to grips with the long-awaited title they were forced to authenticate their copy of the game online. Authentication involved setting up an account with Valve's gaming community system called Steam and letting that check which copy of the game was being run. In a statement detailing the banning of the accounts Valve said this system helped identify who had got hold of pirated copies. ""The method used was extremely easy for Valve to trace and confirm", and so there is no question that the accounts disabled were used to try and illegally obtain Half-Life 2," read the statement. Valve spokesman Doug Lombardi said that the company had not yet released sales figures for the game and would not say what proportion of all Steam players the 20,000 represented. One effect of Steam's popularity has been to limit the copies of the game sold in shops and artificially depress the game's ranking in the top ten. Even so the title debuted at No 3 in the UK charts. Valve also said that a small number of accounts were closed because people were using stolen credit cards to buy copies of the game or were using stolen Steam accounts. Some of

those who have been banned by the move protested their innocence in the online forums on the main Steam site and said they were being punished for what other people did with their account. Some contributors to the forums wondered if the action might force more piracy as people tried to get hold of successive copies of the game to keep ahead of Valve's anti-piracy actions. In its statement Valve also said that rumours that it distributed fake Half-Life 2 keys, copies of the game or instructions on how to hack the game, just to catch pirates and cheats were false. The company said: The hack came from the 'community' as do they all. "" It added that most of those banned simply tried to use copies of Half-Life 2 circulating on file-swapping systems such as Bit Torrent rather than use hacks to get around the need for CD keys. Rob Fahey", editor of online news site gamesindustry.biz, said the mass banning showed off the power of the Steam system. Before now, he said, " it has been hard for game makers to do anything about piracy once the game was being played. ""But with this", Valve is taking really effective steps against people using illegitimate copies of Half-Life 2," he said. If Steam proves effective at cutting the piracy of games to a minimum, said Mr Fahey, other game makers may be tempted to set up copycat systems. It's not hard to see a point in the near future when every publisher wants you to run an application on your system purely to allow you to play their games", " he said. This could mean that computers get cluttered with poorly written Steam-type systems that are used to batter people with adverts. Unless game firms were careful, he said, they could face a backlash from consumers who soon get tired of maintaining different accounts for every game they play.

tech 196.txt New browser wins over net surfers The proportion of surfers using Microsoft's Internet Explorer (IE) has dropped to below 90%, say web analysts. Net traffic monitor, OneStat.com, has reported that the open-source browser Firefox 1.0, released on 9 November, seems to be drawing users away from IE. While IE's market share has dropped 5% since May to 88.9%, Mozilla browsers - including Firefox - have grown by 5%. Firefox is made by the Mozilla Foundation which was set up by former browser maker Netscape in 1998. Although there have been other preview versions of Firefox, version 1.0 was the first complete official program. It seems that people are switching from Microsoft's Internet Explorer to Mozilla's new Firefox browser", " said Niels Brinkman, co-founder of Amsterdam-based OneStat.com. Mozilla browsers - including Firefox 1.0 - now have 7.4% of the market share, the figures suggest. Mozilla said that more than five million have downloaded the free software since its official release. Supporters of the open-source software in the US managed to raise \$25 0,000 (£133,000) to advertise the release of Firefox 1.0 in The New York Times, and support the Mozilla Foundation. There was a flurry of downloads on its first day of release. The figures echo similar research from net analyst WebSideStory which suggested that IE had 92.9% of users in October compared to 95.5% in June. Microsoft IE has dominated the browser market for some time after taking the crown from Netscape, and its share of users has always stayed at around the 95% mark. Firefox is attractive to many because it is open-source. That means people are free to adapt the software's core code to create other innovative features, like add-ons or extensions to the program. Fewer security holes have also been discovered so far in Firefox than in IE. Paul Randle, Microsoft Windows Client product manager, responded to the figures: We certainly respect that some customers will choose alternative browsers and that choosing a browser is about more than a handful of features. ""Microsoft continues to make significant investments in IE", including Service Pack 2 with advanced security technologies," and continues to encourage a vibrant ecosystem of third party add-ons for Internet Explorer." Firefox wants to capture 10% of the market by the end of 2005. Other browser software", like Opera and Apple's Safari, are also challengin

g Microsoft's grip on the browser market. Opera is set to release its version 7.60 by the end of the year. OneStat.com compiled the statistical measurements from two million net users in 100 countries.

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"tech 197.txt Smartphones suffer Skulls attack Owners of some Nokia smartphones are being warned to watch out for malicious wallpaper. Those downloading the software could find all the icons on their 7610 phone swiped for images of skulls. When installed the malicious program also locks many of the 7610's functions making it hard to use and harder to repair. The program is only the latest in a series of viruses produced to attack mobile phones. The file", nicknamed Skulls, is thought to have surfaced on shareware sites where people can pick up free add-ons, such as wallpaper, games and ringtones, for their phones Symbian said that it was not sure if the damage Skulls does was intentional or simply a result of bad programming. Soon after being discovered the file is thought to have been removed from the sites that were unwittingly harbouring it. The program is masquerading as software that creates new background images and themes for the main screen of the 7610 phone. The Skulls program is labelled as a file called: 7610.extended.theme.manager.zip. Once installed the program replaces all the icons on the main page with skulls and replaces all the working applications, such as contacts, calendar, notebook etc with non-working versions so the phone becomes almost useless. The only thing the phone can do is make and take calls. A statement by Symbian played down the significance of the malicious program and said few people would fall victim to it as users have to go through several steps to install it, one of which includes ignoring a security warning. Symbian said that the spread of the Skulls program was likely to be limited as the program cannot travel from one phone to another by itself. Despite this Finnish anti-virus lab F-Secure said it had sporadic reports of 76 10 owners being caught out by it. The firm has produced guidance for users caught out to help them remove the program and get their phone working again. The Skulls program is thought to have been written by a malicious hacker using the alias Tee-222. Symbian phones produced by Sony Ericsson, Motorola, BenQ, Arima and Fujitsu are unaffected by the Skulls program.

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"tech 198.txt Musical future for phones Analyst Bill Thomson has seen the future and it is in his son's hands. I bought my son Max a 3G phone", partly because they are so cheap and he needed a phone, and partly because I am supposed to know about the latest technology and thought I should see how they work in real life. After using it for a while I am not at all tempted to get rid of my SonyEricsson P800 smart phone. That has a relatively large screen, even if it does only have slower GPRS access to the network. I can read my e-mail, surf the web using a proper browser and write stuff using the stylus on its touch screen. Last week someone e-mailed me a document that had been compressed into a ZIP file, and I was pleasantly surprised to discover that my phone even knew how to decompress it for me. By contrast the confusing menus, complicated keyboard and truly irritating user interface of Max's 3G phone simply get in the way, and I did not see much value in the paid-for services, especially the limited web access. The videos of entertainment news, horoscopes and the latest celebrity gossip did not appeal, and I did not see how the small screen could be useful for any sort of image, never mind micro-TV. But then Max started playing, and I realised I was missing the point entirely. It is certainly not a great overall experience, but that is largely due to the poor menu system and the phone layout: the video content itself is compelling. The quality was a

t least as good as the video streaming from the BBC website, and the image is about the same size. Max was completely captivated, and I was intrigued to discover that I had nearly missed the next stage of the network revolution. It is easy to be dismissive of small screens, and indeed anyone of my generation, with failing eyesight and the view that 'there's never anything worth watching on TV', is hardly going to embrace these phones. But just as the World Wide Web was the ""killer application"" that drove internet adoption", music videos are going to drive 3G adoption. With Vodafone now pushing its own 3G service, and 3 already established in the UK, video on the phone is clearly going to become a must-have for kids sitting on the school bus, adults waiting outside clubs and anyone who has time to kill and a group of friends to impress. This will please the network operators, who are looking for some revenue from their expensively acquired 3G licences. But it goes deeper than that: playing music videos on a phone marks the beginning of a move away from the 'download and play' model we have all accepted for our iPods and MP3 players. After all, why should I want to carry 60GB of music and pictures around with me in my pocket when I can simply listen to anything I want, whenever I want, streamed to my phone? Oh - and of course you can always use the phone to make voice calls and send texts, something which ensures that it is always in someone's pocket or handbag, available for other uses too. I have never really approved of using the Internet Protocol (IP), to do either audio or video streaming," and I think that technically it is a disaster to make phone calls over the net using ""voice over IP"". But I have to acknowledge that the net", at least here in the developed Western countries, is fast and reliable enough to do both. I stream radio to my computer while I work, and enjoy hearing the bizarre stations from around the world that I can find online but nowhere else. I am even playing with internet telephony, despite my reservations, and I appear on Go Digital on the World Service, streamed over the web each week. But 3G networks have been designed to do this sort of streaming, both for voice and video, which gives them an edge over net-based IP services. The 3G services aren't quite there yet, and there is a lot to be sorted out when it comes to web access and data charges. Vodafone will let you access its services on Vodafone Live! as part of your subscription cost but it makes you pay by the megabyte to download from other sites - this one, for example. This will not matter to business users, but will distort the consumer market and keep people within the phone company's collection of partner sites, something that should perhaps be worrying telecoms regulator Ofcom. But we should not see these new phones simply as cut-down network terminals. If I want fast access to my e-mail I can get a 3G card for my laptop or hook up to a wireless network. The phone is a lot more, and it is as a combination of mini-TV, personal communications device and music/video player that it really works. There is certainly room in the technology ecosystem for many different sorts of devices, accessing a wide range of services over different networks. 3G phones and iPods can co-exist, at least for a while, but if I had to bet on the long term I would go for content on demand over carrying gigabytes in my pocket. Or perhaps some enterprising manufacturer will offer me both. An MP3G player, anyone? Bill Thompson is a regular commentator on the BBC World Service programme Go Digital.

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"tech 199.txt Multi-purpose TV aids India Two-thirds of the world's population", 4 billion people, live on \$2,000 a year or less. You might think that the last thing on their minds would be getting a television set or a computer. But that's not the case. Many people in the developing world give up one of their daily meals so they can afford to buy a TV. And now," an Indian-born computer engineer thinks he's come up with a way to give them cheap acc

ess to the internet. Carnegie Mellon Professor Raj Reddy has spent the bulk of his professional career trying to find ways to make technology accessible to poor people. The first step is to figure out why poor people would want a personal computer and Professor Reddy thinks he has a pretty good idea of why they might. ""I come from a village," says Prof Reddy, I know what the population is like", many of them are illiterate," and many of them have other concerns." "There", nobody will use it for the conventional uses of a PC, word processing and Powerpoint, he said. So it's clear to me that if people wanted to use PCs in a village - it has to be usable by illiterate people and it must be primarily for entertainment, education, telemedicine," and access to expert advice." Prof Reddy also thinks that tying it into some kind of aid package was the wrong approach. After all", he asked -- what aid group could possibly give expensive computers to 250 million less fortunate Indians, let alone the billions of poor people around the world? Instead," Prof Reddy decided to think of those 250 million Indians as a potential market. The problem then becomes one of making the product compelling enough. ""It must be so compelling that you would give up your third meal in order to have this", Prof Reddy says. People do this today with television sets. If you go to India, and many other countries," they will first go get a television set before they worry about one more meal. Why? Because personalized entertainment has become very important." This hatched a completely new idea. He calls it a PCtv - A personal computer", television and telephone all in one that runs on a normal desktop machine. Literate users can surf through the applications with a keyboard and mouse but illiterate users can use what looks like a television remote control. On the screen, pictures - not words - designate applications like TV, voice mail, and video e-mail. This dependence on graphics, video and audio means that a computer for an illiterate person needs 100 times more power and more memory than one for a PhD. Prassana Rambathla, one of Prof Reddy's graduate students," says that ""when you're talking illiterate you're talking audio and video", and that demands exponentially high bandwidth.' ""It can't choke at any point in time", and it has to withstand anything no matter what you're pressing." "The major part is making it foolproof", very tough, so that it never breaks," he says. The Carnegie Mellon team says this project is only possible because PCs are now so much cheaper and have built-in audio and video hardware and software. Limited trials of the PCtv are due to start this month in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. Although Andhra Pradesh has a fairly good infrastructure but work has to be done to ensure reliable connections to the net. Prof Reddy has teamed up with Eric Brewer at the University of California at Berkeley. The answer, says Prof Brewer, is wi-fi. We're looking at the thing you'll see in Starbucks or many other hotspots", he says. We're doing a lot of work on long-distance wireless and how to make the network work better in the presence of intermittency, when the power goes up and down, and the links go up and down," and the computers you're connected to just get turned off for no reason." Prof Reddy says he hopes to lease the PCtvts for about \$10 a month", and thinks Indians will rent the units for the television and DVD capabilities. Reddy says he can then introduce the PCtv's other technologies - such as video mail. For example," a farmer could use the PCtv's webcam to send a picture of a harmful insect to a local official who could send back a proposed course of action to the farmer. Prof Reddy thinks this kind of communication is the real pay-off. ""The underlying problem", he says, is how you can increase their wealth and reduce their poverty and reduce their illiteracy", and improve their health care.' ""And what I'm postulating is that this is the technology that will enable them. If I didn't have it", it would be an uphill battle. Even with the technology it's an uphill battle. But I have a tool. There is hope. I can reach them in ways that have not been possible before." Clark

Boyd is technology correspondent for "The World", a BBC World Service and WGBH-Boston co-production

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"tech 200.txt Computer grid to help the world Your computer can now help solve the world's most difficult health and social problems. Launched this week", the World Community Grid will use idle computer time to test solutions to these problems. The donated processor cycles will help the WCG create virtual supercomputers via the net. The idea follows the success of other similar projects that have used the untapped processing power of millions of desktop PCs. One of the most successful collaboration projects was Seti@home, run by the Search for Extra Terrestrial Life project, which sorted through radio signals looking for signs of alien communication. Anyone can volunteer to donate the spare time of their computers by downloading a special screensaver from the WGC website. Once installed, the virtual terminal gets a chunk of the computational task to process, and reports back after completing that task. The first WCG problem being tackled will be the Human Proteome Folding Project, which hopes to identify the ways that the proteins in our body fold. The subjects of study are being selected by an international advisory board of experts specializing in health sciences, and technology. The body will evaluate proposals from leading research, public and not-for-profit organizations," and is expected to oversee up to six projects a year. Organisations also represented on the board include the United Nations Development Programme and the World Health Organisation.

"The World Community Grid will enable researchers around the globe to gather and analyze unprecedented quantities of data to help address important global issues", said Elain Gallin, program director for medical research at the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. [It] will inspire us to look beyond the technological limitations that have historically restricted us from addressing some of our most intractable problems""", she added. IBM has donated the hardware, software, technical services and expertise to build the basic infrastructure for the grid. The computer company, working with United Devices, previously developed the Smallpox Research Grid, which linked together more than two million volunteers from 226 countries to speed the analysis of some 35 million drug molecules in the search for a treatment for Smallpox.

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"tech 201.txt How to make a gigapixel picture The largest digital panoramic photo in the world has been created by researchers in the Netherlands. The finished image is 2.5 billion pixels in size - making it about 500 times the resolution of images produced by good consumer digital cameras. The huge image of Delft was created by stitching together 600 single snaps of the Dutch city taken at a fixed spot. If printed out in standard 300 dots per inch resolution", the picture would be 2.5m high and 6m long. The researchers have put the image on a website which lets viewers explore the wealth of detail that it captures. Tools on the page let viewers zoom in on the city and its surroundings in great detail. The website is already proving popular and currently has more than 200,000 visitors every day. The image was created by imaging experts from the Dutch research and technology laboratory TNO which created the 2.5 gigapixel photo as a summer time challenge. The goal of the project was to be one of the first groups to make gigapixel images. The first image of such a size was manually constructed by US photographer Max Lyons in November 2003. That image portrayed Bryce Canyon National Park, in Utah," and was made up of 196 separate photographs. The panorama of Delft is a little staid in contrast to the dramatic rockscape captured in Mr Lyons' image. ""He did it all by hand", which was

an enormous effort, and we got the idea that if you use automatic techniques, it would be feasible to build a larger image," said Jurgen den Hartog, one of the TNO researchers behind the project. We were not competing with Mr Lyons", "but it started as a lunchtime bet." "The Dutch team used already available technologies", "although it had to upgrade them to be able to handle the high-resolution image. ""We had to rewrite almost all the tools", Me den Hartog told the BBC News website. All standard Windows viewers available would not be able to load such a large image," so we had to develop one ourselves." "The 600 component pictures were taken on July 2004 by a computer-controlled camera with a 400 mm lens. Each image was made to slightly overlap so they could be accurately arranged into a composite. The stitching process was also done automatically using five powerful PCs over three days. Following the success of this project", and with promises of help from others, the TNO team is considering creating a full 360-degree panoramic view of another Dutch city, with even higher resolution.

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"tech 202.txt Remote control rifle range debuts Soon you could go hunting via the net. A Texas company is considering letting web users use a remote-controlled rifle to shoot down deer", antelope and wild pigs. For a small fee users will take control of a camera and rifle that they can use to spot and shoot the game animals as they roam around a 133-hectare Texas ranch. The Live-Shot website behind the scheme already lets people practise shooting at targets via the internet. John Underwood, the man behind the Live-Shot website," said the idea for the remote-control hunting came to him a year ago when he was watching deer via a webcam on another net site. ""We were looking at a beautiful white-tail buck and my friend said 'If you just had a gun for that'. A little light bulb went off in my head", "Mr Underwood told the Reuters news agency. A year's work and \$10,000 has resulted in a remote-controlled rig on which sits a camera and .22 calibre rifle. Mr Underwood is planning to put one of these rigs in a concealed location in a small reserve on his Texas ranch and let people shoot at a variety of game animals. Also needed is a fast net connection so remote hunters can quickly track and aim at passing game animals with the camera and rifle rig. Each remote hunting session will cost \$150 with additional fees for meat processing and taxidermy work. Species that can be shot will include barbary, Corsican and mouflon sheep, blackbuck antelope and wild pigs. Already the Live-Shot site lets people shoot 10 rounds at paper and silhouette targets for \$5.95 for each 20-minute shooting session. For further fees, users can get the target they shot and a DVD recording of their session. Handlers oversee each shooting session and can stop the gun being fired if it is being aimed off-range or at something it should not be. Mr Underwood said that internet hunting could be popular with disabled hunters unable to get out in the woods or distant hunters who cannot afford a trip to Texas. In a statement the RSPCA said it had grave concerns" about people being allowed to go online and remotely control a rifle. ""We assume it would be extremely difficult to accurately control a gun in this way and therefore it would be difficult to ensure a 'clean kill'", something the RSPCA accepts is the intention of those shooting for sport, it said. Animals hit but not killed would without doubt be caused to suffer unnecessarily," said the statement. Mike Berger, wildlife director of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, said current hunting statutes did not cover net or remote hunting. He said state laws on hunting only covered regulated animals" such as native deer and bird species. As such there was nothing to stop Mr Underwood letting people hunt ""unregulated"" imported animals and wild pigs. Mr Underwood also lets people come in person to the ranch to hunt and shoot game animals.

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"tech 203.txt Gangsters dominate gaming chart Video games on consoles and computers proved more popular than ever in 2004. Gamers spent more than £1.34bn in 2004", almost 7% more than they did in 2003 according to figures released by the UK gaming industry's trade body. Sales records were smashed by the top title of the year GTA: San Andreas - in which players got the job of turning central character CJ into a crime boss. The game sold more than 1 million copies in the first nine days that it was on sale. This feat made it the fastest selling video game of all time in the UK. Although only released in November the sprawling story of guns, gangsters game beat off strong competition and by year end had sold more than 1.75 million copies. There were also records set for the number of games that achieved double-platinum status by selling more than 600,000 copies. Five titles, including Sony EyeToy Play and EA's Need for Speed: Underground 2, managed this feat according to figures compiled by Chart-Track for the Entertainment and Leisure Software Publishers Association (Elspa). Electronic Arts, the world's biggest games publisher," had 9 games in the top 20. 2004 was a "stellar year"" said Roger Bennett", director general of Elspa. ""In a year with no new generation consoles being released", the market continued to be buoyant as the industry matured and the increasingly diverse range of games reached new audiences and broadened its player base - across ages and gender," he said. Part of the success of games in 2004 could be due to the fact that so many of them are sequels. 16 out of the top 20 titles were all follow-ups to established franchises or direct sequels to previously popular games. Halo, The Sims, Driver, Need for Speed, Fifa football, Burnout were just a few that proved as popular as the original titles. Despite this fondness for older games, Doom 3 did not make it to the top 20. Movie tie-ins also proved their worth in 2004. Games linked to Shrek, The Incredibles, Spider-Man, Harry Potter and Lord of the Rings were all in the top 20. Elspa noted that sales of Xbox games rose 37.9% during the year. However, Sony's PlayStation 2 was the top seller with 47% of the £1.34bn spent on games in 2004 used to buy titles for that console. Despite winning awards and rave reviews Half-Life 2 did not appear in the list. This was because it was only released on PC and, compared to console titles, sold in relatively small numbers. Also the novel distribution system adopted by developer Valve meant that many players downloaded the title rather than travel to the shops to buy a copy. Valve has yet to release figures which show how many copies of the game were sold in this way.

tech 204.txt British Library gets wireless net Visitors to the British Library will be able to get wireless internet access alongside the extensive information available in its famous reading rooms. Broadband wireless connectivity will be made available in the eleven reading rooms, the auditorium, cafe, restaurant, and outdoor Piazza area. A study revealed that 86% of visitors to the Library carried laptops. The technology has been on trial since May and usage levels make the Library London's most active public hotspot. Previously many were leaving the building to go to a nearby internet cafe to access their e-mail, the study found. At the British Library we are continually exploring ways in which technology can help us to improve services to our users"," said Lynne Brindley, chief executive of the British Library. Surveys we conducted recently confirmed that", alongside the materials they consult here, our users want to be able to access the internet when they are at the Library for research or to communicate with colleagues," she said. The service will be priced at £4.50 for an hour's session or £35 for a monthly pass. The study, conducted by consultancy Building Zones, found that 16% of visitors came to the Library to sit down and use it as a business centre. This could be because of its

proximity to busy mainline stations such as Kings Cross and Euston. The study also found that people were spending an average of six hours in the building, making it an ideal wireless hotspot. Since May the service has registered 1,200 sessions per week, making it London's most active public hotspot. The majority of visitors wanted to be able to access their e-mail as well as the British Library catalogue. The service has been rolled out in partnership with wireless provider The Cloud and Hewlett Packard. It will operate independently from the Library's existing network. The British Library receives around 3,000 visitors each day and serves around 500,000 readers each year. People come to view resources which include the world's largest collection of patents and the UK's most extensive collection of science, technology and medical information. The Library receives between three and four million requests from remote users around the world each year.

tech 205.txt UK broadband gets speed injection Broadband's rapid rise continues apace as speeds gear up a notch. An eight megabit service has been launched by internet service provider UK Online. It is 16 times faster than the average broadband package on the market and will pave the way for services such as video-on-demand and broadband TV. The service is possible due to a new regime which allows other operators to use BT's exchanges and will initially only be available in towns. It represents a big leap forward"" for broadband", said Chris Stening, UK Online general manager. The service comes with a hefty £39.99 monthly price tag but will mean users can download MP3s in seconds and offers TV-quality video streaming. The service includes WiFi as standard, meaning users can connect multiple PCs, laptops and game consoles from any room in the house. Not everybody will be able to take advantage of the service, as it will be restricted to metropolitan areas. The service will initially be available to users within 2km radius of 230 telephone exchanges in areas such as London, Birmingham, Glasgow and Cambridge. That represents about 4.4 million households. The service is possible due to a decision to loosen BT's stranglehold on telephone exchanges. The process, known as local loop unbundling, was put in motion by the now defunct telecoms watchdog Oftel but has only proved popular in recent months due to falling costs. UK Online is looking at the possibility of bundling services such as cheap net telephone calls," video-on-demand and TV by 2005 if the service proves popular. ""The service is twice as fast as any other service on offer in the UK and 16 times faster than most broadband services", said Mr Stening. It takes a big leap for broadband and we are very excited about it," he said. Countries such as South Korea and France have found the advantage of upping the speeds of broadband. In South Korea, video-on-demand over the net is cheaper than renting a DVD and online gaming is huge. Mr Stening believes the service will appeal to people in multi-occupancy buildings as well as easing family arguments. A typical family with two adults and two children is currently sharing a 512 kilobit service. This will basically give them 2 megabit s each", " he said.

tech 206.txt Row brewing over peer-to-peer ads Music download networks are proving popular not just with an audience of youngsters keen to take advantage of free music but with advertisers equally keen to reach out to a captive audience. The debate over the legitimacy of file-sharing networks rages on as the music industry continues its threats to close the services down for good. Meanwhile the millions of downloaders are proving both an advertiser's dream come true and a branding nightmare. Paul Myers, chief executive of Wipit - a peer to peer service which provides paid-for music downloads - believes it is time advertisers stopped providing 'oxygen' for companies that support illegal downloading. You may be surprised to know that current advertisers on the most popular peer to peer service eDonkey who now steadfastly support copyri

ght theft with real cash money include Nat West", Vodafone, 02, First Direct, NTL, and Renault," he said in an open letter to the British Phonographic Industry last month. He urged people to follow his lead and 'dump' brands associated with companies such as eDonkey. The BPI is equally quick to condemn established brands becoming bedfellows with peer to peer networks. 'Networks like eDonkey, Kazaa and Grokster facilitate illegal filesharing. The BPI strongly believes that any reputable company should look carefully at the support they are giving these networks through their advertising revenue, it said in a statement. ""Illegal file-sharers steal millions of pounds worth of music through these services. We are sure that the companies advertising on them would not put up with the fit on such a scale from their own businesses", it said. But the issue is often more complicated for advertisers, said Mark Mulligan, a music analyst with Jupiter Research. This has been a problem for a long time", ever since the days of Napster, he told the BBC News website. The reality is that the millions of downloaders represent a very attractive audience. Advertisers probably pay a lot less for putting ads here than on more respected sites and they are reaching the perfect target audience, he said. If you put the legality issues aside, not to advertise here would mean missing out on a valuable audience, he added. Meanwhile companies contacted by the BBC News website insist that they were not directly aware of where their ads have been appearing. OneTel adverts were spotted on eDonkey this week and its response was typical. We have investigated this matter and believe that one of our affiliate partners has placed this advert without our knowledge. It is not our policy to advertise through peer-to-peer networks," read a statement from the discount phone firm. It has requested the advert be removed immediately, said a spokeswoman. Similarly telecommunications firm NTL blames its media buying agency which places adverts with third party networks featuring thousands of sites. Since the matter was brought to its attention last month, the agency has strict instructions to make sure ads do not appear on such sites, a spokesman told the BBC News website. However Mr Mulligan was not entirely convinced by these explanations. While smaller brands might not necessarily be aware of where the money they allocate to online advertising actually ends, this is no excuse for well-known brands, he said. I would be surprised if these brands didn't have the know-how to prevent this happening", he said. At the moment eDonkey is enjoying the benefits of having some very well-known faces advert on its network. Many big brands have leveraged the opportunity, including perhaps two of the biggest brands in the world - Senator John Kerry and President George W. Bush," said chief executive Sam Yagan. There are some distinct advantages of advertising on such a network, he thinks. Peer-to-peer clients offer big brands a unique opportunity to engage with their customers where they're most comfortable: at their desks interacting with their favourite digital media", he said.

tech 207.txt How to smash a home computer An executive who froze his broken hard disk thinking it would be fixed has topped a list of the weirdest computer mishaps. Although computer malfunctions remain the most common cause of file loss, data recovery experts say human behaviour still is to blame in many cases. They say that no matter how effective technology is at rescuing files, users should take more time to back-up and protect important files. The list of the top 10 global data disasters was compiled by recovery company Ontrack. Careless - and preventable - mistakes that result in data loss range from reckless file maintenance practices to episodes of pure rage towards a computer. This last category includes the case of a man who became so mad with his malfunctioning laptop that he threw it in the lavatory and flushed a couple of times. Data can disappear as a result of natural disaster", system fault or computer virus, but human error, including 'computer rage', seems to be a growing

ng problem," said Adrian Palmer, managing director of Ontrack Data Recovery. Nevertheless, "victims soon calm down when they realise the damage they've done and come to us with pleas for help to retrieve their valuable information." "A far more common situation is when a computer virus strikes and leads to precious files being corrupted or deleted entirely. Mr Palmer recalled the case of a couple who had hundreds of pictures of their baby's first three months on their computer," but managed to reformat the hard drive and erase all the precious memories. "Data can be recovered from computers", servers and even memory cards used in digital devices in most cases, said Mr Palmer. However, "individuals and companies can avoid the hassle and stress this can cause by backing up data on a regular basis."

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"tech 208.txt Mobile picture power in your pocket How many times have you wanted to have a camera to hand to catch an unexpected event that would make headlines? With a modern mobile phone that has a camera built in", you no longer need to curse, you can capture the action as it happens. Already on-the-spot snappers are helping newspapers add immediacy to their breaking news stories headlines, where professional photographers only arrive in time for the aftermath. Celebrities might not welcome such a change because they may never be free of a new breed of mobile phone paparazzi making their lives a bit more difficult. Already one tabloid newspaper in LA is issuing photographers with camera phones to help them catch celebrities at play. It could be the start of a trend that only increases as higher resolution phone cameras become more widespread; as video phones catch on and millions of people start carrying the gadgets around. Only last week, the world media highlighted the killing of the Dutch film maker Theo van Gogh, notorious after making a controversial film about Islamic culture. One day later De Telegraaf, a daily Amsterdam newspaper," became news on its own when it published a picture taken with a mobile phone of Mr van Gogh's body moments after he was killed. ""This picture was the story"", said De Telegraaf's image editor, Peter Schoonen. Other accounts of such picture phone users witnessing news events, include: - A flight from Switzerland to the Dominican Republic which turned around after someone took a picture of a piece of metal falling from the plane as it took off from Zurich (reported by the Swiss daily Le Matin). - Two crooks who robbed a bank in Denmark were snapped before they carried out the crime waiting for the doors of the building to be opened (reported by the Danish regional paper Aarhus Stiftstidende). But this is not just about traditional media lending immediacy to their stories with content from ordinary people," it is also about first-hand journalism in the form of online diaries or weblogs. It has been called ""open source news"" or even ""moblog journalism"" and it has flourished in the recent US election campaign. ""Not many people walk around with their cameras", but they always have their mobile phones with them. If something happens, suddenly all these mobiles sort of appear from nowhere, and start taking pictures, said digital artist Henry Reichhold. He himself uses mobile phone pictures to create huge panoramic images of events and places. You see it in bars, you see it everywhere. It's a massive thing," Mr Reichhold told the BBC News website. With some picture agencies already paying for exclusive phone pictures, especially of celebrities, there are also fears about the possible downside of this phenomenon. It could become a nuisance for public figures as higher resolution picture phones hit the market, with five megapixel models already being launched in Asia. Already on US photojournal site, Buzznet, there is a public album full of snaps of celebrities, many of which were taken with camera phones. Tabloid newspapers in the UK and many monthly magazines invite readers to send in images of famous people th

ey have seen and snapped. But there are other positive uses of picture mobile phones that may balance these uses. For instance, in Alabama, in the US, camera phones will be used to take snaps at crime scenes involving children, and help the authorities to arrest and prosecute paedophiles. And in China's capital Beijing, courts have adopted mobile phone photos as formal evidence. For Henry Reichhold, this is progress: That's the whole thing about the immediacy of the thing. I can see that happening a lot more."

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"tech 209.txt Man auctions ad space on forehead A 20-year-old US man is selling advertising space on his forehead to the highest bidder on website eBay. Andrew Fisher", from Omaha, Nebraska," said he would have a non-permanent logo or brand name tattooed on his head for 30 days. ""The way I see it I'm selling something I already own; after 30 days I get it back", he told the BBC Today programme. Mr Fisher has received 39 bids so far, with the largest bid currently at more than \$322 (£171). The winner will be able to send me a tattoo or have me go to a tattoo parlour and get a temporary ink tattoo on my forehead and this will be something they choose", a company name or domain name, perhaps their logo," he told the Radio 4 programme. On the online auction, Mr Fisher describes himself as an average American Joe", "give or take"". His sales pitch adds: ""Take advantage of this radical advertising campaign and become a part of history." Mr Fisher said that while he would accept any brand name or logo", ""I wouldn't go around with a swastika or anything racial"". He added: ""I wouldn't go around with 666", the mark of the beast. ""Other than that I wouldn't promote anything socially unacceptable such as adult websites or stores." He said he would use the money to pay college - he is planning to study graphic design. The entrepreneur said his mother was initially surprised by his decision but following all the media attention she felt he was ""thinking outside the box"".

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"tech 210.txt Toxic web links help virus spread Virus writers have begun using the power of the web to spread their malicious wares. A Windows virus called Bofra is turning infected machines into distributors of its malicious code. Those clicking on the poisoned links in e-mail messages sent out by infected machines may fall victim to the virus. The trick is being used to prevent the program being caught by anti-virus software that combs through code contained in e-mail attachments. The virus that uses this trick is called Bofra and the first member of the family of worms appeared on 10 November. They exploit a Windows vulnerability that was discovered only a few days earlier. Like many other recent viruses", Bofra plunders the address book in Microsoft Outlook for e-mail addresses and scours other files on an infected machine for fresh target addresses. The virus uses its own mail sending software to despatch e-mail messages to potential victims but, unlike many other recent viruses, does not itself travel via mail. Instead the body of the mail messages sent out contain fake weblinks that, when clicked on, connect back to the machine that distributed that e-mail. Essentially, Bofra turns infected machines into small web servers that happily dole out copies of the virus. The messages try to trick people into clicking on the links by promising pornographic videos and images or by posing as payment confirmation for a Paypal transaction. Copies of the messages seen by the BBC News website had bright yellow and green backgrounds. Those clicking on the links will inadvertently download the Bofra virus which will then start searching for new addresses to send itself to. Filtering firm Clearswift said this tactic of creating thousands of mini web servers was designed to

help the virus spread quickly and avoid attempts to shut it down. In the past other malicious programs have relied on a single web server that downloads viral code to target machines. Shutting down this central server usually stops the virus spreading. Clearswift said that fact that no viral code travels in the e-mail messages sent out by machines infected by Bofra could hamper efforts to limit its spread. Finnish anti-virus firm F-Secure said that, so far, it had not seen many copies of the Bofra virus and its variants in circulation. Tim Warner, spokesman for anti-virus firm Finjan," said: ""You have people getting very creative now to deliver the virus and get it propagating."" Mr Warner said organisations needed to prepare deep defences to keep out the modern form of malicious mobile code. ""Most firms have secured their e-mail gateway,"" said Mr Warner, but the irony is that most of them let malicious content through the web gateways." He said behavioural systems that monitor what users do can help to spot when viruses have penetrated organisations and have started hunting for other victims. The Bofra family of viruses", which were originally thought to be offshoots of the MyDoom bug, can infect machines running Windows 2000,95,98, Me, NT, XP and Server 2003. Users running Windows XP that have applied the SP2 update are not vulnerable to the loophole that Bofra exploits.

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"tech 211.txt Millions to miss out on the net By 2025", 40% of the UK's population will still be without internet access at home, says a study. Around 23 million Britons will miss out on a wide range of essential services such as education and medical information, predicts the report by telecoms giant BT. It compares to 27 million, or 50%, of the UK," who are not currently online. The idea that the digital divide will evaporate with time is ""wishful thinking""", the report concludes. The study calls on the government and telecoms industry to come up with new ways to lure those that have been bypassed by the digital revolution. Although the percentage of Britons without home access will have fallen slightly, those that remain digital refuseniks will miss out on more, the report suggests. As more and more everyday tasks move online and offline services become less comprehensive, the divide will become more obvious and more burdensome for those that have not got net access," it predicts. The gap between ""have-nets"" and ""have-nots"" has been much talked about", but predictions about how such a divide will affect future generations has been less discussed. BT set out to predict future patterns based on current information and taking account of the way technology is changing. Optimists who predict that convergence and the emergence of more user-friendly technology will bridge the digital divide could be way off mark," the report suggests. ""Internet access on other devices tends to be something taken up by those who already have it," said Adrian Hosford, director of corporate responsibility at BT. Costs of internet access have fallen dramatically and coverage in remote areas have vastly improved over the last year but the real barrier remains psychological. There is a hard rump of have-nots who are not engaging with the net. They don't have the motivation or skills or perceive the benefits"," said Mr Hosford. As now, the most disadvantaged groups are likely to remain among low income families, the older generation and the disabled. Those on low incomes will account for a quarter of the digital have-nots, the disabled will make up 16% and the elderly nearly a third by 2025, the report forecasts. Organisations such as BT have a responsibility to help tackle the problem, said Mr Hosford. The telco has seen positive results with its Everybody Online project which offers internet access to people in eight deprived communities around Britain. In one area of Cornwall with high levels of unemployment, online training helped people rewrite CVs and learn skills to get new jobs, explained Mr Hosford. Such grassroots activity addr

essing the specific needs of individual communities is essential is the problem of the digital divide is to be overcome, he said. If we don't address this problem now", it will get a lot worse and people will find it more difficult to find jobs, education opportunities will be limited and they'll simply not be able to keep up with society," he said. The Alliance for Digital Inclusion, an independent body with members drawn from government, industry and the voluntary sector has recently been set up to tackle some of the issues faced by the digital refuseniks.

tech 212.txt Lifestyle 'governs mobile choice' Faster, better or funkier hardware alone is not going to help phone firms sell more handsets, research suggests. Instead, phone firms keen to get more out of their customers should not just be pushing the technology for its own sake. Consumers are far more interested in how handsets fit in with their lifestyle than they are in screen size, onboard memory or the chip inside, shows an in-depth study by handset maker Ericsson. Historically in the industry there has been too much focus on using technology", said Dr Michael Bjorn, senior advisor on mobile media at Ericsson's consumer and enterprise lab. We have to stop saying that these technologies will change their lives", he said. We should try to speak to consumers in their own language and help them see how it fits in with what they are doing," he told the BBC News website. For the study, Ericsson interviewed 14,000 mobile phone owners on the ways they use their phone. People's habits remain the same", said Dr Bjorn. They just move the activity into the mobile phone as it's a much more convenient way to do it." One good example of this was diary-writing among younger people", he said. While diaries have always been popular, a mobile phone -- especially one equipped with a camera -- helps them keep it in a different form. Youngsters' use of text messages also reflects their desire to chat and keep in contact with friends and again just lets them do it in a slightly changed way. Dr Bjorn said that although consumers do what they always did but use a phone to do it," the sheer variety of what the new handset technologies make possible does gradually drive new habits and lifestyles. Ericsson's research has shown that consumers divide into different ""tribes"" that use phones in different ways. Dr Bjorn said groups dubbed ""pioneers"" and ""materialists"" were most interested in trying new things and were behind the start of many trends in phone use. ""For instance", he said, older people are using SMS much more than they did five years ago." This was because younger users", often the children of ageing mobile owners, encouraged older people to try it so they could keep in touch. Another factor governing the speed of change in mobile phone use was the simple speed with which new devices are bought by pioneers and materialists. Only when about 25% of people have handsets with new innovations on them, such as cameras, can consumers stop worrying that if they send a picture message the person at the other end will be able to see it. Once this significant number of users is passed, use of new innovations tends to take off. Dr Bjorn said that early reports of camera phone usage in Japan seemed to imply that the innovation was going to be a flop. However, he said, now 45% of the Japanese people Ericsson questioned use their camera phone at least once a month. In 2003 the figure was 29%. Similarly," across Europe the numbers of people taking snaps with cameras is starting to rise. In 2003 only 4% of the people in the UK took a phonecam snap at least once a month. Now the figure is 14%. Similar rises have been seen in many other European nations. Dr Bjorn said that people also used their camera phones in very different ways to film and even digital cameras. ""Usage patterns for digital cameras are almost exactly replacing usage patterns for analogue cameras", he said. Digital cameras tend to be used on significant events such as weddings, holidays and birthdays. By contrast, he said, camera phones were being used much more to capture a moment and were being w

oven into everyday life.

tech 213.txt Search sites get closer to users Search site  
s want to get to know you better. Not content with providing access to the mil  
lions of websites, many now offer ways that do a better job of remembering, cat  
aloguing and managing all the information you come across. Some of the latest t  
o update their search systems are Ask Jeeves and Blinkx, which have both releas  
ed a series of utilities that try to help people get more from the web. The fut  
ure is all about developing your own personal web", " said Tony Macklin, spokesm  
an for Ask Jeeves. Mr Macklin said that too often when people use a search eng  
ine it was like the first time they ever used it, because there was no memory o  
f what they had searched for before. Each time you go back in you have to start  
all over again", " he said. The series of updates to its service, collected unde  
r the My Ask Jeeves banner, would help people remember where they had been befo  
re. Ask Jeeves has added the ability to save"" websites of interest so the nex  
t time a users visits the site they can search through the sites they have prev  
iously found. Sites saved in this way can be arranged in folders and have notes  
attached to them to explain why they were saved. Mr Macklin said many people wa  
nted to save sites they had seen but did not want to add them to their bookmark  
s or favourites not least because such lists cannot be easily searched. On aver  
age", said Mr Macklin, " users conduct between five and 10 searches per day and  
the tools in My Ask Jeeves should stop them having to do searches twice and get  
to what they want much more easily. Under My Ask Jeeves users can search the we  
b or through the results they have already noted as interesting. ""It's about f  
inding again what you found before", " he said. The My Ask Jeeves service lets p  
eople store up to a 1000 web links or 5000 if they sign up to the free service.  
By way of comparison Google's Desktop search tool catalogues search histories i  
nformally and lets people look through the sites they have visited. At the sam  
e time, search start-up Blinkx has released a second version of its eponymous s  
oftware. Blinkx is desktop search software that watches what someone is working  
on, be it a document or e-mail, and suggests websites, video clips, blogs or do  
cuments on a PC that are relevant to it. Since Blinkx launched it has faced in  
creased competition from firms such as Google, Copernic, Enfish, X1 and Apple a  
ll of whom now have programs that let people search their PC as well as the we  
b. The competition has validated the problem we tackle", " said Suranga Chandrat  
illake, co-founder of Blinkx. In the latest release of Blinkx, the company has  
added what it calls smart folders. Once created the folders act as persistent q  
ueries that automatically sweep the web for pages related to their subject and  
catalogues relevant information, documents or incoming e-mails, on hard drives  
too. What users do with Blinkx and other desktop search engines shows that peop  
le tend to be very promiscuous in their use of search engines. Blinkx users do  
not stop using other web search systems", he said. They might use Google to loo  
k up a company, or Yahoo for travel because they know they are good at that, he  
said. The classic thing we have seen recently, is people using Blinkx to look a  
t the things they have searched on," he said. The variety of ways to search dat  
a was only helping users, said Mr Chandratillake and that it was likely that in  
the future people would use different ones for different tasks.

tech 214.txt Anti-spam screensaver scrapped A contentious  
campaign to bump up the bandwidth bills of spammers by flooding their sites wit  
h data has been dropped. Lycos Europe's Make Love, Not Spam campaign began in  
late November but its tactics proved controversial. Lycos has shut down the cam  
paign saying it had been started to stimulate debate about anti-spam measures a  
nd had now achieved this aim. The anti-spammer screensaver came under fire for  
encouraging vigilante activity and skirting the edge of the law. Through the M  
ake Love, Not Spam website, users could download a screensaver that would endle

ssly request data from the net sites mentioned in many junk mail messages. More than 100,000 people are thought to have downloaded the screensaver that Lycos Europe offered. The company wanted to keep the spam sites running at near total capacity to make it much less financially attractive to spammers to operate the sites. But the campaign was controversial from the moment it kicked off and many net veterans criticised it for using spamming-type tactics against the senders of junk mail. Some net service firms began blocking access to the Lycos Europe site in protest at the action. Monitoring firm Netcraft found that the anti-spam campaign was proving a little too successful. According to response-time figures gathered by Netcraft, some of the sites that the screensaver targeted were being knocked offline by the constant data requests. In a statement from Lycos Europe announcing the scrapping of the scheme, the company denied that this was its fault. There is nothing to suggest that "Make Love", Not Spam has brought down any of the sites that it has targeted, it said. At the time that Netcraft measured the sites it claims may have been brought down, they were not in fact part of the Make Love, Not Spam attack cycle, it added. The statement issued by Lycos also said that the centralised database it used ensured that traffic to the target sites left them with 5% spare capacity. The idea was simply to slow spammers' sites and this was achieved by the campaign," the company said. Many security organisations said users should not participate in the Lycos Europe campaign. The closure comes only days after the campaign was suspended following the outbreak of criticism.

tech 215.txt Europe backs digital TV lifestyle How people receive their digital entertainment in the future could change, following the launch of an ambitious European project. In Nice last week, the European Commission announced its Networked & Electronic Media (NEM) initiative. Its broad scope stretches from the way media is created, through each of the stages of its distribution, to its playback. The Commission wants people to be able to locate the content they desire and have it delivered seamlessly, when on the move, at home or at work, no matter who supplies the devices, network, content, or content protection scheme. More than 120 experts were in Nice to share the vision of interconnected future and hear pledges of support from companies such as Nokia, Intel, Philips, Alcatel, France Telecom, Thomson and Telefonica. It might initially appear to be surprising that companies in direct competition are keen to work together. But again and again, speakers stated they could not see incompatible, stand-alone solutions working. A long-term strategy for the evolution and convergence of technologies and services would be required. The European Commission is being pragmatic in its approach. They have identified that many groups have defined the forms of digital media in the areas that NEM encompasses. The NEM approach is to take a serious look at what is available and what is in the pipeline, pick out the best, bring them together and identify where the gaps are. Where it finds holes, it will develop standards to fill them. What is significant is that such a large and powerful organisation has stated its desire for digital formats to be open to all and work on any gadget. This is bound to please, if not surprise, many individuals and user organisations who feel that the wishes of the holder of rights to content are normally considered over and above those of the consumer. Many feel that the most difficult and challenging area for the Commission will be to identify a solution for different Digital Rights Management (DRM) schemes. Currently DRM solutions are incompatible, locking certain types of purchased content, making them unplayable on all platforms. With the potential of having a percentage of every media transaction that takes place globally, the prize for being the supplier of the world's dominant DRM scheme is huge. Although entertainment is an obvious first step, it will encompass the remote provisions of healthcare, energy efficiency and control of the smart home.

e. The 10-year plan brings together the work of many currently running research projects that the EC has been funding for a number of years. Simon Perry is the editor of the Digital Lifestyles website, which covers the impact of technology on media

tech 216.txt TV future in the hands of viewers With home theatre systems, plasma high-definition TVs, and digital video recorders moving into the living room, the way people watch TV will be radically different in five years' time. That is according to an expert panel which gathered at the annual Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas to discuss how these new technologies will impact one of our favourite pastimes. With the US leading the trend, programmes and other content will be delivered to viewers via home networks, through cable, satellite, telecoms companies, and broadband service providers to front rooms and portable devices. One of the most talked-about technologies of CES has been digital and personal video recorders (DVR and PVR). These set-top boxes, like the US's TiVo and the UK's Sky+ system, allow people to record, store, play, pause and forward watch TV programmes when they want. Essentially, the technology allows for much more personalised TV. They are also being built-in to high-definition TV sets, which are big business in Japan and the US, but slower to take off in Europe because of the lack of high-definition programming. Not only can people forward watch through adverts, they can also forget about abiding by network and channel schedules, putting together their own a-la-carte entertainment. But some US networks and cable and satellite companies are worried about what it means for them in terms of advertising revenues as well as brand identity"" and viewer loyalty to channels. Although the US leads in this technology at the moment", it is also a concern that is being raised in Europe," particularly with the growing uptake of services like Sky+. ""What happens here today", we will see in nine months to a year's time in the UK," Adam Hume, the BBC Broadcast's futurologist told the BBC News website. For the likes of the BBC, there are no issues of lost advertising revenue yet. It is a more pressing issue at the moment for commercial UK broadcasters, but brand loyalty is important for everyone. We will be talking more about content brands rather than network brands", said Tim Hanlon, from brand communications firm Starcom MediaVest. The reality is that with broadband connections", anybody can be the producer of content." He added: ""The challenge now is that it is hard to promote a programme with so much choice." What this means", said Stacey Jolna, senior vice president of TV Guide TV group, is that the way people find the content they want to watch has to be simplified for TV viewers. It means that networks, in US terms, or channels could take a leaf out of Google's book and be the search engine of the future, instead of the scheduler to help people find what they want to watch. This kind of channel model might work for the younger iPod generation which is used to taking control of their gadgets and what they play on them. But it might not suit everyone, the panel recognised. Older generations are more comfortable with familiar schedules and channel brands because they know what they are getting. They perhaps do not want so much of the choice put into their hands," Mr Hanlon suggested. ""On the other end", you have the kids just out of diapers who are pushing buttons already - everything is possible and available to them, said Mr Hanlon. Ultimately," the consumer will tell the market they want." Of the 50",000 new gadgets and technologies being showcased at CES, many of them are about enhancing the TV-watching experience. High-definition TV sets are everywhere and many new models of LCD (Liquid Crystal Display) TVs have been launched with DVR capability built into them, instead of being external boxes. One such example launched at the show is Humax's 26-inch LCD TV with an 80-hour TiVo DVR and DVD recorder. One of the US's biggest satellite TV companies, DirectTV, has even launched its own branded DVR at the show with 100-hours of r

ecording capability, instant replay, and a search function. The set can pause and rewind TV for up to 90 hours. And Microsoft chief Bill Gates announced in his pre-show keynote speech a partnership with TiVo, called TiVoToGo, which means people can play recorded programmes on Windows PCs and mobile devices. All these reflect the increasing trend of freeing up multimedia so that people can watch what they want, when they want.

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,,,,"tech 217.txt Cyber criminals step up the pace So-called phishing attacks that try to trick people into handing over confidential details have boomed in 2004", say security experts. The number of phishing e-mail messages stopped by security firm MessageLabs has risen more than tenfold in less than 12 months. In 2004 it detected more than 18 million phishing e-mail messages. Other statistics show that in 2004 73% of all e-mail was spam and one in 16 messages were infected with a virus. In its end-of-year report, MessageLabs said that phishing had become the top security threat and most popular form of attack among cyber criminals. In September 2003, MessageLabs caught only 273 phishing e-mails that tried to make people visit fake versions of the websites run by real banks and financial organisations. But by September 2004 it was stopping more than two million phishing related e-mail messages per month. Worryingly, said the firm, phishing gangs were using increasingly sophisticated techniques to harvest useful information such as login details or personal data. Older attacks relied on users not spotting the fact that the site they were visiting was fake," but more recent phishing e-mails simply try to steal details as soon as a message is opened. Other phishing scams try to recruit innocent people into acting as middlemen for laundering money or goods bought with stolen credit cards. ""E-mail security attacks remain unabated in their persistence and ferocity", said Mark Sunner, chief technology officer at MessageLabs. In just 12 months phishing has firmly established itself as a threat to any organisation or individual conducting business online", he said. Mr Sunner said MessageLabs was starting to see some phishing attacks become very focused on one company or organisation. Already particular businesses are threatened and blackmailed, indicating a shift from the random, shotgun approach, to customised attacks designed to take advantage of the perceived weaknesses of some businesses," he said. Although phishing attacks grew substantially throughout 2004, viruses and spam remain popular with cyber-criminals and vandals. One of the biggest outbreaks took place in January when the MyDoom virus started circulating. To date the company has caught more than 60 million copies of the virus. Also up this year was the amount of spam in circulation. In 2003 only 40% of messages were spam. But by the end of 2004, almost three-quarters of messages were junk.

tech 218.txt Gritty return for Prince of Persia Still bas king in the relatively recent glory of last year's Sands Of Time, the dashing Prince of Persia is back in Warrior Within, and in a more bellicose mood than last time. This sequel gives the franchise a grim, gritty new look and ramps up the action and violence. As before, you control the super-athletic prince from a third-person perspective. The time-travelling plot hinges on the Dahaka, an all-consuming monster pursuing our hero through the ages. The only way to dispel it is to turn back the clock again and kill the sultry Empress Of Time before she ever creates the Sands of Time that caused the great beast's creation. Studiously structured though this back story is, everything boils down to old-fashioned fantasy gameplay which proves, on the whole, as dependable as it needs to be. Ever since the series' then-groundbreaking beginnings on the Commodore Amiga, Prince of Persia has always been about meticulously-animated acrobatic moves, that provide an energetic blend of leaping preposterously between pieces of

scenery and lopping off enemies' body parts. Those flashy moves are back in full evidence, and tremendous fun to perform and perfect. Combining them at speed is the best fun, although getting a handle of doing so takes practice and plenty of skill. Until you reach that point, it is a haphazard business. All too often, you will perform a stunning triple somersault, pirouette off a wall, knock out three enemies in one glorious swoop, before plummeting purposefully over a cliff to your doom. That in turn can mean getting set back an annoyingly long distance, for you can only save at the fountains dotted along the path. The expected fiendish puzzles are all present and correct, but combat is what is really been stepped up, and there is more of it than before. The game's developers have combined acrobatic flair with gruesome slaying techniques in some wonderfully imaginative ways. Slicing foes down the middle is one particularly entertaining method of seeing them off. Warrior Within is a very slick package; the game's intro movie is so phenomenally good that it actually does an ultimate disservice once the game itself commences. It is on a par with the jaw-dropping opening sequence of Onimusha 3 earlier this year, and when the game begins, it is something of an anti-climax. That said, the graphics are excellent, and indeed among the most striking and satisfying elements of the game. The music is probably the worst aspect - a merit-free heavy metal soundtrack that you will swiftly want to turn off. There is something strangely unsatisfying about the game. Perhaps precisely because its graphics and mechanics are so good that the story and overall experience are not quite as engaging as they should be. Somehow it adds up to less than the sum of its parts, and is more technically impressive than it is outright enjoyable. But that is not to say Warrior Within is anything other than a superb adventure that most will thoroughly enjoy. It just does not quite take the character to the new heights that might have been hoped for.

tech 219.txt Disney backs Sony DVD technology A next generation DVD technology backed by Sony has received a major boost. Film giant Disney says it will produce its future DVDs using Sony's Blu-ray Disc technology, but has not ruled out a rival format developed by Toshiba. The two competing DVD formats, Blu-ray developed by Sony and others, and Toshiba's HD-DVD, have been courting top film studios for several months. The next generation of DVDs promise very high quality pictures and sound, as well as a lot of data. Both technologies use a blue laser to write information. It has a shorter wavelength so more data can be stored. Disney is the latest studio to announce which technology it is backing in a format battle which mirrors the 1980s Betamax versus VHS war. Sony lost out to JVC in that fight. The current battle for Hollywood's hearts and minds is a crucial one because high-definition films will bring in billions of revenue and the studios would prefer to use one standard. Last month, Paramount, Universal and Warner Brothers said they were opting for the Toshiba and NEC-backed format, HD-DVD high-definition discs. Those studios currently produce about 45% of DVD content. Sony Pictures Entertainment and MGM Studios have already staked their allegiance with the Blu-ray Disc Association, whose members also include technology companies Dell, Samsung and Matsushita. Twentieth Century Fox is still to announce which technology it will be supporting. If Fox decided to go with Blu-ray too, it would mean the format would have a 47% share of DVD content. Disney said its films would be available on the Blu-ray format when DVD players for the standard went on sale on North America and Japan, expected in 2006. Universal is to start producing films on the HD-DVD format in 2005, and Paramount will start releasing titles using the standard in 2006. Toshiba expects sales of HD-DVDs to reach 300bn yen (\$2.9bn, £1.5bn) by 2010.

tech 220.txt Britons growing 'digitally obese' Gadget lovers are so hungry for digital data many are carrying the equivalent of 10 truckloads full of paper in weight". Music", images, e-mails, and texts are being hoar

ded on mobiles, cameras laptops and PDAs (Personal Digital Assistants), a Toshiba study found. It found that more than 60% kept 1,000 to 2,000 music files on their devices," making the UK ""digitally fat"". ""Virtual weight"" measurements are based on research by California Institute of Technology professor Roy Williams. He calculated physical comparisons for digital data in the mid-1990s. He worked out that one gigabyte (1",0,0,000 bytes) was the equivalent of a pick-up truck filled with paper. The amount of data people are squirreling away on their gadgets is clearly a sign that people are finding more things to do with their shiny things. If digital hoarding habits continue on this scale," people could be carrying around a ""digitally obese"" 20 gigabytes by next year. ""Britain has become a nation of information hoarders with a ferocious appetite for data," said Martin Larsson, general manager of Toshiba's European storage device division. As storage capabilities increase and the features and functionalities of mobile devices expand to support movie files and entire libraries of multi-media content", we will all become virtually obese," he told the BBC News web site. The survey reflects the increasing trend for portable devices with built-in hard drives like music and media players from Apple, Creative Labs, Archos, iRiver and others. This trend is set to grow, according to analysts. They suggest the number of hard drives in consumer electronics gadgets could grow from 17 million last year to 55 million in 2006. Consumers are driving the move towards smaller devices that have greater functionality", and industry is trying to keep up, said Mr Larsson. People are looking for more than just phone calls and text messages on the move, they want things like web browsing, e-mailing, music," photos and more." Many are finding memory keys and memory sticks are simply not big enough to hold everything. ""Floppies and memory keys have their place", but they don't have anything like the capacity or flexibility of a hard drive so are unable to meet the demand for more and more storage capacity in consumer devices," said Mr Larsson. The cost of making hard drives has dropped and is continuing to do so because of improved technologies so they are proving to be more cost-effective than other forms of memory, he added. The amount of data that can be stored has grown by 400% in the last three years, while the cost for every gigabyte has fallen by 80%. It is also getting easier to transfer files from one device to another, which has traditionally been a slow and problematic area. Transfer of data between different memory types has improved significantly in recent times", and will be further helped by the standards for hard drives which are currently being developed by the major manufacturers," said Mr Larsson. According to technology analysts IDC, a fifth of all hard drives produced will be used in consumer electronics by 2007.

tech 221.txt Halo 2 heralds traffic explosion The growing popularity of online gaming could spell problems for net service firms, warns network monitoring company Sandvine. It issued the warning following analysis which shows that traffic on the Xbox game network increased fourfold on the launch day of Halo 2. The 9 November traffic explosion has continued into December, said Sandvine. Service providers now need to make sure that their networks can cope with the increasing demands for bandwidth. As well as being a popular single-player title, Halo 2 can be connected to Microsoft's subscription-based broadband network, Xbox Live. Gamers who want to play online can create their own clan, or team, and take on others to see how well they compare. But the surge in numbers and huge demands for bandwidth should be a wake-up call to the industry which must ensure that their networks can cope with the increases in traffic, said Sandvine's chief technology officer Marc Morin. In a bid to cope and ease congestion, providers are increasingly making their networks intelligent, finding out who is using bandwidth and for what. It could become common to charge people for the amount of bandwidth they use. The explosion in Xbox Live traff

ic attributed to Halo 2 should be seen as a clarion call", he said. ISPs need to enhance the broadband experience for these high-end users by prioritising or reserving bandwidth for games," he added. One of the main factors that spoils online gaming is lag"" in which there is a noticeable delay between a gamer clicking on a mouse or keyboard and what happens in the online gaming world. Gamers tend to migrate toward networks with the lowest ""lag"". Analysing traffic will become increasingly important for service providers if they are to hold on to bandwidth-hungry gamers said Lindsay Schroth", an analyst with research firm The Yankee Group. ""In the competitive broadband environment", operators need to differentiate the way they offer access to services like live-play gaming," she said. In countries such as Korea, which has high levels of fast net connections to homes, online gaming is hugely popular.

tech 222.txt Media gadgets get moving Pocket-sized devices that let people carry around video and images are set to have a big year in 2005, according to industry experts. Last year saw the emergence of portable media players, such as the Windows-based Creative Zen portable media player, the Samsung Yepp, the iRiver PMC-100, and the Archos AV400 series among others. But this year, they are set to get smarter and more connected, to allow people to find more video to watch on them. Archos launched its latest range of its Linux-based portable media devices at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas on Friday. Dubbed the Pocket Media Assistant PMA430, it crucially has wi-fi capability built-in for the first time. Consumers are showing a great thirst for devices that store all their media in one place for anywhere access", said Henri Crulas, chief of Archos. And now those consumers can stay connected and productive at the same time." Archos said the focus for the device is to be the second gadget in people's pockets", after the mobile. Unlike Windows-based players, the Archos AV400 series devices have always been able to record from any video source, such as TVs, as well as playback. The content put onto the devices is copy protected so cannot then be swapped to another device. Recording is perhaps a crucial functionality for those who have not seen the point of portable video if there is not a lot of video to watch on it. And wi-fi connectivity opens up the possibility of content delivery via a high-speed wireless link. Archos also announced that it would open up the software development kit to Linux developers so that more applications could be created for the device. Microsoft also made some announcements in the portable media arena at CES, primarily for US consumers though. It has agreed a content deal with personal video recorder company TiVo, which Bill Gates also showcased in his keynote speech at CES. The TiVo To Go service means that US consumers will be able to take any programmes they record on their TiVos and transfer it for free to watch on any of the Windows-based portable media players or smartphones. It also said it had launched a service with MTV to let people watch Comedy Central, VH1 and Country Music TV on its devices. And a service is launching with MSN to provide people with shortened versions of news, entertainment and other video on a subscription basis for download via the PC onto the portable devices. But the ability to record directly from TV, VCR, and digital cable and satellite boxes, which Windows-based devices do not offer, certainly gives people more content to watch on the go too. The increased capability of these devices, and the content deals that are being done," may go some way to persuading people to use them. Recent research by Jupiter suggested that people would prefer a device that was dedicated to music. Only 13% of Europeans wanted to watch video while on the move. More seemed interested in spending their cash on music-only devices. ""This year", we are ready for an explosion of portable media, Microsoft's Mike Coleman told the BBC News website. We are very bullish about it. The fact that I can put photos on here too and share them is super-cool to the consumer," he added. The fact that Europeans

are far larger public transport users than Americans is one reason why portable media will take off in the coming year too. There is a burgeoning market there for commuters to watch news and other programmes on their way to work. Although Microsoft's content distribution deals are for the US market at the moment, talks were always on-going"" with European content suppliers to offer similar services. Various rights management issues have to be ironed out first however. But that does not prevent people from finding ways to create their own content to share online and swap on portable devices", particularly via those which are wi-fi enabled. The possibility is open for non-professional makers of video and audio to take advantage of the growing portable media market to distribute their work. CES, which runs from 6 to 9 January, showcases more than 50,000 new gadgets that will be hitting the shelves in 2005.

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"tech 223.txt Satellite mapping aids Darfur relief Aid workers trying to house"," feed and clothe millions of homeless refugees in the Sudanese region of Darfur are getting a helping hand from advanced mapping technology. A European consortium of companies and university groups known as Respond is working to provide accurate and up to date maps. The aim is to overcome some of the huge logistical challenges in getting supplies to where they are needed. Respond is using satellite imagery to produce accurate maps that can be used in the field rapidly. ""Respond has produced very detailed maps for example for the road networks", for the rivers and for the villages, to more large-scale maps useful for very general planning purposes," said Einar Bjorgo from Unosat, the UN satellite mapping organisation that is part of the Respond consortium. The group uses satellites from Nasa, the European Space Agency and the Disaster Monitoring Constellation. The satellite data is transmitted to ground stations. From there, the information makes its way to Respond organisations that specialise in interpreting such data. You have to convert the data into images", then the interpreter has to convert all this into crisis, damage, or situation maps," said Stefan Voigt, who works in the remote sensing department of one of those organisations, the German Aerospace Centre. This kind of detailed analysis usually takes a couple of months but Respond gets it done in about 12 hours. Our users are usually not so much familiar with reading satellite imagery", reading satellite maps, so it's our task to transfer the data into information that non-technical people can read and understand easily and very, very efficiently," said Mr Voigt. Respond supplies maps to aid groups via the web, and on compact disc. But the best map is one you can hold in your hands, especially in remote areas where internet connections and laptops are scarce. A map is a working document", explains Herbert Hansen of Respond's Belgian partner Keyobs. You need to use it, you need to write on it, correct, give feedback and so on," so you need paper to write on. ""We print maps", we laminate the maps, we encapsulate the maps if needed so you can take a shower with the map," it's completely protected." Humanitarian groups in Darfur have been making good use of Respond's maps. They have come in especially handy during Sudan's rainy season", when normally dry riverbeds, or wadis," became flooded. ""These wadis had a very small amount of flooding", generally, in terms of depth, but greatly impeded the transport capabilities and capacities of the humanitarian groups on the ground," says Stephen Candillon of Respond imaging partner Sertit. Respond's rapid imaging has allowed aid groups to find ways around the wadis, allowing them to mark on their maps which roads were washed out at which times. Aid groups say that combination of satellite technology and on-the-ground observation helped keep relief flowing to those who needed it. Clark Boyd is technology correspondent for The World, a BBC World Service and WGBH-Boston co-production

tech 224.txt Disney backs Sony DVD technology A next generation DVD technology backed by Sony has received a major boost. Film giant Disney says it will produce its future DVDs using Sony's Blu-ray Disc technology, but has not ruled out a rival format developed by Toshiba. The two competing DVD formats, Blu-ray developed by Sony and others, and Toshiba's HD-DVD, have been courting top film studios for several months. The next generation of DVDs promises very high quality pictures and sound, as well as a lot of data. Both technologies use a blue laser to write information. It has a shorter wavelength so more data can be stored. Disney is the latest studio to announce which technology it is backing in a format battle which mirrors the 1980s Betamax versus VHS war. Sony lost out to JVC in that fight. The current battle for Hollywood's hearts and minds is a crucial one because high-definition films will bring in billions of revenue and the studios would prefer to use one standard. Last month, Paramount, Universal and Warner Brothers said they were opting for the Toshiba and NEC-backed format, HD-DVD high-definition discs. Those studios currently produce about 45% of DVD content. Sony Pictures Entertainment and MGM Studios have already staked their allegiance with the Blu-ray Disc Association, whose members also include technology companies Dell, Samsung and Matsushita. Twentieth Century Fox is still to announce which technology it will be supporting. If Fox decided to go with Blu-ray too, it would mean the format would have a 47% share of DVD content. Disney said its films would be available on the Blu-ray format when DVD players for the standard went on sale on North America and Japan, expected in 2006. Universal is to start producing films on the HD-DVD format in 2005, and Paramount will start releasing titles using the standard in 2006. Toshiba expects sales of HD-DVDs to reach 300bn yen (\$2.9bn, £1.5bn) by 2010.

tech 225.txt Lifestyle 'governs mobile choice' Faster, better or funkier hardware alone is not going to help phone firms sell more handsets, research suggests. Instead, phone firms keen to get more out of their customers should not just be pushing the technology for its own sake. Consumers are far more interested in how handsets fit in with their lifestyle than they are in screen size, onboard memory or the chip inside, shows an in-depth study by telecommunications company Ericsson. Historically in the industry there has been too much focus on using technology", " said Dr Michael Bjorn, senior advisor on mobile media at Ericsson's consumer and enterprise lab. We have to stop saying that these technologies will change their lives", he said. We should try to speak to consumers in their own language and help them see how it fits in with what they are doing," he told the BBC News website. For the study, Ericsson interviewed 14,000 mobile phone owners on the ways they use their phone. People's habits remain the same", " said Dr Bjorn. They just move the activity into the mobile phone as it's a much more convenient way to do it." " One good example of this was diary-writing among younger people", he said. While diaries have always been popular, a mobile phone -- especially one equipped with a camera -- helps them keep it in a different form. Youngsters' use of text messages also reflects their desire to chat and keep in contact with friends and again just lets them do it in a slightly changed way. Dr Bjorn said that although consumers do what they always did but use a phone to do it," the sheer variety of what the new handset technologies make possible does gradually drive new habits and lifestyles. Ericsson's research has shown that consumers divide into different ""tribes"" that use phones in different ways. Dr Bjorn said groups dubbed ""pioneers"" and ""materialists"" were most interested in trying new things and were behind the start of many trends in phone use. ""For instance", " he said, older people are using SMS much more than they did five years ago." " This was because younger users", often the children of ageing mobile owners, encouraged older people to try it so they could keep in touch. Another factor governing the speed of ch

ange in mobile phone use was the simple speed with which new devices are bought by pioneers and materialists. Only when about 25% of people have handsets with new innovations on them, such as cameras, can consumers stop worrying that if they send a picture message the person at the other end will be able to see it. Once this significant number of users is passed, use of new innovations tends to take off. Dr Bjorn said that early reports of camera phone usage in Japan seemed to imply that the innovation was going to be a flop. However, he said, now 45% of the Japanese people Ericsson questioned use their camera phone at least once a month. In 2003 the figure was 29%. Similarly, "across Europe the numbers of people taking snaps with cameras is starting to rise. In 2003 only 4% of the people in the UK took a phonecam snap at least once a month. Now the figure is 14%. Similar rises have been seen in many other European nations. Dr Bjorn said that people also used their camera phones in very different ways to film and even digital cameras. "Usage patterns for digital cameras are almost exactly replacing usage patterns for analogue cameras", he said. Digital cameras tend to be used on significant events such as weddings, holidays and birthdays. By contrast, he said, camera phones were being used much more to capture a moment and were being woven into everyday life.

tech 226.txt Millions to miss out on the net By 2025, 40% of the UK's population will still be without internet access at home, says a study. Around 23 million Britons will miss out on a wide range of essential services such as education and medical information, predicts the report by telecoms giant BT. It compares to 27 million, or 50%, of the UK, who are not currently online. The idea that the digital divide will evaporate with time is wishful thinking "", the report concludes. The study calls on the government and telecoms industry to come up with new ways to lure those that have been bypassed by the digital revolution. Although the percentage of Britons without home access will have fallen slightly, those that remain digital refuseniks will miss out on more, the report suggests. As more and more everyday tasks move online and offline services become less comprehensive, the divide will become more obvious and more burdensome for those that have not got net access," it predicts. The gap between ""have-nets"" and ""have-nots"" has been much talked about", but predictions about how such a divide will affect future generations has been less discussed. BT set out to predict future patterns based on current information and taking account of the way technology is changing. Optimists who predict that convergence and the emergence of more user-friendly technology will bridge the digital divide could be way off mark," the report suggests. "Internet access on other devices tends to be something taken up by those who already have it", said Adrian Hosford, director of corporate responsibility at BT. Costs of internet access have fallen dramatically and coverage in remote areas have vastly improved over the last year but the real barrier remains psychological. There is a hard rump of have-nots who are not engaging with the net. They don't have the motivation or skills or perceive the benefits", said Mr Hosford. As now, the most disadvantaged groups are likely to remain among low income families, the older generation and the disabled. Those on low incomes will account for a quarter of the digital have-nots, the disabled will make up 16% and the elderly nearly a third by 2025, the report forecasts. Organisations such as BT have a responsibility to help tackle the problem, said Mr Hosford. The telco has seen positive results with its Everybody Online project which offers internet access to people in eight deprived communities around Britain. In one area of Cornwall with high levels of unemployment, online training helped people rewrite CVs and learn skills to get new jobs, explained Mr Hosford. Such grassroot activity addressing the specific needs of individual communities is essential is the problem of the digital divide is to be overcome, he said. If we don't address this problem no

w", it will get a lot worse and people will find it more difficult to find jobs, education opportunities will be limited and they'll simply not be able to keep up with society," he said. The Alliance for Digital Inclusion, an independent body with members drawn from government, industry and the voluntary sector has recently been set up to tackle some of the issues faced by the digital refugees.

tech 227.txt Spam e-mails tempt net shoppers Computer users across the world continue to ignore security warnings about spam e-mails and are being lured into buying goods, a report suggests. More than a quarter have bought software through spam e-mails and 24% have bought clothes or jewellery. As well as profiting from selling goods or services and driving advertising traffic, organised crime rings can use spam to glean personal information. The Business Software Alliance (BSA) warned that people should stay alert""."Many online consumers don't consider the true motives of spammers", said Mike Newton, a spokesperson for the BSA which commissioned the survey. By selling software that appears to be legitimate in genuine looking packaging or through sophisticated websites"," spammers are hiding spyware without consumers' knowledge. ""Once the software is installed on PCs and networks"," information that is given over the internet can be obtained and abused."" The results also showed that the proportion of people reading - or admitting to reading - and taking advantage of adult entertainment spam e-mails is low", at one in 10. The research, which covered 6,000 people in six countries and their attitudes towards junk e-mails, revealed that Brazilians were the most likely to read spam. A third of them read unsolicited junk e-mail and 66% buy goods or services after receiving spam. The French were the second most likely to buy something (48%)," with 44% of Britons taking advantage of products and services. This was despite 38% of people in all countries being worried about their net security because of the amount of spam they get. More than a third of respondents said they were concerned that spam e-mails contained viruses or programs that attempted to collect personal information. ""Both industry and the media have helped to raise awareness of the issues that surround illegitimate e-mail", helping to reduce the potential financial damage and nuisance from phishing attacks and spoof websites," said William Plante, director of corporate security and fraud protection at security firm Symantec. At the same time", consumers need to continue exercising caution and protect themselves from harm with a mixture of spam filters," spyware detection software and sound judgement.""

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tech 228.txt More power to the people says HP The digital revolution is focused on letting people tell and share their own stories", according to Carly Fiorina, chief of technology giant Hewlett Packard. The job of firms such as HP now, she said in a speech at the Consumer Electronics Show (CES), was to ensure digital and physical worlds fully converged. She said the goal for 2005 was to make people the centre of technology. CES showcases 50,000 new gadgets that will be hitting the shelves in 2005. The tech-fest, the largest of its kind in the world," runs from 6 to 9 January. ""The digital revolution is about the democratisation of technology and the experiences it makes possible", she told delegates. Revolution has always been about giving power to the people." She added: ""The real story of the digital revolution is not just new products", but the millions of experiences made possible and stories that millions can tell."" Part of giving people more control has been about the freeing up of content", such as images, video and music. Crucial to this has been the effort to make devices that speak to each other better so that content can be more easily transferred from one device, such as a digital camera, to others, suc

h as portable media players. A lot of work still needs to be done, however, to sort out compatibility issues and standards within the technology industry so that gadgets just work seamlessly, she said. Ms Fiorina's talk also touted the way technology is being designed to focus on lifestyle, fashion and personalisation, something she sees as key to what people want. Special guest, singer Gwen Stefani, joined her on-stage to promote her own range of HP digital cameras which Ms Stefani has helped design and which are heavily influenced by Japanese youth culture. The digital cameras, which are due to go on sale in the US by the summer, are based on the HP 607 model. The emphasis on personalisation and lifestyle is a big theme at this year's CES, with tiny, wearable MP3 players at every turn and rainbow hues giving colour to everything. Ms Fiorina also announced that HP was working with Nokia to launch a visual radio service for mobiles, which would launch in Europe early this year. The service will let people listen to radio on their mobiles and download relevant content, like a track's ringtone, simultaneously. The service is designed to make mobile radio more interactive. Among the other new products she showcased was the Digital Media Hub, a big upgrade to HP's Digital Entertainment Centre. Coming out in the autumn in the US, the box is a networked, high-definition TV, cable set-top box, digital video recorder and DVD recorder. It has a removable hard drive cartridge, memory card slots, and Light Scribe labelling software which lets people design and print customised DVD labels and covers. It is designed to contain all a household's digital media, such as pre-recorded TV shows, pictures, videos and music so it can all be managed in one place. The hub reflects the increasing move to re-box the PC so that it can work as part of other key centres of entertainment. Research suggests that about 258 million images are saved and shared every day, equating to 94 billion a year. Eighty per cent of those remain on cameras. Media hubs are designed to encourage people to organise them on one box. Ms Fiorina was one of several keynote speakers, who also included Microsoft chief Bill Gates, to set out what major technology companies think people will be doing with technologies and gadgets in the next 12 months. In a separate announcement during the keynote speech, Ms Fiorina said that HP would be partnering MTV to replace this year's MTV Asia music award. MTV's Asia Aid will be held in Bangkok on 3 February, and is aimed at helping to raise money for the Asian tsunami disaster.

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"tech 229.txt Robotic pods take on car design A new breed of wearable robotic vehicles that envelop drivers are being developed by Japanese car giant Toyota. The company's vision for the single passenger in the 21st Century involves the driver cruising by in a four-wheeled leaf-like device or strolling along encased in an egg-shaped cocoon that walks upright on two feet. Both these prototypes will be demonstrated", along with other concept vehicles and helper robots, at the Toyota stand at the Expo 2005 in Aichi, Japan, in March 2005. The models are being positioned as so-called personal mobility devices," which have few limits. The open leaf-like ""i-unit"" vehicle is the latest version of the concept which the company introduced last year. Built using environmentally friendly plant-based materials", the single passenger unit is equipped with intelligent transport system technologies that allow for safe autopilot driving in specially equipped lanes. The model allows the user to make tight on-the-spot turns," move upright amongst other people at low speeds and can be easily switched into a reclining position at higher speeds. Body colours can be customized to suit individual preferences and a personal recognition system offers both information and music. Also on display at the show will be the egg-shaped ""i-foot"". This is a two-legged mountable robot like device that can be c

ontrolled with a joystick. Standing at a height of well over seven feet (2.1 m etres)", "the unit can walk along at a speed of about 1.35km/h (0.83mph) and n avigate staircases into the bargain. Mounting and dismounting is accomplished wi th the aid of the bird-like legs that bend over backwards. ""They are clearly w hat we call concept vehicles", innovative ideas which have yet to be transforme d into potential products and which are a few years away from actual productio n, said Dr David Gillingwater from the Transport Studies Group at Loughborough University. They clearly have eye-catching appeal, which is in part the name of the game here, and are linked to the iMac and iPod-type niche which Apple have been responsible for developing and leading in recent years - new, different, h i-tech," image conscious products. ""As always with these concept vehicles", "i t is difficult to see 'who' they would appeal to and what their role would be i n the 'personal transport' marketplace." "The personal transport arena is taki ng on a new dimension though with futuristic devices that augment human capabil ities. Toyota's prototypes represent the latest incarnation of wearable exoskel etons in a vehicular form that is specially focused on transport. Powered robot ic exoskeletons have been the focus of much US military research over the years and Japan seems to have jumped onto the bandwagon with a wave of products being developed for specific applications. With an emerging range of devices targeted towards the ageing world population", care giving and the military, wearable ex oskeletons seem to represent a new line of future technologies that meet an ind ividual's particular mobility needs. While Toyota's prototypes are geared towar ds mass transport, the company says that the vehicles will allow the elderly an d the disabled to achieve independent mobility. Experts, though," are a bit sc eptical of their acceptance in this area. ""Those with arguably the greatest n eeds for this sort of assistance", now and certainly in the future, are the eld erly and infirm people," Dr Gillingwater told the BBC News website. You have to ask whether these sorts of vehicles will appeal to these groups." "Design consi derations also exist. Dr Erel Avineri", "of the Centre for Transport and Societ y at the University of the West of England in Bristol said: ""The design of the introduced mobility devices is not completely adjusted to the specific needs of the elderly and the disabled. ""For example", one problem that many older passe ngers experience is limited ability to rotate the neck and upper body," making it difficult to look to the side and back when backing up. ""It looks like the visual design of the device interior does not consider this need. This and othe r human-factors related issues in the design of such devices are not the only i ssues that should be considered", said Dr Avineri. In general," introducing a n ew technology requires the passenger to change behaviour patterns that have ser ved the older passenger for decades. Elderly users might not necessarily accept such innovation. ""This may be another barrier to the commercial success of suc h a vehicle." "Such single-person vehicles may find a relatively small market n iche and may be more suited towards specialised applications rather than revolu tionising the face of mass transport. ""The concept of personal mobility behind these sorts of innovations is great but they beg a huge number of questions", " said Dr Gillingwater. What's their range? How user-friendly will they really b e? What infrastructure will be required to allow these vehicles to be used. ""O verall I think these vehicles pose a number of important questions than provide answers or solutions." "

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tech 230.txt Hi-tech posters guide commuters Interactive  
posters are helping Londoners get around the city during the festive season. W hen interrogated with a mobile phone", the posters pass on a number that people can call to get information about the safest route home. Sited at busy undergro

und stations, the posters are fitted with an infra-red port that can beam information directly to a handset. The posters are part of Transport for London's Safe Travel at Night campaign. The campaign is intended to help Londoners, especially women, avoid trouble on the way home. In particular it aims to cut the number of sexual assaults by drivers of unlicensed minicabs. Nigel Marson, head of group marketing at Transport for London (TfL), " said the posters were useful because they work outside the mobile phone networks. " "They can work in previously inaccessible areas such as underground stations which is obviously a huge advantage in a campaign of this sort", he said. The posters will automatically beam information to any phone equipped with an IR port that is held close to the glowing red icon on the poster. We started with infra-red because there are a huge number IR phones out there," said Rachel Harker, spokeswoman for Hypertag which makes the technology fitted to the posters. It's a well established technology." " Hypertag is also now making a poster that uses short-range Bluetooth radio technology to swap data. Although the hypertags in the posters only pass on a phone number", Ms Harker said they can pass on almost any form of data including images, ring tones and video clips. She said that there are no figures for how many people are using the posters but a previous campaign run for a cosmetics firm racked up 12, "500 interactions. " "Before we ran a campaign there was a big question mark of: 'If we build it will they come?'" " she said. " "Now we know that", yes," they will." " The TfL campaign using the posters will run until Boxing Day.

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"tech 231.txt Parents face video game lessons Ways of ensuring that parents know which video games are suitable for children are to be considered by the games industry. The issue was discussed at a meeting between UK government officials", industry representatives and the British Board of Film Classification. It follows concerns that children may be playing games aimed at adults which include high levels of violence. In 2003, Britons spent £1,152m on games, more than ever before. And this Christmas, parents are expected to spend millions on video games and consoles. Violent games have been hit by controversy after the game Manhunt was blamed by the parents of 14-year-old Stefan Pakeerah, who was stabbed to death in Leicester in February. His mother, Giselle, said her son's killer, Warren Leblanc, 17 - who was jailed for life in September - had mimicked behaviour in the game. Police investigating Stefan's murderer dismissed its influence and said Manhunt was not part of its legal case. The issue of warnings on games for adults was raised on Sunday by Trade and Industry Secretary Patricia Hewitt. This was the focus of the talks between government officials," representatives from the games industry and the British Board of Film Classification. " "Adults can make informed choices about what games to play. Children can't and they deserve to be protected", " said Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell after the meeting. Industry will consider how to make sure parents know what games their children should and shouldn't play." " Roger Bennett", director general of Entertainment and Leisure Software Publishers Association," said: " "A number of initiatives were discussed at the meeting. " "They will be formulated to create specific proposals to promote greater understanding", recognition and awareness of the games rating system," ensuring that young people are not exposed to inappropriate content." " Among the possible measures could be a campaign to explain to parents that many games are made for an adult audience", as well as changes to the labelling of the games themselves. According to industry statistics, a majority of players are over 18, with the average age of a gamer being 29. Academics point out that there has not been any definitive research linking bloodthirsty games such as Manhunt with violent responses in players. I

n a report published this week for the Video Standards Council," Dr Guy Cumberbatch said: ""The research evidence on media violence causing harm to viewers is wildly exaggerated and does not stand up to scrutiny." Dr Cumberbatch", head of the social policy think tank, the Communications Research Group, reviewed the studies on the issue. He concluded that there was an absence of convincing research that media violence caused harm.

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"tech 232.txt BBC web search aids odd queries The BBC's online search engine was used a record amount in 2004", helping with enquiries both simple and strange. More than 277 million enquiries were made, asking for information of a wide range of subjects. The most requested search terms of 2004 included games, EastEnders, CBBC, John Peel, Harry Potter and Olympics. But there were many strange enquiries, including: what is a dog?, how do you say basketball? and what is the biggest collection of naval fluff? The search engine works by matching key words typed in to different web pages but many people still type in natural language questions. Here are some of the strangest queries of 2004 - spelling and grammar errors left untouched - and their possible solutions:  
- How to fold a serviette like an elf's boot?  
- How do I structure a French letter?  
- What is better one long vacation each year or several short vacations throughout the year?  
- What is so special about the Swiss?  
- What are the contemporary issues in nurses?  
- What is the number 4 in this number 40052308090?  
- What is up?  
- What is the name of James Martin's dog?  
Search engines are key to the way people use the internet. Companies such as Google have become of paramount importance as they dictate how people travel through websites while online.

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"tech 233.txt 2D Metal Slug offers retro fun Like some drill sergeant from the past", Metal Slug 3 is a wake-up call to today's gamers molly-coddled with slick visuals and fancy trimmings. With its hand-animated sprites and 2D side-scrolling, this was even considered retro when released in arcades four years ago. But a more frantic shooter you will not find at the end of your joypad this year. And yes, that includes Halo 2. Simply choose your grunt and wade through five 2D side-scrolling levels of the most hectic video game blasting you will ever encounter. It is also the toughest game you are likely to play, as hordes of enemies and few lives pile the pressure on. Players must battle soldiers, snowmen, zombies, giant crabs and aliens, not to mention the huge, screen-filling bosses that guard each of the five levels. The shoot-anything-that-moves gameplay is peppered with moments of old-school genius. Fans of robotic gastropods should note the title refers, instead, to the vast array of vehicles on offer in a game stuffed with bizarre hardware. Tanks, jets and submarines can be commandeered, as well as cannon-toting camels, elephants and ostriches - more weaponry on offer than in an acre of Iraq. Doling out justice is a joy thanks to ultra responsive controls, and while this is a tough nut to crack, it is addictive enough to have you gagging for that one last go. And at a mere £20, Metal Slug 3 is as cheap as sliced, fried spuds, as the man says. Of course, most of you will ignore this, lacking as it does the visual fireworks of modern blasters. But at a time when blockbuster titles offer only a fresh lick of paint in favour of real innovation, Metal Slug 3 is a fresh gasp of air from an era when the Xbox was not even a twinkle in Bill Gates' eye.

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"tech 234.txt Mobile multimedia slow to catch on There is

no doubt that mobile phones sporting cameras and colour screens are hugely popular. Consumers swapping old phones for slinkier", dinkier versions are thought to be responsible for a 26% increase in the number of phones sold during the third quarter of 2004, according to analysts Gartner More than 167 million handsets were sold between July and September 2004, a period that," according to Gartner analyst Carolina Milanesi is ""seldom strong"". But although consumers have mobiles that can take and send snaps", sounds and video clips few, so far, are taking the chance to do so. In fact, the numbers of people not taking and sending pictures, audio and video is growing. Figures gathered by Continental Research shows that 36% of British camera phone users have never sent a multimedia message (MMS), up from 7% in 2003. This is despite the fact that, during the same period, the numbers of camera phones in the UK more than doubled to 7.5 million. Getting mobile phone users to send multimedia messages is really important for operators keen to squeeze more cash out of their customers and offset the cost of subsidising the handsets people are buying. The problem they face, said Shailendra Jain, head of MMS firm Adamind," is educating people in how to send the multimedia messages using their funky handsets. ""Also"," he said, they have to simplify the interface so its not rocket science in terms of someone understanding it." Research bears out the suspicion that people are not sending multimedia messages because they do not know how to. According to Continental Research", 29% of the people it questioned said they were technophobes that tended to shy away from innovation. Only 11% regarded themselves as technically savvy enough to send a picture or video message. The fact that multimedia services are not interoperable across networks and phones only adds to people's reluctance to start sending them," said Mr Jain. ""They ask themselves: 'If I'm streaming video from one handset to another will it work?"" he said. ""There's a lot of user apprehension about that."" There are other deeper technical reasons why multimedia messages are not being pushed as strongly as they might. Andrew Bud", executive chairman of messaging firm Mblox," said mobile phone operators cap the number of messages that can be circulating at any one time for fear of overwhelming the system. ""The rate we can send MMS into the mobile network is fairly constant", he said. The reason for this is that there are finite capacities for data traffic on the second generation networks that currently have the most users. No-one wants to take the risk of swamping these relatively narrow channels so the number of MMS messages is capped, said Mr Bud. This has led to operators finding other technologies, particularly one known as Wap-push, to get multimedia to their customers. But when networks do find a good way to get multimedia to their customers, the results can be dramatic. Israeli technology firm Celltick has found a way to broadcast data across phone networks in a way that does not overwhelm existing bandwidth. One of the first firms to use the Celltick service is Hutch India, the largest mobile firm in the country. The broadcast system gets multimedia to customers via a rolling menu far faster than would be possible with other systems. While not multimedia messaging, such a system gets people used to seeing their phones as a device that can handle all different types of content. As a result 40% of the subscribers to the Hutch Alive, which uses Celltick's broadcast technology, regularly click for more pictures, sounds and images from the operator. Operators really need to start utilising this tool to reach their customers", said Yaron Toren, spokesman for Celltick. Until then, multimedia will be a message that is not getting through.

tech 235.txt Internet boom for gift shopping Cyberspace is becoming a very popular destination for Christmas shoppers. Forecasts predict that British people will spend £4bn buying gifts online during the festive season, an increase of 64% on 2003. Surveys also show that the average amount that people are spending is rising, as is the range of goods that they are happy to

o buy online. Savvy shoppers are also using the net to find the hot presents that are all but sold out in High Street stores. Almost half of the UK population now shop online according to figures collected by the Interactive Media in Retail Group which represents web retailers. About 85% of this group, 18m people, expect to do a lot of their Christmas gift buying online this year, reports the industry group. On average each shopper will spend £220 and Britons lead Europe in their affection for online shopping. Almost a third of all the money spent online this Christmas will come out of British wallets and purses compared to 29% from German shoppers and only 4% from Italian gift buyers. James Roper, director of the IMRG, said shoppers were now much happier to buy so-called big ticket items such as LCD television sets and digital cameras. Mr Roper added that many retailers were working hard to reassure consumers that online shopping was safe and that goods ordered as presents would arrive in time for Christmas. He advised consumers to give shops a little more time than usual to fulfil orders given that online buying is proving so popular. A survey by Hostway suggests that many men prefer to shop online to avoid the embarrassment of buying some types of presents, such as lingerie, for wives and girlfriends. Much of this online shopping is likely to be done during work time, according to research carried out by security firm Saint Bernard Software. The research reveals that up to two working days will be lost by staff who do their shopping via their work computer. Worst offenders will be those in the 18-35 age bracket, suggests the research, who will spend up to five hours per week in December browsing and buying at online shops. Iggy Fanlo, chief revenue officer at Shopping.com, said that the growing numbers of people using broadband was driving interest in online shopping. When you consider narrowband and broadband the conversion to sale is two times higher", he said. Higher speeds meant that everything happened much faster, he said, which let people spend time browsing and finding out about products before they buy. The behaviour of online shoppers was also changing, he said. The single biggest reason people went online before this year was price", he said. The number one reason now is convenience." "Very few consumers click on the lowest price", he said. They are looking for good prices and merchant reliability." "Consumer comments and reviews were also proving popular with shoppers keen to find out who had the most reliable customer service. Data collected by eBay suggests that some smart shoppers are getting round the shortages of hot presents by buying them direct through the auction site. According to eBay UK there are now more than 150 Robosapiens remote control robots for sale via the site. The Robosapiens toy is almost impossible to find in online and offline stores. Similarly many shoppers are turning to eBay to help them get hold of the hard-to-find slimline PlayStation 2", which many retailers are only selling as part of an expensive bundle. The high demand for the PlayStation 2 has meant that prices for it are being driven up. In shops the PS2 is supposed to sell for £104.99. In some eBay UK auctions the price has risen to more than double this figure. Many people are also using eBay to get hold of gadgets not even released in this country. The portable version of the PlayStation has only just gone on sale in Japan yet some enterprising eBay users are selling the device to UK gadget fans.

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"tech 236.txt Google to scan famous libraries The libraries of five of the world's most important academic institutions are to be digitised by Google. Scanned pages from books in the public domain will then be made available for search and reading online. The full libraries of Michigan and Stanford universities", as well as archives at Harvard, Oxford and the New York Public Library are included. Online pages from scanned books will not have advert

s but will have links to online store Amazon," Google said. ""The goal of the project is to unlock the wealth of information that is offline and bring it online"," said Susan Wojcicki, director of product management at Google. There will also be links to public libraries so that the books can be borrowed. Google will not be paid for providing for the links. It will take six years to digitise the full collection at Michigan, which contains seven million volumes. Users will only have access to extracts and bibliographies of copyrighted works. The New York library is allowing Google to include a small portion of books no longer covered by copyright. Harvard is limiting its participation to 40,000 books, while Oxford wants Google to scan books originally published in the 19th Century and held in the Bodleian Library. A spokeswoman for Oxford University said the digitised books would include novels, poetry, political tracts and art books. Important works that are out of print or only available in a few libraries around the world will be made available to everyone", she said. About one million books will be scanned by Google, less than 15% of the total collection held in the Bodleian. We hope that Oxford's contribution to this project will be of scholarly use", as well as general interest, to people around the world," said Reg Carr, director of Oxford University Library Services. It's a significant opportunity to bring our material to the rest of the world", said Paul LeClerc, president of the New York Public Library. It could solve an old problem: If people can't get to us", how can we get to them?"" "This is the day the world changes", said John Wilkin, a University of Michigan librarian working with Google. It will be disruptive because some people will worry that this is the beginning of the end of libraries. "But this is something we have to do to revitalise the profession and make it more meaningful.""

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"tech 237.txt Microsoft takes on desktop search Microsoft has entered the desktop search fray", releasing a test version of its tool to find documents, e-mails and other files on a PC hard drive. The beta program only works on PCs running Windows XP or Windows 2000. The desktop search market is becoming increasingly crowded with firms touting programs that help people find files. Search giant Google launched its desktop search tool in October, while Yahoo is planning to release similar software in January. "Our ambition for search is to provide the ultimate information tool that can find anything you're looking for", said Yusuf Mehdi, corporate vice president at Microsoft's MSN internet division. Microsoft's program can be used as a toolbar on the Windows desktop, the Internet Explorer browser and within the Outlook e-mail program. The software giant is coming late to the desktop search arena, competing with a large number of rivals. Google has already released a desktop tool. Yahoo is planning to get into the game in January and AOL is expected to offer desktop searching early next year. Small firms such as Blinkx, Copernic, Enfish X1 Technologies and X-Friend offer tools that catalogue the huge amounts of information that people increasingly store on their desktop or home computer. Apple will release a similar search system for its computers called Spotlight that is due to be released with the Tiger operating system.

tech 238.txt Gamers snap up new Sony PSP Gamers have bought almost all of the first batch of Sony's new PlayStation Portable (PSP) games console, which went on sale in Japan on Sunday. Thousands of people queued for hours to get hold of one of the 200,000 PSPs which were shipped to retailers. The handheld console can play games, music and movies and goes on sale in Europe and North America next year. Despite the demand Sony said it would not increase the 500,000-strong stock of PSPs it plans to ship by year's end. Sony says it intends to ship three million of the consoles by March 2005. The company is hop

ing to challenge the dominance of Nintendo in the handheld market. Nintendo released its new DS console earlier this year and has already raised shipment targets for the device by 40%. The PSP is selling in Japan for 19,800 yen (\$188; £98) while Nintendo's DS console sells in the US and Japan for \$150 (£78). Nintendo's goal is to ship 5 million of its new Nintendo DS handheld consoles by March 2005.

tech 239.txt Go-ahead for new internet names The internet could soon have two new domain names, aimed at mobile services and the jobs market. The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (Icann) has given preliminary approval to two new addresses - .mobi and .jobs. They are among 10 new names being considered by the net's oversight body. Others include a domain for pornography, an anti-spam domain as well as .post and .travel, for the postal and travel industries. The .mobi domain would be aimed at websites and other services that work specifically around mobile phones, while the .jobs address could be used by companies wanting a dedicated site for job postings. The process to see the new domain names go live in cyberspace could take months and Icann officials warned that there were no guarantees they would ultimately be accepted. Applicants paid £23,000 apiece to have their proposals considered. The application for .mobi was sponsored by technology firms including Nokia, Microsoft and T-Mobile. Of the 10 currently under consideration, the least likely to win approval is the .xxx domain for pornographic websites. There are currently around 250 domain names in use around the globe, mostly for specific countries such as .fr for France and .uk for Britain. Perhaps unsurprisingly, .com remains the most popular address on the web.

tech 240.txt Set your television to wow Television started off as a magical blurry image. Then came the sharpness, the colour and the wide-screen format. Now the TV set is taking another leap forward into a crystal clear future, although those in Europe will have to be patient. After years of buzz about high-definition TV (HDTV) it is finally taking off in a handful of countries around the world, mainly the US and Japan. If you believe the hype, then HDTV will so wow you, that you will never want to go back to your old telly. HDTV is just the latest must-have technology in viewers' homes", says Jo Flaherty, a senior broadcaster with the CBS network in the US. All television images are made up of pixels, going across the screen, and scan lines going down. British TV pictures are made up of 625 lines and about 700 pixels. By contrast, HDTV offers up to 1,080 active lines, with each line made up of 1,920 pixels. The result is a picture which can be up to six times as sharp as standard TV. But to get the full impact, programmes need to be broadcast in this format and you need a HDTV set to receive them. Most new computer displays are already capable of handling high-resolution pictures. Viewers in Japan, the US, Australia, Canada and South Korea are already embracing the new TV technology, with a selection of primetime programmes being broadcast in the new format, which includes 5.1 digital surround sound. But TV viewers in Europe will have to wait to enjoy the eye-blasting high-definition images. Many high-end European TV programmes, such as the recent Athens Olympics, are already being produced in high-definition. But they still reach your screen in the old 625 lines. The prospects for getting sharper images soon do not seem very encouraging. According to consultants Strategy Analytics, only 12% of homes in Europe will have TVs capable of showing programmes in high-definition by 2008. But the HDTV hype spilling out of the US and Japan has spurred European broadcasters and consumer electronic companies to push for change. Big sports and entertainment events are set to help trigger the general public's attention. The 2006 World Cup in Germany will be broadcast in high-definition. In the UK, satellite broadcaster BSkyB is planning HDTV services in 2006. There is already a HDTV service in Europe called Euro1080.

Other European broadcasters, especially in France and Germany, also aiming to launch similar services. In Britain, digital satellite and cable are largely seen as the natural home for HDTV, at least while a decision is taken regarding terrestrial broadcast options. The communications watchdog Ofcom could hand over some terrestrial frequencies freed up when the UK switches off its analogue TV signal. For now, broadcasters like the BBC are working on their own HDTV plans, although with no launch date in sight. The BBC will start broadcasting in HDTV when the time is right", and it would not be just a showcase, but a whole set of programming," says Andy Quested, from the BBC's high-definition support group. We have made the commitment to produce all our output in high-definition by 2010"," which would put us on the leading edge."" One of the options under consideration is to offer high-definition pictures on the web. The BBC has already dipped its toe into this", including some HDTV content in recent trials of its interactive media player - a video player for PCs. It is planning to offer special releases of selected flagship programmes online in the near future. According to Mr Quested, this could help put Europe back into the running in the race to switch to HDTV. This is backed by recent research which suggests that the number of Europeans with broadband has exploded over the past 12 months, with the web eating into TV viewing habits.

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"tech 241.txt Hollywood to sue net film pirates The US movie industry has launched legal action to sue people who facilitate illegal film downloading. The Motion Picture Association of America wants to stop people using the program BitTorrent to swap movies. The industry is targeting people who run websites which provide information and internet links to movies which have been copied or filmed in cinemas. More than 100 server operators have been targeted in the actions launched in the US and UK", the MPAA added. The suits were filed against users of the file-sharing programs BitTorrent, eDonkey and DirectConnect in the United States, United Kingdom, France, Finland and the Netherlands, the MPAA said. BitTorrent users can download movies by following a link to files which are found on websites called trackers. Unlike most peer-to-peer programs BitTorrent works by sharing a file, which could be anything from a legitimate digital photo to a copied movie, among multiple users at the same time. The movie industry hopes that suing the people who run the trackers will cut BitTorrent users off from illegal movies at source. Last month major film studios started legal action against 200 individuals who were swapping films online. The growth in broadband has made it quicker for people to download movies and the industry fears that if it does not take action now, it could suffer the same downturn as the music industry.

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"tech 242.txt PC ownership to 'double by 2010' The number of personal computers worldwide is expected to double by 2010 to 1.3 billion machines", according to a report by analysts Forrester Research. The growth will be driven by emerging markets such as China, Russia and India, the report predicted. More than a third of all new PCs will be in these markets, with China adding 178 million new PCs by 2010, it said. Low-priced computers made by local companies are expected to dominate in such territories, Forrester said. The report comes less than a week after IBM, a pioneer of the PC business," sold its PC hardware division to China's number one computer maker Lenovo. The \$1.75bn (£900m) deal will make the combined operation the third biggest PC vendor in the world. ""Today's products from Western PC vendors won't dominate in those markets in the long term"," Simon Yates, a senior analyst for Forrester, said. Instead

d local PC makers like Lenovo Group in China and Aquarius in Russia that can better tailor the PC form factor", price point and applications to their local markets will ultimately win the market share battle," he said. There are currently 575 million PCs in use globally. The United States, Europe and Asia-Pacific are expected to add 150 million new PCs by 2010, according to the study. The report forecast that there will be 80 million new PC users in India by 2010 and 40 million new users in Indonesia.

tech 243.txt PC photo printers challenge pros Home printers pictures can be cheaper and higher quality than those from High Street developers, tests shows. A survey carried out by PC Pro magazine looked at which of 100 home photo printers offered a better deal than handing your snaps to a photo lab. The tests found that images from top PC printers kept their colour longer than professionally produced photographs. But using the wrong printer cartridge could mean snaps fade in months, warned the magazine. The group test of 100 home photo printers for PCs discovered how much it costs to create images using the devices compared to online developers as well as High Street names such as Jessops, Boots and Snappy Snaps. The comprehensive test also revealed how quickly different printers produced images, the quality of the finished image and how resistant finished pictures were to smudging or water damage. It found that although some ink for printers now costs more than £2 per millilitre it can still be cheaper to produce prints from photographs at home than it is to send them off to a High Street store. If you really like your photos", then it's definitely worth printing at home instead of going to the high street, but only if you choose the right printer," said Nick Ross, top tester at PC Pro. Mr Ross said that a new generation of printers produced images with brighter colours and that were less likely to fade than many High Street developers or even some professional wedding photographers. Some High Street photo shops can be the cheapest when it came to developing prints that were 6x4in, said Mr Ross, but the test revealed that images 7x5in and 8x10in in size were cheaper to produce at home. According to PC Pro, producing a print 8x10in on an Epson R800 printer using top quality paper costs £1.87. At Jessops the same image would cost £2.50 and at Snappy Snaps £9.99. A 10x7in snap at Boots would cost £4.99. Considering how convenient it can be to go to the High Street and how silver-halide prints can fade in the sun", we're adamant that it's now better, cheaper and more convenient to print at home," he said. Ann Simpson, marketing manager at Snappy Snaps believes the convenience of high street printing will continue to attract customers. Some people will want to do their own thing on their computer but the feedback to us is that customers often have to print two or three pictures at home in order to get a good one", she said. Many people are not skilled at getting the colour, contrast and cropping right and they don't want the hassle," she added. The magazine test found that which ink consumers use determined how long their prints lasted before they started fading. It recommended avoiding so-called third-party inks not produced by printer makers because they tended to produce prints that fade the quickest.

tech 244.txt The gaming world in 2005 If you have finished Doom 3, Half Life 2 and Halo 2, don't worry. There's a host of gaming gems set for release in 2005. WORLD OF WARCRAFT The US reception to this game from developers Blizzard has been hugely enthusiastic, with the title topping its competitors in the area of life-eating, high-fantasy, massively multiplayer role-player gaming. Solid, diverse, accessible and visually striking, it may well open up the genre like never before. If nothing else, it will develop a vast and loyal community. Released 25 February on PC. ICO 2 (WORKING TITLE) Ico remains a benchmark for PS2 gaming, a title that took players into a uniquely atmospheric and artistic world of adventure. The (spiritual) sequel has visuals that ech

o those of the original, but promises to expand the Ico world, with hero Wanda taking on a series of giants. The other known working title is Wanda And Colossus. Release date to be confirmed on PS2. THE LEGEND OF ZELDA The charismatic cel imagery has been scrapped in favour of a dark, detailed aesthetic (realism isn't quite the right word) that connects more with Ocarina Of Time. Link resumes his more teenage incarnation too, though enemies, elements and moves look familiar from the impressive trailer that has been released. Horseback adventuring across a vast land is promised. Release date to be confirmed on GameCube. ADVANCE WARS DS The UK Nintendo DS launch line-up is still to be confirmed at time of writing, but titles that exploit its two-screen and touch capacity, like War ioWare Touched! and Sega's Feel The Magic, are making a strong impression in other territories. Personally, I can't wait for the latest Advance Wars, the franchise that has been the icing on the cake of Nintendo handheld gaming during the past few years. Release date to be confirmed on DS. S.T.A.L.K.E.R. Following in the high-spec footsteps of Far Cry and Half-Life 2, this looks like the key upcoming PC first-person shooter (with role-playing elements). The fact that it is inspired in part by Andrei Tarkovsky's enigmatic 1979 masterpiece Stalker and set in 2012 in the disaster zone, a world of decay and mutation, makes it all the more intriguing. Released 1 March on PC. METAL GEAR SOLID: SNAKE EATER More Hideo Kojima serious stealth, featuring action in the Soviet-controlled jungle in 1964. The game sees Snake having to survive on his wits in the jungle, including eating wildlife. Once again, expect cinematic cut scenes and polished production values. Released March on PS2. DEAD OR ALIVE ULTIMATE Tecmo's Team Ninja are back with retooled and revamped versions of Dead Or Alive 1 and 2. Here's the big, big deal though - they're playable over Xbox Live. Released 11 March on Xbox. KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC II Looks set to build on the acclaimed original Star Wars role playing game with new characters, new Force powers and a new set of moral decisions, despite a different developer. Released 11 February on Xbox and PC.

tech 245.txt Bond game fails to shake or stir For gaming fans, the word GoldenEye evokes excited memories not only of the James Bond revival flick of 1995, but also the classic shoot-em-up that accompanied it and left N64 owners glued to their consoles for many an hour. Adopting that hallowed title somewhat backfires on this new game, for it fails to deliver on the promise of its name and struggles to generate the original's massive sense of fun. This however is not a sequel, nor does it relate to the GoldenEye film. You are the eponymous renegade spy, an agent who deserts to the Bond world's extensive ranks of criminal masterminds, after being deemed too brutal for MI6. Your new commander-in-chief is the portly Auric Goldfinger, last seen in 1964, but happily running around bent on world domination. With a determination to justify its name which is even less convincing than that of Tina Turner's similarly-titled theme song, the game literally gives the player a golden eye following an injury, which enables a degree of X-ray vision. Rogue Agent signals its intentions by featuring James Bond initially and proceeding to kill him off within moments, squashed by a plummeting helicopter. The notion is of course to add a novel dark edge to a 007 game, but the premise simply does not get the juices flowing like it needs to. Recent Bond games like Nightfire and Everything Or Nothing were very competent and did a fine job of capturing the sense of flair, invention and glamour of the film franchise. This title lacks that aura, and when the Bond magic shines through, it feels like a lucky accident. The central problem is that the gameplay just is not good enough. Quite aside from the bizarre inability to jump, the even more bizarre glaring graphical bugs and dubious enemy AI, the levels simply are not put together with much style or imagination. Admittedly the competition has been tough, even in recent weeks, with the likes of H

alo 2 and Half Life 2 triumphing in virtually every department. What the game is good at is enveloping you in noisy, dynamic scenes of violent chaos. As is the trend of late, you are made to feel like you are in the midst of a really messy and fraught encounter. Sadly that sense of action is outweighed by the difficulty of navigating and battling within the chaos, meaning that frustration is often the outcome. And irregular save points mean you have to backtrack each time you are killed. A minute red dot passes for a crosshair, although the collision-detection is so suspect that the difficulties of aiming weapons are compensated for. Shooting enemies from a distance can be tricky, and you will not always know you have picked them off, since dead enemies vanish literally before they have fully hit the floor, and they do so in some woefully uninspiring death animations. It is perhaps indicative of a lack of confidence that the game maker's allow you several different weapons almost immediately and throw you quickly into raging firefights - no time is risked with a measured build-up. By far the most satisfying element of the game is seeing old favourites like Dr No, Goldfinger, hat-fiend Oddjob and crazed Russian sex beast Xenia Onatopp resurrected after all these years, and with their faces rendered in an impressively recognisable fashion. There is a real thrill from doing battle with these legendary villains, and it is a testament to the power of the Bond universe that they can cut such a dash. But the in-game niggles, combined with a story and presentation that just do not feel sufficiently well thought-through, will make this a disappointment for most. Diehard fans of Bond will probably find enough here to make it a worthwhile purchase and try to ignore the failings. The game is weak, not completely unplayable. Then again, 007 fanatics may also take umbrage at the cavalier blending of characters from different eras. Given James Bond's healthy pedigree in past games, there is every reason to hope that this is just a blip, a commendable idea that just has not worked, that will be rectified when the character inevitably makes his return. GoldenEye: Rogue Agent is out now

tech 246.txt Humanoid robot learns how to run Car-maker Honda's humanoid robot Asimo has just got faster and smarter. The Japanese firm is a leader in developing two-legged robots and the new, improved Asimo (Advanced Step in Innovative Mobility) can now run, find his way around obstacles as well as interact with people. Eventually Asimo could find gainful employment in homes and offices. The aim is to develop a robot that can help people in their daily lives", said a Honda spokesman. To get the robot running for the first time was not an easy process as it involved Asimo making an accurate leap and absorbing the impact of landing without slipping or spinning. The run"" he is now capable of is perhaps not quite up to Olympic star Kelly Holmes' standard. At 3km/h", it is closer to a leisurely jog. Its makers claim that it is almost four times as fast as Sony's Qrio, which became the first robot to run last year. The criteria for running robots is defined by engineers as having both feet off the ground between strides. Asimo has improved in other ways too, increasing his walking speed, from 1.6km/h to 2.5km, growing 10cm to 130cm and putting on 2kg in weight. While he may not quite be ready for yoga, he does have more freedom of movement, being able to twist his hips and bend his wrists, thumbs and neck. Asimo has already made his mark on the international robot scene and in November was inducted into the Robot Hall of Fame. He has wowed audiences around the world with his ability to walk upstairs, recognise faces and come when beckoned. In August 2003 he even attended a state dinner in the Czech Republic, travelling with the Japanese prime minister as a goodwill envoy. He is one of a handful of robots used by tech firms to trumpet their technological advances. Technology developed for Asimo could be used in the automobile industry as electronics increasingly take over from mechanics in car design. For the moment Asimo's biggest role is an entertainer and the audience gathered to see his first publi

c run greeted his slightly comical gait with amusement, according to reports. Robots can fulfil serious functions in society and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe predicts that the worldwide market for industrial robots will swell from 81,000 units in 2003 to 106,000 in 2007.

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"tech 247.txt Nintendo adds media playing to DS Nintendo is releasing an adapter for its DS handheld console so it can play music and video. The add-on for the DS means people can download TV programmes", film clips or MP3 files to the adaptor and then play them back while on the move. The release of the media add-on is an attempt by the Japanese games giant to protect its dominance of the handheld gaming market. Nintendo said the media adapter will be available from February in Japan. The Nintendo DS is the successor to the hugely successful GameBoy handheld game console and went on sale in Japan on 2 December. The DS has two screens, one of which is touch sensitive, and also has on-board a short-range wireless link that lets people play against each other. The launch of the media adapter, and the attempt to broaden the appeal of the device, is widely seen as a response to the unveiling of the Sony PSP which was built as a multi-purpose media player and game gadget from the start. Sony is thought to be preparing pre-packaged movies and music for the PSP. The add-on will also work with the GameBoy Advance SP. Nintendo dominates the handheld gaming console world thanks to successive versions of the GameBoy. More than 28 million GameBoy Advance handhelds have been sold around the world. The dual-screen DS is also thought to be selling well with more than 2.5 million expected to be sold by the end of 2004. Nintendo said it had no plans to sell the media adapter outside Japan. When it goes on sale the adapter is expected to cost about 5000 yen (£25), roughly the difference in price between the DS and the higher-priced Sony PSP.

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"tech 248.txt Apple sues to stop product leaks Computer firm Apple has issued a lawsuit to prevent online leaks of information about future products. The lawsuit", against an unidentified individual, comes just weeks before the MacWorld conference in San Francisco," used to showcase new products. The complaint said an ""unidentified individual... has recently misappropriated and disseminated confidential information"". The lawsuit was filed with the Santa Clara California Superior Court. Apple is famously secretive about its future product launches while Apple users are equally famous for speculating about new technology from the company. Fans have speculated in recent weeks about the possibility of a new type of iPod being announced at the MacWorld conference. Apple said in the seven-page complaint", filed on 13 December," that it did not know the ""true names or capacities", whether individual, associate, corporate or otherwise," of the defendants. The company said it would amend the complaint once they had discovered the names of those who had allegedly leaked information. It is not the first time Apple has sued people who have posted information about future products on the internet. In December 2002, Apple sued a former contractor who allegedly posted online drawings, images and engineering details of the company's PowerMac G4 computer. In a statement, Apple said of the current lawsuit: Apple has filed a civil complaint against unnamed individuals who we believe stole our trade secrets and posted detailed information about an unannounced Apple product on the internet.""

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"tech 249.txt Gamer buys \$26", "500 virtual land A 22-yea

r-old gamer has spent \$26",500 (£13,700) on an island that exists only in a computer role-playing game (RPG). The Australian gamer, known only by his gaming moniker Deathifier, bought the island in an online auction. The land exists within the game Project Entropia, an RPG which allows thousands of players to interact with each other. Entropia allows gamers to buy and sell virtual items using real cash," while fans of other titles often use auction site eBay to sell their virtual wares. Earlier this year economists calculated that these massively multi-player online role-playing games (MMORPGs) have a gross economic impact equivalent to the GDP of the African nation of Namibia. ""This is a historic moment in gaming history", and this sale only goes to prove that massive multi-player online gaming has reached a new plateau," said Marco Behrmann, director of community relations at Mindark, the game's developer. The virtual island includes a gigantic abandoned castle and beautiful beaches which are described as ripe for developing beachfront property. Deathifier will make money from his investment as he is able to tax other gamers who come to his virtual land to hunt or mine for gold. He has also begun to sell plots to people who wish to build virtual homes. This type of investment will definitely become a trend in online gaming", said Deathifier. The Entropia economy lets gamers exchange real currency into PED (Project Entropia Dollars) and back again into real money. Ten PEDs are the equivalent to one US dollar and typical items sold include iron ingots (\$5) and shogun armour (\$1.70) Gamers can theoretically earn money by accumulating PEDs through the acquisition of goods, buildings, and land in the Entropia universe. MMORPGs have become enormously popular in the last 10 years with hundreds of thousands of gamers living out alternate lives in fantasy worlds. Almost 200,000 people are registered players on Project Entropia.

tech 250.txt Microsoft sets sights on spyware Windows users could soon be paying Microsoft to keep PCs free of spyware. Following the takeover of anti-spyware firm Giant, Microsoft said it would soon release a toolkit that strips machines of the irritating programs. Although initially free, Microsoft has not ruled out charging people who want to keep this toolkit up to date. Surveys show that almost every Windows PC is infested with spyware programs that do everything from bombard users with adverts to steal login data. Microsoft said that a beta version of the toolkit to clean up Windows machines should be available within 30 days. Designed for PCs running Windows 2000 and XP, the utility will clean out spyware programs, constantly monitor what happens on a PC and will be regularly updated to catch the latest variants. Before now many of Microsoft's other security boosting programs, such as the firewall in Windows XP, have been given away free. But Mike Nash, vice president in Microsoft's security business unit, said it was still working out pricing and licensing issues. Charging for future versions has not been discounted, he said. We'll come up with a plan and roll that out", he said. The plan could turn out to be a lucrative one for Microsoft. A recent survey by Earthlink and Webroot found that 90% of PCs are infested with the surreptitious software and that, on average, each one is harbouring 28 separate spyware programs. Currently users wanting protection from spyware have turned to free programs such as Spybot and Ad-Aware. Spyware comes in many forms and at its most benign exploits lazy browsing habits to install itself and subject users to unwanted adverts. Other forms hijack net browser settings to force people to view pages they would otherwise never visit. At its most malign, spyware watches everything that people do with their PC and steals login information and other personal data. Microsoft's announcement about spyware comes after it bought small New York software firm Giant Company Software. Terms of the acquisition were not disclosed.

tech 251.txt Video phone help for deaf people Deaf people who prefer to communicate using British Sign Language (BSL) could soon be havin

g their phone conversations relayed using webcams or videophones and an interpreter. The Video Relay Service is being piloted by the Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID), but the organisation says unless the service is provided at the same rate as voice calls it will be beyond most people's pockets. The RNID is urging telecoms regulator, Ofcom, to reduce the cost of the service from the current £7.00 per minute and make it the same as ordinary phone calls. The service works by putting a deaf person in visual contact with a BSL interpreter via a webcam or video phone, and the interpreter then relays the deaf person's conversation using a telephone and translates the other person's response into sign language. For many deaf people, especially those born deaf, BSL is a first and preferred means of communication. Until now, the only alternative has been to use textphones which means having to type a message and have it relayed via an operator. In the past", I've used textphones but they have problems," said Robert Currington who is taking part in the pilot. I communicate in BSL; my written English is not very good and it takes me longer to think in English and type my message." "I sometimes find it difficult to understand the reply." "The RNID says the UK is lagging behind other countries which are already making relay services available at the cost of an ordinary phone call. "There are no technical or economic reasons for not providing equivalent access to services for deaf people", said RNID technology director, Guido Gybels. In the US and Australia", sign language relay services have already been made universally available at the same cost as a voice call. "By failing to provide and fund the video relay service for sign language users", the telecommunications sector is effectively discriminating against an already disenfranchised group." Ofcom says it has plans to review the services that telecoms companies are obliged to provide early next year. And new technology", including the Video Relay Service," will be discussed with interested parties in the near future. But a spokesman said its powers were limited by legislation. "Any proposals to extend existing arrangements to cover new services would be for government to consider", he said. Mr Currington, like many of the UK's 70,000 BSL users, will be hoping that a way can be found to make a cost-effective service available. The relay service makes phone conversations a pleasure", he said. I can show my emotions more easily in BSL in the same way hearing people express emotions through voice calls."

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"tech 252.txt Virus poses as Christmas e-mail Security firms are warning about a Windows virus disguising itself as an electronic Christmas card. The Zafi.D virus translates the Christmas greeting on its subject line into the language of the person receiving infected e-mail. Anti-virus firms speculate that this multilingual ability is helping the malicious program spread widely online. Anti-virus firm Sophos said that 10% of the e-mail currently on the net was infected with the Zafi virus. Like many other Windows viruses", Zafi-D plunders Microsoft Outlook for e-mail addresses and then uses mail-sending software to despatch itself across the web to new victims. To be infected users must open up the attachment travelling with the message which bears the code for the malicious bug. The attachment on the e-mail poses as an electronic Christmas card but anyone opening it will simply get a crude image of two smiley faces. The virus' subject line says ""Merry Christmas"" and translates this into one of 15 languages depending of the final suffix of the e-mail address the infected message has been sent to. The message in the body of the e-mail reads: ""Happy Holidays"" and this too is translated. On infected machines the virus tries to disable anti-virus and firewall software and opens up a backdoor on the PC to hand over control to the writer of the virus. The virus is thought to hav

e spread most widely in South America", Italy, Spain," Bulgaria and Hungary. The original Zafi virus appeared in April this year. ""We have seen these hoaxes for several Christmases already", and personally I prefer traditional pen and paper cards, and we recommend this to all our clients too," said Mikko Hypponen, who heads F-Secure's anti-virus team.

tech 253.txt Fast lifts rise into record books Two high-speed lifts at the world's tallest building have been officially recognised as the planet's fastest. The lifts take only 30 seconds to whisk passengers to the top of the 508m tall TFC 101 Tower in Taipei, Taiwan. The Guinness Book of Records has declared the 17m per second speed of the two lifts the swiftest on Earth. The lifts also have a pressure control system to stop passengers' ears popping as they ascend and descend at high speed. In total, the TFC Tower has 61 lifts, 34 of them double-deckers, and 50 escalators to shuttle people around its 106 floors. The TFC 101 Tower is due to be officially opened on 31 December. The super-fast lifts can speed up to 24 passengers to the tip of the tower in about 30 seconds, while ascending their 382m track. The 17m/s top speed of the lifts translates to about 38mph (61km/h). Curiously the lifts take longer to descend and spend almost a whole minute returning to ground level from the top of the TFC Tower. The key new technologies applied in the world's fastest elevators include:  
- A pressure control system, which adjusts the atmospheric pressure inside a car by using suction and discharge blowers, preventing ear popping""  
- An active control system which tries to balance the lift more finely and remove the sources of vibrations  
- Streamlined cars to reduce the whistling noise produced by running the lifts at a high speed inside a narrow shaft  
""The certification of our elevators as world record-holders by the authoritative Guinness World Records is a great honour for us", said Masayuki Shimono, president of manufacturer Toshiba Elevator and Building Systems which installed the lifts. The first record for the world's fastest passenger elevators was published in the first edition of the Guinness Book of Records in 1955. As such", it is an interesting indicator of how technology has advanced in the 50 years since that first edition, when the record was 426m per minute, or 25.6 km/h, less than half the speed of the new record," said Hein Le Roux, specialist researcher at the Guinness World Records. Taipei's TFC 101 Tower is more than 50m taller than the Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia - formerly the world's tallest skyscraper.

tech 254.txt Broadband in the UK gathers pace One person in the UK is joining the internet's fast lane every 10 seconds, according to BT. The telecoms giant said the number of people on broadband via the telephone line had now surpassed four million. Including those connected via cable, almost six million people have a fast, always-on connection. The boom has been fuelled by fierce competition and falling prices, as well as the greater availability of broadband over the phone line. The take-up rate for broadband is accelerating at a terrific pace", said Ben Verwaayen, BT's chief executive. We will be in a very strong position to hit our five million target by summer 2006 much earlier than we had previously expected." The last million connections were made over the past four months", with thousands of people being added to the total every day of the week. Those signing up to broadband include those that get their service direct from BT or via the many companies that re-sell BT lines under their own name. Part of the surge in people signing up was due to BT stretching the reach of ADSL - the UK's most widely used way of getting broadband - beyond six kilometres. Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line technology lets ordinary copper phone lines support high data speeds. The standard speed is 512kbps, though faster connections are available. According to BT, more than 95% of UK homes and businesses can receive broadband over the phone line. It aims to extend t

his figure to 99.4% by next summer. There are also an estimated 1.7 million cable broadband customers in the UK.

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"tech 255.txt Hollywood campaign hits websites Movie studio efforts to stop pirated films being shared on peer-to-peer networks have claimed a high-profile victim. The campaign of legal action is thought to be behind the closure of the widely used Suprnova.org website. The site was the most popular place for people swapping and sharing links for the BitTorrent network. A recent study showed that more than half of the peer-to-peer traffic during June was for the BitTorrent system. In a message posted on Suprnova.org on Sunday," the site's controllers said the site was ""closing down for good in the way that we all know it"". If the site did return", the message said, "it would not be hosting any more torrent links. It continued: ""We are very sorry for this", but there was no other way," we have tried everything. "" The only parts that would keep going", said the operators of the Suprnova site, were the discussion forums and net chat channels. The site is thought to have closed following an announcement by the Motion Picture Association of America that it was launching legal action against those operating BitTorrent servers rather than end users. Because of the way that BitTorrent works, server sites do not host the actual file being shared, instead they host a link that points people to others that have it. By targeting servers, the MPAA hopes to cripple BitTorrent's ability to share files. In the opening days of the MPAA campaign, the organisation filed 100 lawsuits against operators of BitTorrent server site. The launching of the legal seems to be having an effect. Phoenix Torrents, another popular BitTorrent site, has also decided to shut down and, though it gave no reasons for the closure, it is thought to be motivated by the threat of legal action. Last week Finnish police raided a BitTorrent site based in the country that, according to reports, let 10,000 users shared pirated films, software, music and games.

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"tech 256.txt Poles play with GameBoy 'blip-pop' A group of artists in Poland has taken the cacophony of blips"," boops and beeps created as players bash buttons on Nintendo's handheld GameBoy console to a new level. The Gameboyzz Orchestra Project has taken the game sounds to put together music tunes they have dubbed ""blip-pop."" Think of it as Donkey Kong meets Norman Cook", or maybe Tetris takes on Kraftwerk. Any way you slice it, the sound is distinct. All the sounds are made by six Nintendo GameBoys, with a mixture of older models and newer Advance SP handhelds. The Gameboyzz Orchestra Project tweaks the software a bit, and then connects the units through a mixing board. Jarek Kujda, one of the project's founding members has been into electronic music and video games," for a while now. ""I was playing some experimental music and three", four years ago when I first used a GameBoy in my band as a drum machine," said Kujda. He realised that the console could be used as a rudimentary synthesizer. He wondered, if one GameBoy can make music, what would happen if he put six of them together? Kujda found five other people who were interested and the Gameboyzz Orchestra Project was born. Gameboyzz Orchestra Project is more of an improvisational project", said Kudja. We prepare some patterns before a concert," and then improvise during the concert." The group plays maybe four or five shows a year. Malgorzata Kujda", Jarek's younger sister and a fellow band member," describes a Gameboyzz Orchestra Project concert as a lot of noise. ""For example", I make music with more hard beats and noises, she said. But each of us makes another music, a different sound. And then in the concert we just improvise," and that I think is more fun for us."" The Gameboyzz Orchestra Proj

ct admits they get mixed reactions from audiences. Some love the group's music", and others are not quite sure what to make of it. In the world of electronic music," these purveyors of blip-pop are not unique. But Jarek Kujda says they try to be unique. ""We have lots of people making music on old school stuff", electronic old school stuff like Commodore, Atari, Spectrum, he said. We want to play only experimental music," not cover songs. We're something like an electronic jam session." The Gameboyyz Orchestra Project's tracks are available online and the group hopes to make a CD next year. And they have sponsorship", courtesy of the Polish distributor of Nintendo products. The members of the Gameboyzz Orchestra Project do not expect serious competition anytime soon. A GameBoy Advance costs about US \$200 in Poland these days, which is still way beyond the reach of most Polish gamers, or musicians. Clark Boyd is technology correspondent for The World, a BBC World Service and WGBH-Boston co-production

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"tech 257.txt Santy worm makes unwelcome visit Thousands of website bulletin boards have been defaced by a virus that used Google to spread across the net. The Santy worm first appeared on 20 December and within 24 hours had successfully hit more than 40",000 websites. The malicious program exploits a vulnerability in the widely used phpBB software. Santy's spread has now been stopped after Google began blocking infected sites searching for new victims. The worm replaces chat forums with a webpage announcing that the site had been defaced by the malicious program. Soon after being infected," sites hit by the worm started randomly searching for other websites running the vulnerable phpBB software. Once Google started blocking these search queries the rate of infection tailed off sharply. A message sent to Finnish security firm F-Secure by Google's security team said: ""While a seven hour response for something like this is not outrageous"," we think we can and should do better." "We will be reviewing our procedures to improve our response time in the future to similar problems", the Google team said. Security firms estimate that about 1m websites run their discussion groups and forums with the open source phpBB program. The worst of the attack now seems to be over as a search conducted on the morning of the 22 December produced only 1,440 hits for sites showing the text used in the defacement message. People using the sites hit by Santy will not be affected by the worm. Santy is not the first malicious program to use Google to help it spread. In July a variant of the MyDoom virus slowed down searches on Google as the program flooded the search site with queries looking for new e-mail addresses to send itself to.

tech 258.txt EU software patent law delayed Controversial new EU rules for the patenting of computer-based inventions have been put on hold due to a last minute intervention from Poland. Poland - a large and therefore crucial EU member - has requested more time to consider the issue, especially as it relates to the patenting of software. Critics say the law would favour large companies over small, innovative ones. They say it could have massive ramifications for developments such as open source software. Polish ministers want to see the phrasing of the text of the Directive on the Patentability of Computer-Implemented Inventions changed so that it excludes the patenting of software. The planned law has ignited angry debate about whether the EU should allow the patenting of computer programs and internet business methods as currently happens in the US. So, for instance, US-based Amazon.com holds a patent on 'one-click shopping'. Critics claim the law, which the EU says is needed to harmonise with the US, is little more than a law on ideas. Patent rights", it is claimed, protect inventors but in this case it is exclusively the interests of the big companies that are protected," Eva Lichtenberg, a Austrian Green member of th

e European Parliament said in a statement. Smaller", innovative firms cannot afford the patenting and legal costs that the directive would inflict on them," he added. The European Parliament has already clashed with the European Union on the issue and there have been accusations that the process to decide the issue has been undemocratic. The directive has been subject to several previous delays.

tech 259.txt Apple sues 'Tiger' file sharers Apple has taken more legal action to stop online leaks of its new products. The computer giant has sued three men for releasing preview versions of its latest Mac OSX software onto file-sharing sites prior to its release. It said two versions of the operating system, codenamed Tiger, were put onto the net in October and December. It is the second time in two weeks Apple has taken legal action to protect its future products. Tiger is due to be shipped in early 2005. Last week, it filed a lawsuit against unnamed individuals"" who leaked details about new products onto the web. The latest action was against members of the Apple Developer Connection", " a group of programmers which gets to see test versions of upcoming software so they can develop or change their own programs to work with them. ""Members of Apple Developer Connection receive advance copies of Apple software under strict confidentiality agreements", which we take very seriously to protect our intellectual property," Apple said in a statement. It added that its future financial results were very much dependent on developing and improving its operating systems and other software. It is thought the men used sites which employ BitTorrent technology. With BitTorrent technology, sites do not host actual files being shared, instead they host a link that points people to others that have the particular file. Last week, the Motion Picture Association of America launched a legal campaign targeting websites that operate using the BitTorrent system in an effort to clamp down on movie piracy. Apple is no stranger to taking legal action against those who leak product information. In December 2002, it sued a former contractor who allegedly put drawings, images and engineering details of its PowerMac G4 computer online. The latest action was filed on Monday in the US District Court in California. It comes just weeks before the MacWorld conference in San Francisco, used to showcase new products.

tech 260.txt Apple unveils low-cost 'Mac mini' Apple has unveiled a new, low-cost Macintosh computer for the masses, billed as the Mac mini. Chief executive Steve Jobs showed off the new machine at his annual MacWorld speech, in San Francisco. The \$499 Macintosh, sold for £339 in the UK, was described by Jobs as the most important Mac"" made by Apple. Mr Jobs also unveiled the iPod shuffle", a new music player using cheaper flash memory rather than hard drives, which are used in more expensive iPods. The new computer shifts the company into new territory - traditionally, the firm is known as a design and innovation-led firm rather than as a mass-market manufacturer. The Mac mini comes without a monitor, keyboard and mouse," and a second version with a larger hard drive will also be sold for \$599. The machine - which will be available from 22 January - was described by Jobs as ""BYODKM... bring your own display", keyboard," and mouse"". In an attempt to win over Windows PC customers", " Mr Jobs said it would appeal to people thinking of changing operating systems. ""People who are thinking of switching will have no more excuses", " he said. It's the newest and most affordable Mac ever." The new computer has been the subject of speculation for several weeks and while few people will be surprised by the announcement many analysts had already said it was a sensible move. In January", Apple sued a website after it published what it said were specifications for the new computer. Ian Harris, deputy editor of UK magazine Mac Format," said the machine would appeal to PC-owning consumers who had purchased an iPod. ""They want a further taste of Mac because they like what they have seen with iPod

d. "" Harris added: ""Everybody thought that Apple was happy to remain a niche maker of luxury computers", and moving into a market dominated by low margin manufacturers like Dell is a bold move. ""But it shows that Apple is keen to capitalise on the mass market success it's had with the iPod. The Mac mini will appeal to PC users looking for an attractive", 'no fuss' computer." The new iPod shuffle comes in two versions - one offering 512mb of storage for \$99 (£69 in the UK) and a second with one gigabyte of storage for \$149 (£99) - and went on sale Tuesday. The music player has no display and will play songs either consecutively or shuffled. The smaller iPod will hold about 120 songs", said Mr Jobs. Mr Jobs told the delegates at MacWorld that iPod already had a 65% market share of all digital music players.

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"tech 261.txt Speech takes on search engines A Scottish firm is looking to attract web surfers with a search engine that reads out results. Called Speegle", it has the look and feel of a normal search engine, with the added feature of being able to read out the results. Scottish speech technology firm CEC Systems launched the site in November. But experts have questioned whether talking search engines are of any real benefit to people with visual impairments. The Edinburgh-based firm CEC has married speech technology with ever-popular internet search. The ability to search is becoming increasingly crucial to surfers baffled by the huge amount of information available on the web. According to search engine Ask Jeeves," around 80% of surfers visit search engines as their first port of call on the net. People visiting Speegle can select one of three voices to read the results of a query or summarise news stories from sources such as the BBC and Reuters. ""It is still a bit robotic and can make a few mistakes but we are never going to have completely natural sounding voices and it is not bad", said Speegle founder Gordon Renton. The system is ideal for people with blurred vision or for those that just want to search for something in the background while they do something else. ""We are not saying that it will be suitable for totally blind people", although the Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB) is looking at the technology," he added. But Julie Howell, digital policy manager at the RNIB, expressed doubts over whether Speegle and similar sites added anything to blind people's experience of the web. There are a whole lot of options like this springing up on the web and one has to think carefully about what the market is going to be", she said. Blind people have specialised screen readers available to them which will do the job these technologies do in a more sophisticated way," she added. The site uses a technology dubbed PanaVox, which takes web text and converts it into synthesised speech. In the past speech technology has only been compatible with broadband because of the huge files it downloads but CEC says its compression technology means it will also work on slower dial-up connections. Visitors to Speegle may notice that the look and feel of the site bears more than a passing resemblance to the better known, if silent, search engine Google. Google has no connection with Speegle and the use of bright colours is simply to make the site more visible for those with visual impairments, said Mr Renton. It is not a rip-off. We are doing something that Google does not do and is not planning to do and there is truth in the saying that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery", he said. Speegle is proving popular with those learning English in countries such as Japan and China. The site is bombarded by people just listening to the words. The repetition could be useful although they may all end up talking like robots," said Mr Renton.

tech 262.txt Broadband steams ahead in the US More and more Americans are joining the internet's fast lane, according to official figure

s. The number of people and business connected to broadband jumped by 38% in a year, said the US Federal Communications Commission (FCC). In a report, it said there were more than 32 million broadband connections by the end of June 2004. But the US is still behind compared to other nations, ranked 13th in the world by a UN telecoms body. During his 2004 re-election campaign, President George W Bush pledge to ensure that affordable high-speed net access would be available to all Americans by 2007. According to the report by the FCC, broadband is becoming increasingly popular, with people using it for research and shopping, as well as downloading music and watching video. The total number of people and businesses on broadband rose by to 32.5 million in the year ending June 2004, compared to 23.5 million in June 2003. Whereas in the UK, most people hook up to broadband via Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line (ADSL) technology which lets ordinary copper phone lines support high data speeds. But in the US, cable leads the way, accounting for 18.6 million lines. Broadband over the phone line makes up 11.4 million connections, according to the FCC figures.

tech 263.txt Napster offers rented music to go Music download, for those that have rejected the free peer to peer services, can be a costly business. The cost of paying even as little as 70p per track can add up, particularly for those people who own one of the new generation of players that can store thousands of songs. Paying per track for music is becoming as outmoded as paying per minute for internet access and alternative monthly or yearly subscription models are springing up as a more convenient, and ultimately cheaper way of owning music. Music fans are moving away from buying the traditional bundled package of a dozen or more songs that we used to call an album to newer ways that fit their lifestyle; either single tracks or subscriptions services", " said Paul Myers, chief executive of Wippit, a UK-based music download service. While iTunes is doing good business with its sales of individual tracks to iPod owners, others are questioning whether the concept of owning music is even valid in the digital age. Napster is due to launch a new rental subscription service - dubbed Napster to Go in the UK in the next few months. The service can be used on players that support Microsoft Windows latest Digital Rights Management technology known as Janus. This includes players made by Samsung, Rio and Creative. Currently on offer in beta-version in the US, the service costs \$15 per month for unlimited downloads. The technology ensures that music downloaded to the player only remains playable while the user subscribes to the service. Users need to update their license on a monthly basis or the tunes will no longer play. This has outraged some digital music lovers, especially as Napster already offers a cheaper service for downloading music to the PC. Napster claims the higher price is a result of record labels charging more for the to-go service and says it also offers greater value" for customers. Mr Myers is not convinced a rental model will work for consumers. " "We've been offering our unlimited music subscription service for more than three years now and our customers know what they want. Format interoperability", excellent value and the reassurance that music purchased from Wippit is theirs to keep and enjoy on whatever device they choose," he said. Who wants to download a track that won't play next month if you decide to unsubscribe to the service or change portable player for an iPod or the latest mobile phone?" Wippit offers a download subscription service for £4.99 per month or £50 per year. It has a catalogue of around 60",000 songs.

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"tech 264.txt Broadband soars in 2004 If broadband were a jumbo jet", then 2003 would have seen it taxiing down the runway, firing up its engines and preparing for take-off. But this year has seen it soar. In the spr

ing it literally took to the skies as Lufthansa and British Airways trialled it on flights. This perhaps said more about how indispensable people were beginning to perceive the technology, rather than how useful sky-high broadband would actually be. It was flying high and by the autumn, five million Britons had signed up for high-speed net access at home. Such enthusiasm is unlikely to dampen any time soon and experts predict that by the end of next year the numbers will have risen to more than eight million, or more than 30% of homes. The two key factors in whetting people's appetite were falling prices and a huge marketing push. When operators such as BT and Telewest offered standard 512K broadband for less than £20 at the beginning of the year, it was as if an invisible barrier had been breached - broadband had truly gone mass market. A feeding frenzy followed as firms vied for eyeballs in a price war reminiscent of that following the mass market take-up of dial-up. Broadband for less than £10 was even touted by some firms, although such a low price raised eyebrows among more established companies questioning how they are able to sustain such business models. For those who became broadbanders in 2004 there was no turning back and the days of waiting for the modem to kick in began to seem as outdated an idea as a jungle without celebrities. The rest of the world was also falling in love with the benefits of fast internet access, to the tune of 100 million connections worldwide by April, prompting research firm Point Topic to declare it one of the fastest growing technologies ever. By September, the number of broadband connections in the UK finally overtook dial-up and in December BT announced that it was making a new broadband connection every 10 seconds. Broadband was being mentioned on the 10 O'clock News and in the tabloids; the Sun even carried a cartoon joke about it. But two of the most significant pieces of news for broadband were items that did not make the headlines. In May, BT quietly announced that it was shaving 70% off the cost of allowing other operators access to its telephone exchanges, so-called local loop unbundling. The vital local loop is the crucial link between telephone exchanges and homes. At the moment BT has a stranglehold on more than 80% of these lines making it the key voice in deciding what ADSL products get into homes. With cheaper local loop unbundling, rivals to BT can offer faster services that will leave the broadband of today looking positively tortoise-like. It will mean the UK will finally catch up with countries such as France and the Netherlands, where homes are routinely enjoying speeds of up to 15Mb (megabits per second). And the major price fall means that, rather than just talk about it, companies are actually starting to get their own equipment into BT's exchanges. It may not seem that exciting but it is a remarkable transition given that just a few years ago the arguments over local loop unbundling bore more than a passing resemblance to the Northern Ireland peace talks - fraught, bitter and with no end in sight. Another big piece of news for broadband users in 2004 was the extension of BT's reach, meaning more than 95% of the population could get broadband, regardless of how far away from the exchange they lived. There was a slight caveat for those wanting to upgrade to 1Mbps broadband, they still have to live within six kilometres of a broadband-enabled exchange. For thousands frustrated by their inability to get the technology, the news meant they could finally join in. Broadband is not just about fast access over the telephone and cable operators NTL and Telewest also had a bumper year. The biggest news for them was increased speeds, introducing 2Mb and 3Mb services for users and offering a free upgrade to those on 512K. The cable operators are limited in their reach and it is perhaps testament to how big a deal local loop unbundling could become that even they are considering extending their range via this route. Broadband can seem confusing for consumers, with the huge amount of operators offering so many different products, some with capped bandwidth and different length contracts and set-up fees. It is unlikely to get any less easy to un

derstand in 2005 but remains a plane worth catching. As it gets faster and offers extras such as cheap telephone calls online, the only real thing to remember for the coming year is to enjoy the ride.

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"tech 265.txt Half of UK's mobiles 'go online' Multimedia mobile phones are finally showing signs of taking off", with more Britons using them to go online. Figures from industry monitor, the Mobile Data Association (MDA), show the number of phones with GPRS and MMS technology has doubled since last year. GPRS lets people browse the web, access news services, mobile music and other applications like mobile chat. By the end of 2005," the MDA predicts that 75% of all mobiles in the UK will be able to access the net via GPRS. The MDA say the figures for the three months up to 30 September are a ""rapid increase"" on the figure for the same time the previous year. About 53 million people own a mobile in the UK", so the figures mean that half of those phones use GPRS. GPRS is often described as 2.5G technology - 2.5 generation - sitting between 2G and 3G technology, which is like a fast, high-quality broadband internet for phones. With more services being offered by mobile operators, people are finding more reasons to go online via their mobile. Downloadable ringtones are still proving highly popular, but so is mobile chat. BandAid was the fastest ever-selling ringtone this year, according to the MDA, and chat was given some publicity when Prime Minister Tony Blair answered questions through mobile text chat. Multimedia messaging services also looked brighter with 32% of all mobiles in the UK able to send or receive picture messages. This is a 14% rise from last September's figures. But a recent report from Continental Research reflects the continuing battle mobile companies have to actually persuade people to go online and to use MMS. It said that 36% of UK camera phone users had never sent a multimedia message, or MMS. That was 7% more than in 2003. Mobile companies are keen for people to use multimedia functions their phones, like sending MMS and going online, as this generates more money for them. But critics say that MMS is confusing and some mobiles are too difficult to use. There have also been some issues over interoperability, and being able to send MMS from a mobile using one network to a different one.

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"tech 266.txt Blinx sequel purrs nicely The original Blinx was intended to convert many platform game lovers to Microsoft's then new Xbox console. Its sharp graphics and novel gameplay", with the main character able to pause, slow, rewind and fast-forward time, were meant to lure many fans to the new machine. But poor design meant the game became a very frustrating affair with players often stranded half-way through a level without the required tools to finish. Thankfully, the sequel has fixed many of the original faults. This time around you do not play as Blinx but instead you are given the chance to create two unique cat characters and two pig characters. The character generator is very detailed and a few minutes of tweaking and adjusting will create a unique personality to unleash on the game. As the game progresses you swap between the two rival factions, pig and feline, assuming the role of your created characters. The thrust of the game sees the two factions competing to recover pieces of a missing Time Crystal. As in the original, your feline persona can control time, but this time the pigs get to control space. There are a number of puzzles which require control over time to solve while the pigs can create things such as warps, space bubbles and void traps in order to progress. The control over space and time is achieved through a number of VCR-style icons and is quite intuitive. Annoyingly, the puzzles are a little too obviously flagged up and

most gamers will find it more of a chore than a challenge to solve them. The game has also tried to emulate franchises such as Jak and Daxter and Ratchet and Clank on PS2 and so there are a number of combat elements. These are a little predictable and tend to drag the general polish of the game down to a more dull affair. But the game's excellent graphics, easily the best-looking platform game around, sound and dollops of humour make it an attractive game for younger platform fans. Blinx 2 is out on Xbox now.

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"tech 267.txt The year search became personal The odds are that when you fire up your browser", you go straight to your favourite search engine, rather than type in a web address. Some may see this as the height of laziness, but in an era of information overload, search has become a vital tool in navigating the net. It is symptomatic of how the way we use the internet is changing. And as Google has shown, there is money in offering a service that people cannot live without. There is no shortage of companies vying for the loyalty of web searchers, offering a wealth of different services and tools to help you find what you want. Over the past 12 months," giants of the technology world such as Microsoft and Yahoo have sought to grab a slice of the search action. ""User experience has contributed to people searching more"," said Yonca Brunini of Yahoo. As people become more familiar with the internet, they tend to spend more time online and ask more queries, she said. The other second thing is broadband"," Ms Brunini told the BBC News website. This will do to internet what colour has done to TV."" But search is hardly a new phenomenon. It has been around since the early days of the net. Veteran surfers will remember old-timers like Hotbot and Altavista. ""Search was always important"," said Urs Holzle, Google vice-president of operations. We trumpeted that in 1999. It is even truer now as there are more users and more information." "People didn't realise that search was the future. The financials have something to do with it." "Google has shown web commerce can work through its targeted small adverts"," which appear at the top and down the right-hand side of a page and are related to the original search. These small ads helped Google reach revenues of \$805.9m for the three months to September. Others have woken up to the fact that you can make money out of web queries. ""Once you see there is a market", Microsoft is bound to step to it. If Microsoft sees search as important, then nobody queries it," said Mr Holzle. Microsoft is just one of the net giants muscling in on search. Yahoo, Ask Jeeves, Amazon and a handful of smaller outfits are all seeking to capture eyeballs. Web users face a plethora of choices as each company tries to outflank Google by rolling out new search products such as desktop search. It reflects how the battlefield has shifted from the net to your PC. Search is not just about finding your way around the web. It is now about unlocking information hidden in the gigabytes of documents, images and music on hard drives. For all these advances, search is still a clumsy tool, often failing to come up with exactly what you had in mind. In order to do a better job, search engines are trying to get to know you better, doing a better job of remembering, cataloguing and managing all the information you come across. Personalisation is going to be a big area for the future"," said Yahoo's Yonca Brunini. Whoever cracks that and gives you the information you want is going to be the winner. We have to understand you to give you better results that are tailored to you." "This is perhaps the Holy Grail of search", understanding what it is you are looking for and providing it quickly. The problem is that no one yet knows how to get there.

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"tech 268.txt IBM frees 500 software patents Computer ga

nt IBM says 500 of its software patents will be released into the open development community. The move means developers will be able to use the technologies without paying for a licence from the company. IBM described the step as a ""new era"" in how it dealt with intellectual property and promised further patents would be made freely available. The patents include software for a range of practices", including text recognition and database management. Traditional technology business policy is to amass patents and despite IBM's announcement the company continues to follow this route. IBM was granted 3,248 patents in 2004, more than any other firm in the US, the New York Times reports. For each of the past 12 years IBM has been granted more US patents than any other company. IBM has received 25,772 US patents in that period and reportedly has more than 40,000 current patents. In a statement, Dr John E. Kelly, IBM senior vice president, Technology and Intellectual Property," said: ""True innovation leadership is about more than just the numbers of patents granted. It's about innovating to benefit customers", partners and society. ""Our pledge today is the beginning of a new era in how IBM will manage intellectual property."" In the past", IBM has supported the non-commercial operating system Linux although critics have said this was done only as an attempt to undermine Microsoft. The company said it wanted to encourage other firms to release patents into what it called a ""patent commons"". Adam Jollans", IBM's world-wide Linux strategy manager," said the move was a genuine attempt to encourage innovation. ""We believe that releasing these patents will result in innovation moving more quickly. ""This is about encouraging collaboration and following a model much like academia."" Mr Jollans likened the plan for a patent commons to the way the internet was developed and said everyone could take advantage of the result of collaboration. ""The internet's impact has been on everyone. The benefits are there for everyone to take advantage of." Stuart Cohen", chief executive of US firm Open Source Development Labs," said the move could mean a change in the way companies deal with patents. ""I think other companies will follow suit", he said. But not everyone was as supportive. Florian Mueller, campaign manager of a group lobbying to prevent software patents becoming legal in the European Union, dismissed IBM's move as insubstantial. It's just diversionary tactics", wrote Mr Mueller, who leads nosoftwarepatents.com, in a message on the group's website. Let's put this into perspective: We're talking about roughly one percent of IBM's worldwide patent portfolio. They file that number of patents in about a month's time", he added. IBM will continue to hold the 500 patents but it has pledged to seek no royalties from the patents. The company said it would not place any restrictions on companies, groups or individuals who use them in open-source projects. Open source software is developed by programmers who offer the source code - the origins of the program - for free and allow others to adapt or improve the software. End users have the right to modify and redistribute the software, as well as the right to package and sell the software. Other areas covered by the patents released by IBM include storage management, simultaneous multiprocessing, image processing, networking and e-commerce.

tech 269.txt Yahoo moves into desktop search Internet giant Yahoo has launched software to allow people to search e-mail and other files on their PCs. The firm is following in the footsteps of Microsoft, Google and Ask Jeeves, which have offered similar services. Search has become a lucrative and hotly-contested area of expansion for net firms, looking to extend loyalty beyond the web. With hard drives providing bigger storage, users could need more help to locate important files, such as photos. The desktop search technology has been licensed from a US-based firm X1 Technologies. It is designed to work alongside Microsoft's Outlook and Outlook Express e-mail programs. Searching e-mail effectively is becoming increasingly important, especially as the amount

of spam increases. According to research from message analysts the Radicati Group, up to 45% of businesses' critical information is stored in e-mail and attachments. Yahoo's software can also work separately on the desktop, searching for music, photos and other files. Users can search under a variety of criteria, including file name, size, date and time. It doesn't yet incorporate web searching, although Yahoo has promised that future versions will allow users to search both web-based and desktop data. "We are all getting more and more files on our desktop but the real commercial opportunity lies with linking this through to web content," said Julian Smith, an analyst with research firm Jupiter. "It is all about extending the idea of search and getting a closer relationship with consumers by organising not just how they search on the internet but the files on your computer as well," he said. Search engines are often the first port of call for users when they go onto the web. The new foray into desktop search has rung alarm bells for human rights groups, concerned about the implications to privacy. And not everyone is impressed with the functionality of such services. Alexander Linden, vice president of emerging technologies at analyst firm Gartner, downloaded the Google product but has since removed it. "It was just not very interesting", he said. He believes the rush to enter the desktop business is just a way of keeping up with rivals. "Desktop search is just one of many features people would like but I'm suspicious of its usefulness," he said. More useful would be tools that can combine internet, intranet and desktop search alongside improvements to key word searching, he said.

tech 270.txt Rings of steel combat net attacks Gambling is hugely popular, especially with tech-savvy criminals. Many extortionists are targeting net-based betting firms and threatening to cripple their websites with deluges of data unless a ransom is paid. But now deep defences are being put in place by some of the UK's biggest net firms to stop these attacks. Increasing numbers of attacks and the huge amounts of data being used to try to bump a site off the web are prompting firms to adopt the measures. Net firms are realising that it's not just about anti-virus and firewalls", said Paul King, chief security architect at Cisco. There are more things that can be done in the network to protect data centres." Mr King said the only way to properly combat these so-called Distributed Denial-of-Service attacks was with intelligent net-based systems. Many of the gambling sites suffering DDoS attacks are in offshore data and hosting centres", so any large scale data flood could knock out access to many more sites than just the one the criminals were targeting, said Mr King. This overspill effect was only likely to grow as attacks grow in size and scale. Malcolm Seagrave, security expert at Energis, said the most common types of attacks hit sites with 10 megabytes of data over short periods of time. Bigger attacks sending down 200 megabytes of traffic or more were rarely seen," he said. ""It does feel like they are turning the dial because you see this traffic gradually growing", he said. So far there have been no attacks involving gigabytes of data, said Mr Seagrave. However, he added that it was only a matter of time before such large attacks were mounted. Maria Capella, spokeswoman for net provider Pipex, said that when DDoS attacks were at their height, customers were getting hit every four to five days. The defences being put in place constantly monitor the streams of data flowing across networks and pluck out the traffic destined for target sites. "It's about understanding what's genuine traffic and keeping attack traffic from going to the site", she said. "We study the profile of their traffic and as soon as we see an anomaly in the profile that's when we start to get the backbone engineering boys to see if we are going to sustain an attack," said Ms Capella. This traffic can be hard to spot because DDoS attacks typically use thousands of computers in many different countries, each participating machine only sends a small part of the entire data flood. Typical

ly these computers have been infected by a virus or worm which reports its success and the net address of compromised machines back to the malicious hacker or hi-tech criminal that set off the virus. Hijacked computers are known as zombies or 'bots and collections of them are called 'bot nets. Many spammers rent out 'bot nets to help them anonymously send junk mail. Most of the zombies are based outside the country that hosts the target site so getting the attacking PCs shut off can be difficult. Often Pipex and other net suppliers do get advance notice that an attack is about to happen. The serious players tend to precede an attack with some kind of ransom e-mail", said Ms Capella. We ask, as part of the service we provide," that customers notify us of anything they have in advance that would give us forewarning." Once an attack is spotted dedicated net hardware takes over to remove the attack traffic and ensure that sites stay up. Energis took a similar approach", said Mr Seagrave. "We have technology out there that allows us to detect attacks in minutes rather than let network engineers spend hours pulling the information together", said Mr Seagrave. Also net firms were starting to work more closely together on the problem of DDoS attacks and pool information about where they are coming from. Information gathered on attacks and where they originated has led to some arrests. He said Energis also did its own intelligence work to get in insight into which sites criminal gangs plan to target. We have people in places where they shouldn't be, monitoring tech sites," he said. Sometimes though, he said, spotting the next victim was easy. You can see them going alphabetically through the list with the gambling sites", trying one after another," said Mr Seagrave.

tech 271.txt US hacker breaks into T-Mobile A man is facing charges of hacking into computers at the US arm of mobile phone firm T-Mobile. The Californian man, Nicholas Lee Jacobsen, was arrested in October. Mr Jacobsen tried at least twice to hack T-Mobile's network and took names and social security numbers of 400 customers, said a company spokesman. The arrest came a year after T-Mobile uncovered the unauthorised access. The US Secret Service has been investigating the case. T-Mobile has stringent procedures in place where we monitor for suspicious activity so that limited his activities and we were able to take corrective action immediately", Peter Dobrow, a T-Mobile spokesperson said. It is thought that Mr Jacobsen's hacking campaign took place over at least seven months during which time he read e-mails and personal computer files, according to court records. Although Mr Jacobsen, 21, managed to get hold of some data, it is thought he failed to get customer credit card numbers which are stored on a separate computer system, said Mr Dobrow. T-Mobile confirmed that the US Secret Service was also looking into whether the hacker accessed photos that T-Mobile subscribers had taken with their camera phones. The Associated Press agency reported that Mr Jacobsen also read personal files on the Secret Service agent who was apparently investigating the case. A Los Angeles grand jury indicted Mr Jacobsen with intentionally accessing a computer system without authorisation and with the unauthorised impairment of a protected computer between March and October 2004. He is currently on bail. T-Mobile is a subsidiary company of Deutsche Telekom and has about 16.3 million subscribers in the US.

tech 272.txt Windows worm travels with Tetris Users are being warned about a Windows virus that poses as the hugely popular Tetris game. The Cellery worm installs a playable version of the classic falling blocks game on PCs that it has infected. While users play the game, the worm spends its time using the machine to search for new victims to infect on nearby networks. The risk of infection by Cellery is thought to be very low as few copies of the worm have been found in the wild. The Cellery worm does not spread via e-mail like many other viruses. Instead it browses computer networks for PCs that have not shut off all the insecure ways they connect to other machines. When it infect

s a machine, Cellery installs a version of Tetris that users can play. As the game starts up the worm also starts a music file to accompany it. At the same time the virus starts scouring networks for other vulnerable machines. The virus does no damage to machines but heavily infected networks could slow down as scanning traffic builds. Productivity may suffer too if users spend time playing Tetris. PCs running Windows 95, 98, ME, NT, 2000, and XP could be vulnerable to the worm. If your company has a culture of allowing games to be played in the office", your staff may believe this is simply a new game that has been installed - rather than something that should cause concern," said Graham Cluley, spokesman for anti-virus firm Sophos. So far the number of people infected by Cellery is thought to be very small and the risks of further infection is very low. Sophos urged users and companies to update their anti-virus software to keep themselves protected.

tech 273.txt US state acts to stop 'spammers' US state Texas has filed a lawsuit against two men believed to be among the world's top five spammers. It is seeking millions of dollars in damages in a civil lawsuit filed earlier this week. The Texas attorney general said it started the legal action as messages sent by the alleged spammers broke three laws governing e-mail marketing. The company named in the lawsuit denied any wrongdoing and said it complied with all relevant laws. The Texas lawsuit was filed against Ryan Samuel Pitylak, a University of Texas student, and Mark Stephen Trotter of California. Both are thought to be the top executives in three companies - PayPerAction LLC., Leadplex LLC. and Leadplex Inc - that are suspected of sending out many millions of unwanted e-mail messages. Illegal spam must be stopped", said Greg Abbott, Texas attorney general announcing the legal action. Spam is one of the most aggravating and pervasive problems facing consumers today. "" The attorney general alleges that messages sent by Mr Pitylak and Mr Trotter's companies broke the 2003 Controlling the Assault of Non-Solicited Pornography and Marketing Act (Can-Spam) as well as the Texas Electronic Mail and Solicitation Act and Texas Deceptive Trade Practices Act. All three acts confer cash penalties for each violation of their terms. If the men are found guilty and all penalties are applied", the two men could face a damages bill running into millions. Mr Abbott said the messages sent by the pair broke laws by using misleading subject lines, not identifying themselves as adverts and offering services for which they had no licence to do so in Texas. Lawyers for the alleged spammers said the lawsuit was groundless and the two men would defend themselves strongly against the accusations. ""Leadplex and PayPerAction are legitimate internet marketing companies that are in complete compliance with the federal Can-Spam Act", said Lin Hughes, speaking on behalf of Mr Pitylak and Mr Trotter. In a similar move the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has won a court order that stops an international group of spammers sending sexually explicit e-mail. The FTC took the action because the messages being sent violated several parts of the CAN-Spam Act. In particular, the pornographic messages did not identify themselves as being sexually explicit, had deceptive subject headings, did not have working opt-out mechanisms, failed to mention they were adverts and did not give the sender's real world address. The court order stops the spammers sending e-mail and freezes assets prior to a hearing on a permanent injunction.

tech 274.txt World tour for top video gamers Two UK gamers are about to embark on a world tour as part of the most lucrative-ever global games tournament. Aaron Foster and David Treacy have won the right to take part in a tournament offering \$1m in total prize money. The cash will be handed out over 10 separate competitions in a continent-hopping contest organised by the Cyberathlete Professional League. As part of their prize the pair will have their travel costs paid to ensure they can get to the different bouts. The CPL Wo

rld Tour kicks off in mid-February and the first leg will be in Istanbul. All ten bouts of the tournament will be played throughout 2005, each one in a different country. At each stop \$50,000 in prize money will be up for grabs. The tournament champion for each leg of the CPL World Tour will walk away with a \$15,000 prize. The winner of the grand final will get a prize purse of \$150,000 from a total pot of \$500,000. Winners of each stage of the tour automatically get a place at the next stop. The world tour stops are open to any keen gamer that registers. Online registration for the first stop opens this weekend. Some pro-players are winning a spot at the tour destinations through qualifying events organised by CPL partners. Winners at these qualifiers get seeded higher in the elimination parts of each tournament. Mr Foster and Mr Treacy get the chance to attend the World Tour as members of the UK's Four-Kings gaming clan. Towards the end of 2004 Four-Kings staged a series of online Painkiller competitions to reveal the UK's top players of the PC game. The best eight players met face-to-face in a special elimination event in late December where Mr Foster and Mr Tracey proved their prowess at Painkiller. As part of their prize the pair also get a contract with Four-Kings Intel which is one of the UK's few pro-gaming teams. "There are a lot of people who take gaming very seriously and support their local or national team with the same passion as any other sport", said Simon Bysshe who filmed the event for Four-Kings and Intel. More than 80,000 people have downloaded the movie of the tournament highlights. Professional gaming is here to stay and will only grow in popularity", he said.

tech 275.txt Souped-up wi-fi is on the horizon Super high-speed wireless data networks could soon be in use in the UK. The government's wireless watchdog is seeking help on the best way to regulate the technology behind such networks called Ultra Wideband (UWB). Ofcom wants to ensure that the arrival of UWB-using devices does not cause problems for those that already use the same part of the radio spectrum. UWB makes it possible to stream huge amounts of data through the air over short distances. One of the more likely uses of UWB is to make it possible to send DVD quality video images wirelessly to TV screens or to let people beam music to media players around their home. The technology has the potential to transmit hundreds of megabits of data per second. UWB could also be used to create so-called Personal Area Networks that let a person's gadgets quickly and easily swap data amongst themselves. The technology works over a range up to 10 metres and uses billions of short radio pulses every second to carry data. At the recent Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas products with UWB chips built-in got their first public airing. Currently, use of UWB is only allowed in the UK under a strict licencing scheme. We're seeking opinion from industry to find out whether or not we should allow UWB on a licence-exempt basis", said a spokesman for Ofcom. Companies have until 24 March to respond. In April the EC is due to start its own consultation on Europe-wide adoption of UWB. The cross-Europe body for radio regulators, known as the European Conference of Postal and Telecommunications Administrations (CEPT), is carrying out research for this harmonisation programme. Early sight of the CEPT work has caused controversy as some think it over-emphasises UWB's potential to interfere with existing users. By contrast a preliminary Ofcom report found that it would be quite straight-forward to deploy UWB without causing problems for those that already use it. The Ofcom spokesman said it was considering imposing a "mask" or set of technical restrictions on UWB-using devices. "We would want these devices to have very strict controls on power levels so they can not transmit a long way or over a wide area", he said. Despite the current restrictions the technology is already being used. Cambridge-based Ubisense has about 40 customers around the world using the short-range radio technology, said David Theriault, standards and regulatory liaison for Ubisense. He said that UWB was dr

iving novel ways to interact with computers. It's like having a 3D mouse all the time", he said. He said that European decisions on what to do with UWB allied with IEEE decisions on the exact specifications for it would help drive adoption. Prior to its adoption as a way for gadgets and computers to communicate, UWB was used as a sensing technology. It is used to spot such things as cracks under the surface of runways or to help firemen detect people through walls.

tech 276.txt EA to take on film and TV giants Video game giant Electronic Arts (EA) says it wants to become the biggest entertainment firm in the world. The US firm says it wants to compete with companies such as Disney and will only achieve this by making games appeal to mainstream audiences. EA publishes blockbuster titles such as Fifa and John Madden, as well as video game versions of movies such as Harry Potter and the James Bond films. Its revenues were \$3bn (£1.65bn) in 2004, which EA hoped to double by 2009. EA is the biggest games publisher in the world and in 2004 had 27 titles which sold in excess of one million copies each. Nine of the 20 biggest-selling games in the UK last year were published by EA. Gerhard Florin, EA's managing director for European publishing, said: Doubling our industry in five years is not rocket science." He said it would take many years before EA could challenge Disney - which in 2004 reported revenues of \$30bn (£16bn) - but it remained a goal for the company. ""We will be able to bring more people into gaming because games will be more emotional." Mr Florin predicted that the next round of games console would give developers enough power to create real emotion. ""It's the subtleties", the eyes, the mouth - 5,000 polygons doesn't really sell the emotion. ""With PS3 and Xbox 2", we can go on the main character with 30,000 to 50,000 polygons, he said. With that increased firepower, the Finding Nemo video game looks just like the movie," but it will be interactive." Mr Florin said that more than 50% of all EA's games were sold to adults and played by adults", but the perception remained that the video game industry was for children. ""Our goal is to bring games to the masses which bring out emotions." EA said the video game industry was now bigger than the music industry. ""Nobody queues for music anymore." "You can't ignore an industry when people queue to buy a game at midnight because they are so desperate to play it", he said, referring to demand for titles for such as Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas and Halo 2. Jan Bolz, EA's vice president of sales and marketing in Europe, said the firm was working to give video games a more central role in popular culture. He said the company was in advanced stages of discussions over a reality TV show in which viewers could control the actions of the characters as in its popular game The Sims. One idea could be that you're controlling a family", telling them when to go to the kitchen and when to go to the bedroom, and with this mechanism you have gamers all over the world 'playing the show', said Mr Bolz. He also said EA was planning an international awards show similar to the Oscars and the Grammys" which would combine video games", music and movies. Mr Bolz said video games firm had to work more closely with celebrities. ""People will want to play video games if their heroes like Robbie Williams or Christina Aguilera are in them." Mr Florin said the challenge was to keep people playing in their 30s", 40s and 50s. ""There's an indication that a 30 year old comes home from work and still wants to play games. ""If that's true", that's a big challenge for TV broadcasters - because watching TV is the biggest pastime at present." "

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tech 277.txt Tech helps disabled speed demons An organisation has been launched to encourage disabled people to get involved in all aspects of motorsport", which is now increasingly possible thanks to technological innovations. The Motorsport Endeavour Club left the starting grid yesterday at

the Autosport International 2005 show at Birmingham's NEC, with several technologies to adapt vehicles on display. Motorcycle racer, Roy Tansley," from Derby developed his electronic sequential gear changer following an accident which resulted in part of his left leg being amputated. ""I needed to find a way of changing gear and generally you do that with your left leg", Mr Tansley told the BBC News website. In simple terms," I needed to invent a left foot - initially it was quite a Heath Robinson device."" Mr Tansley had to argue his case to be allowed to continue competing with motorcycle racing's governing body", " the Autocycle Union. ""At that time they wouldn't let any amputee race at all", " but eventually they told me I could have a licence as long as I raced sidecars." " Mr Tansley's invention", the Pro-Shift, is designed to work with Hewland gearboxes which are widely used in motorcycle racing. In addition to helping disabled riders to compete, Mr Tansley reckons that the Pro-Shift saves at least 20 seconds per lap when he competes in the Isle of Man TT. As a result," there has been considerable interest in the product from other riders keen to improve their performance. ""I'm not prejudiced", " I'll sell to able-bodied people if I have to!"" he joked. Another exhibit on the Motorsport Endeavour stand is a Subaru Impreza rally car", adapted to accommodate a variety of disabilities. The vehicle belongs to ParaRallying," the world's only rally school for disabled drivers which is based in Lincolnshire. ""We use the latest technology supplied by an Italian company", said rally driver Dave Hawkins who runs the company. The cars have electronic throttles, electronic brakes," electronic clutches - we've yet to turn anybody away." " Mr Hawkins - a paraplegic himself - says his customers have included right or left arm amputees", quadriplegics, people who have had strokes and a woman who had had all four limbs amputated. ParaRallying uses a Vauxhall Astra GSI with an automatic gearbox and manual Subaru Imprezas. The car on display is fitted with a 'duck clutch' - a switch on the gear stick used instead of the clutch pedal. It also has a second ring behind the steering wheel to operate the throttle and a hand operated brake bar. When Joy Rainey started competing in motorsport in 1974 she was continuing the family tradition - her father, Murray, is a former Australian Formula 3 champion. And it was Rainey Senior who modified a sports racer to accommodate his daughter's small stature so that she could take part in hill climbs. She uses an ordinary road car by putting extensions on the pedals," a cushion behind her back and raising the seat. ""But in a competition car you have to have everything right or you'll lose the balance of the car", she said. I bring everything back to me - steering wheel, steering column," gear lever and pedals." " When she recently took part in the London to Sydney Marathon she shared the driving with her partner", Trevor, who now does the engineering work. He designed a system for their Morris Minor so that the adaptations could be totally removed in under a minute. The Motorsport Endeavour Club is hoping that putting such technologies on display will result in more disabled people becoming involved in all areas of the sport and at every level.

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"tech 278.txt Web photo storage market hots up An increasing number of firms are offering web storage for people with digital photo collections. Digital cameras were the hot gadget of Christmas 2004 and worldwide sales of the cameras totalled \$24bn last year. Many people's hard drives are bulging with photos and services which allow them to store and share their pictures online are becoming popular. Search firms such as Google are also offering more complex tools for managing personal photo libraries. Photo giants such as Kodak offer website storage which manages photo collections", lets users edit pictures online and provides print-ordering services. Some services, such as Koda

k's Ofoto and Snapfish, offer unlimited storage space but they do require users to buy some prints online. Other sites, such as Pixagogo, charge a monthly fee. Marcus Hawkins, editor of Digital Camera magazine," said: ""As file sizes of pictures increase", "storage becomes a problem. ""People are using their hard drives", "backing up on CD and DVD and now they are using online storage solution s. ""They are a place to store pictures", "to share their pictures with families and friends and they can print out their photos." While many of the services are aimed at the amateur and casual digital photographer", other websites are geared up for enthusiasts who want to share tips and information. Photosig is an online community of photographers who can critique each other's work. On Tuesday, Google released free software for organising and finding digital photos stored on a computer's hard drive. The tool, called Picasa, automatically detects photos as they are added to a PC - whether sent via e-mail or transferred from a digital camera. The software includes tools for restoring colour and removing red eye," as well as sharpening images. Photos can then be uploaded to sites such as Ofoto. Many people use the sites to edit and improve their favourite photographs before ordering prints. Mr Hawkins added: ""The growth area is that you can order your prints online. Friends and family can also access pictures you want them to see and they can print them out too. ""Rather than just a place to dump your pictures", "it's about sharing them." The vast majority of pictures remain on a PC's hard drive", which is why search tools, such as those offered by Google," become increasingly important. But some historians and archivists are concerned that the need for perfect pictures will mean that those poor quality prints which offered a tantalising glimpse of the past may disappear for ever. ""It's one thing taking pictures", it's another finding them," said Mr Hawkins. But this is the same problem that has always existed - how many of us have photos in wallets tucked away somewhere?""

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"tech 279.txt Speak easy plan for media players Music and film fans will be able to control their digital media players just by speaking to them", under plans in development by two US firms. ScanSoft and Gracenote are developing technology to give people access to their film and music libraries simply by voice control. They want to give people hands-free access to digital music and films in the car," or at home or on the move. Huge media libraries on some players can make finding single songs hard. ""Voice command-and-control unlocks the potential of devices that can store large digital music collections", " said Ross Blanchard, vice president of business development for Gracenote. These applications will radically change the car entertainment experience", allowing drivers to enjoy their entire music collections without ever taking their hands off the steering wheel," he added. Gracenote provides music library information for millions of different albums for jukeboxes such as Apple's iTunes. The new technology will be designed so that people can play any individual song or movie out of a collection, just by saying its name. Users will also be able to request music that fits a mood or an occasion, or a film just by saying the actor's name. Speech is a natural fit for today's consumer devices", particularly in mobile environments," said Alan Schwartz, vice president of SpeechWorks, a division of ScanSoft. Pairing our voice technologies with Gracenote's vast music database will bring the benefits of speech technologies to a host of consumer devices and enable people to access their media in ways they've never imagined." The two firms did not say if they were developing the technology for languages other than English. Users will also be able to get more information on a favourite song they have been listening to by asking: ""What is this?"" Portable players are becoming popular in cars and a number of auto firms are working w

ith Apple to device interfaces to control the firm's iPod music player. But with tens of thousands of songs able to be stored on one player", voice control would make finding that elusive track by Elvis Presley much easier. The firms gave no indication about whether the iPod, or any other media player, were in mind for the use of the voice control technology. The companies estimate that the technology will be available in the fourth quarter of 2005.

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"tech 280.txt Cable offers video-on-demand Cable firms NTL and Telewest have both launched video-on-demand services as the battle between satellite and cable TV heats up. Movies from Sony Pictures", Walt Disney, Touchstone, Miramax, Columbia and Buena Vista will be among those on offer. The service is similar to Sky Plus, as users can pause, fast forward and rewind content, but they cannot store programmes on their set top box - yet. It could sound the death knell for some TV channels," Telewest predicts. ""It allows us to demonstrate a clear competitive advantage over Sky for the first time in many years", said Telewest chief executive Eric Tvetter. Video-on-demand will offer a deeper range of content than currently exists on TV. There will be less compromising around the TV schedule and some of the less popular channels may go by the wayside," said Philip Snalune, director of products at Telewest. Telewest customers in Bristol and NTL viewers in Glasgow will be the first to test the new service, which sees a raft of movies on offer for 24 hour rental. During the year, the service will be extended to all cable regions. Films will range in price from £1 or £2 for archived movies to £3.50 for current releases. New releases initially on offer will include 50 First dates, Kill Bill: Volume 2, Gothika and The Station Agent. In addition, NTL is offering children's programmes, adult content, music video and concerts. Telewest will launch similar services later in the year. NTL is also offering viewers the chance to catch up with programmes they have missed. Its pick of the week service will offer a selection of BBC programmes from the previous seven days such as Eastenders, Casualty, Top Gear and Antiques Roadshow. The BBC is trialling a similar service, offering broadband users the chance to watch programmes already broadcast on their PC. For Telewest it is the beginning of a £20m investment in TV-on-demand which will also see the launch of a personal video recorder (PVR). PVR has been a big success for Sky because it gives customers control over programmes. Satellite customers without PVR cannot pause, rewind or fast forward their programmes. With both services on offer from Telewest, Mr Tvetter is confident the cable firm can dent not just the viewing figures for terrestrial TV but also gain a huge competitive advantage over Sky. We offer the best of both worlds and most households have an interest in having both video-on-demand and PVR", he said. Video rental stores may also have to watch their back. Video-on-demand is better than having a video-store in your living room and is more convenient, he said. NTL said it had not ruled out the possibility of offering a PVR but for the moment is concentrating on video-on-demand. PVR is a recording mechanism whereas what we are offering is truly on demand," said a spokesman for the company. Video-on-demand has the added advantage of not requiring a separate set-top box or extra remote controls, he added. Adam Thomas, an analyst at research firm Informa Media believes the time is ripe for video-on-demand to flourish. While Sky will remain the dominant force in UK pay TV for some time to come", NTL and Telewest seem well placed to successfully ride this second wave of VOD enthusiasm and, if marketed correctly, this could help them eat into Sky's lead," he said.

tech 281.txt Cyber crime booms in 2004 The last 12 months have seen a dramatic growth in almost every security threat that plague Windows PCs. The count of known viruses broke the 100,000 barrier and the number of ne

w viruses grew by more than 50%. Similarly phishing attempts, in which conmen try to trick people into handing over confidential data, are recording growth rates of more than 30% and attacks are becoming increasingly sophisticated. Also on the increase are the number of networks of remotely controlled computers, called bot nets, used by malicious hackers and conmen to carry out many different cyber crimes. One of the biggest changes of 2004 was the waning influence of the boy hackers keen to make a name by writing a fast-spreading virus, said Kevin Hogan, senior manager in Symantec's security response group. Although teenage virus writers will still play around with malicious code, said Mr Hogan, 2004 saw a significant rise in criminal use of malicious programs. The financial incentives were driving criminal use of technology, he said. His comment was echoed by Graham Cluley, senior technology consultant from anti-virus firm Sophos. Mr Cluley said: When the commercial world gets involved," things really get nasty. Virus writers and hackers will be looking to make a tidy sum." In particular", phishing attacks, which typically use fake versions of bank websites to grab login details of customers," boomed during 2004. Web portal Lycos Europe reported a 500% increase in the number of phishing e-mail messages it was catching. The Anti-Phishing Working group reported that the number of phishing attacks against new targets was growing at a rate of 30% or more per month. Those who fall victim to these attacks can find that their bank account has been cleaned out or that their good name has been ruined by someone stealing their identity. This change in the ranks of virus writers could mean the end of the mass-mailing virus which attempts to spread by tricking people into opening infected attachments on e-mail messages. "They are not an efficient way of spreading viruses," said Mr Hogan. They are very noisy and they are not technically challenging." The opening months of 2004 did see the appearance of the Netsky", Bagle and MyDoom mass mailers, but since then more surreptitious viruses, or worms," have dominated. Mr Hogan said worm writers were more interested in recruiting PCs to take part in ""bot nets"" that can be used to send out spam or to mount attacks on websites. In September Symantec released statistics which showed that the numbers of active ""bot computers"" rose from 2",000 to 30,"000 per day. Thanks to these ""bot nets""", spam continued to be a problem in 2004. Anti-spam firms report that, in many cases," legitimate e-mail has shrunk to less than 3 0% of messages. Part of the reason that these ""bot nets"" have become so prevalent", he said, was due to a big change in the way that many viruses were created. In the past many viruses, such as Netsky, have been the work of an individual or group. By contrast, said Mr Hogan, the code for viruses such as Gaobot, Spybot and Randex were commonly held and many groups work on them to produce new variants at the same time. The result is that now there are more than 3,"000 variations of the Spybot worm. ""That's unprecedented," said Mr Hogan. What makes it difficult is that they are all co-existing with each other and do not exist in an easy to understand chronology." The emergence of the first proper virus for mobile phones was also seen in 2004. In the past", threats to smart phones have been largely theoretical because the viruses created to cripple phones existed only in the laboratory rather than the wild. In June, the Cabir virus was discovered that can hop from phone to phone using Bluetooth short-range radio technology. Also released this year was the Mosquito game for Symbian phones which surreptitiously sends messages to premium rate numbers, and in November the Skulls Trojan came to light which can cripple phones. On the positive side, Finnish security firm F-Secure said that 2004 was the best-ever year for the capture, arrest and sentencing of virus writers and criminally-minded hackers. In total, eight virus writers were arrested and some members of the so-called 29A virus writing group were sentenced. One high-profile arrest was that of German teenager Sven Jaschen who confessed to be behind the Netsky and Sasser virus fa

milies. Also shut down were the Carderplanet and Shadowcrew websites that were used to trade stolen credit card numbers.

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"tech 282.txt Dublin hi-tech labs to shut down Dublin's hi-tech research laboratory", Media Labs Europe, is to shut down. The research centre, which was started by the Irish government and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, was a hotbed for technology concepts. Since its opening in 2000, the centre has developed ideas, such as implants for teeth, and also aimed to be a digital hub for start-ups in the area. The centre was supposed to be self-funded, but has failed to attract the private cash injection it needs. In a statement, Media Labs Europe said the decision to close was taken because neither the Irish Government nor the prestigious US-based Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) was willing to fund it. Prime Minister Bertie Ahern had wanted to the centre to become a big draw for smaller hi-tech companies, in an attempt to regenerate the area. About three dozen small firms were attracted to the area," but it is thought the effects of the dot.com recession damaged the Labs' long-term survival. The Labs needed about 10 million euros (US\$13 million) a year from corporate sponsors to survive. ""In the end", it was too deep and too long a recession," said Simon Jones, the Labs' managing director. Ian Pearson, BT's futurologist, told the BBC News website that the closure was a real shame"". BT was just one of the companies that had worked with the Labs"," looking at RFID tag developments and video conferencing. ""There were a lot of very talented"," creative people there and they came up with some great ideas that were helping to ensure greater benefits of technology for society. ""I have no doubt that the individuals will be quickly snapped up by other research labs"," but the synergies from them working as a team will be lost."" Noel Dempsey", the government's communications minister," said Mr Ahern had been ""very committed"" to the project. ""He is", I know, very disappointed it has come to this. At the time it seemed to be the right thing to do," he said. Unfortunately the model is not a sustainable one in the current climate." During its five years", innovative and some unusual ideas for technologies were developed. In recent months, 14 patent applications had been filed by the Labs. Many concepts fed into science, engineering, and psychology as well as technology, but it is thought too few of the ideas were commercially viable in the near-term. Several research teams explored how which humans could react with technologies in ways which were entirely different. The Human Connectedness group, for example, developed the iBand, a bracelet which stored and exchanged information about you and your relationships. This information could be beamed to another wearer when two people shook hands. Other projects looked at using other human senses, like touch, to interact with devices which could be embedded in the environment, or on the body itself. One project examined how brainwaves could directly control a computer game. The Labs, set up in an old Guinness brewery, housed around 100 people, made up of staff, researchers, students, collaborators and part-time undergraduate students. It is thought more than 50 people will lose their jobs when the Labs close on 1 February. According to its latest accounts, Media Lab Europe said it spent 8.16 million euros (about US\$10.6 million) in 2003 and raised just 2.56 million euros (US\$3.3 million).

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"tech 283.txt Games help you 'learn and play' 'God games' in which players must control virtual people and societies could be educational", says research. A US researcher has suggested that games such as The Sims could be a good way to teach languages. Ravi Purushotma believes that the world

of The Sims can do a better job of teaching vocabulary and grammar than traditional methods. The inherent fun of game playing could help to make learning languages much less of a chore, said Mr Purushotma. There must be few parents or teachers that do not worry that the lure of a video game on a computer or console is hard to resist by children that really should be doing their homework. But instead of fearing computer games, Ravi Purushotma believes that educationalists," particularly language teachers should embrace games. ""One goal would be to break what I believe to be the false assumption that learning and play are inherently oppositional"," he said. He believes that the phenomenal ability"" of games such as The Sims and others to capture the interest of adolescent audiences is ripe for exploitation. The hard part of learning any language", said Mr Purushotma," were the basic parts of learning what different words refer to and how they are used to build up sentences. Boring lessons drumming vocabulary into pupils couched in terms they do not understand has made many languages far harder to learn than they should be. ""The way we often teach foreign languages right now is somewhat akin to learning to ride a bike by formally studying gravity", he said. By contrast, said Mr Purushotma, learning via something like The Sims may mean students do not feel like they are studying at all. This was because The Sims does not rely solely on words to get information across to players. Instead the actions of its computer controlled people and how they interact with their world often makes clear what is going on. The incidental information about what a Sim was doing could reinforce what a player or student was supposed to be learning, said Mr Purushotma. By contrast many language lessons try to impart information about a tongue with little context. For instance, he said, in a version of The Sims adapted to teach German, if a player misunderstood what was meant by the word *energie*" the actions of a tired Sim", stumbling then falling asleep, would illustrate the meaning. If necessary detailed textual information could be called upon to aid players' or students' understanding. One of the drawbacks of The Sims, said Mr Purushotma, was the lack of spoken language to help people brush up on pronunciation. However, online versions of The Sims, in which people have to move in, meet the neighbours and get to know the local town, could be adapted to help this. Although not wishing to claim that he is the first to suggest using a game can help people learn, Mr Purushotma believes that educationalists have missed the potential they have to help. Getting a simulated person to perform everyday activities in a make-believe world and having them described in a foreign language could be a powerful learning aid, he believes. Before now, he said, educational software titles suffer by comparison with the slick graphics and rich worlds found in games. But, he said," using pre-prepared game worlds such as The Sims has never been easier because tools have been made by its creators and fans that make it easy to modify almost any part of the game. This could make it easy for teachers to adapt parts of the game for their own lessons. ""I'm hoping now to re-create a well-polished German learning mod for the sequel by this summer", he told the BBC News website. I'm encouraged to hear that others are thinking of experimenting with Japanese and Spanish." Earlier work with a colleague on using Civilisation III to teach students about history showed that it could be a powerful way to get them to realise that solving a society's problems can not always come from making a single change. A report on the experiment said: ""Students began asking historical and geographical questions in the context of game play", using geography and history as tools for their game," and drawing inferences about social phenomena based on their play." Mr Purushotma's ideas were aired in an article for the journal Language Learning and Technology.

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"tech 284.txt Hacker threat to Apple's iTunes Users of Apple's music jukebox iTunes need to update the software to avoid a potential security threat. Hackers can build malicious playlist files which could crash the program and let them seize control of the computer by inserting Trojan code. A new version of iTunes is now available from the Apple website which solves the problem. Security firm iDefence", which notified users of the problem," recommended that users upgrade to iTunes version 4.7.1. The problem affects all users of iTunes - Windows and Mac OS - running versions 4.7 and earlier. Users can automatically upgrade iTunes by opening the ""look for updates"" window in the program. The security firm says users should avoid clicking on or accessing playlist files - which have the file extension of .pls or .m3u - which have come from unknown sources. Itunes is the world's most popular online music store with more than 200 million songs downloaded since it launched in 2003.

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"tech 285.txt Format wars could 'confuse users' Technology firms Sony", Philips, Matsushita and Samsung are developing a common way to stop people pirating digital music and video. The firms want to make a system that ensures files play on the hardware they make but also thwarts illegal copying. The move could mean more confusion for consumers already faced by many different, and conflicting, content control systems, experts warned. They say there are no guarantees the system will even prevent piracy. Currently many online stores wrap up downloadable files in an own-brand control system that means they can only be played on a small number of media players. Systems that limit what people can do with the files they download are known as Digital Rights Management systems. By setting up the alliance to work on a common control system," the firms said they hope to end this current fragmentation of file formats. In a joint statement the firms said they wanted to let consumers enjoy ""appropriately licensed video and music on any device" , independent of how they originally obtained that content"". The firms hope that it will also make it harder for consumers to make illegal copies of the music", movies and other digital content they have bought. Called the Marlin Joint Development Association, the alliance will define basic specifications that every device made by the electronics firms will conform to. Marlin will be built on technology from rights management firm Intertrust as well as an earlier DRM system developed by a group known as the Coral Consortium. The move is widely seen as a way for the four firms to decide their own destiny on content control systems instead of having to sign up for those being pushed by Apple and Microsoft. Confusingly for consumers," the technology that comes out of the alliance will sit alongside the content control systems of rival firms such as Microsoft and Apple. ""In many ways the different DRM systems are akin to the different physical formats", such as Betamax and VHS, that consumers have seen in the past," said Ian Fogg, personal technology and broadband analyst at Jupiter Research. The difference is that it is very fragmented", he said. It's not a two-horse race, it's a five, six," seven or even eight-horse race"" Mr Fogg said consumers had to be very careful when buying digital content to ensure that it would play on the devices they own. He said currently there were even incompatibilities within DRM families. Although initiatives such as Microsoft's ""Plays for Sure"" program could help remove some of the uncertainty", he said, life was likely to be confusing for consumers for some time to come. Shelley Taylor, analyst and author of a report about online music services, said the locks and limits on digital files were done to maximise the cash that firms can make from consumers. Apple's iTunes service was a perfect example of this," she said. ""Although iTunes has been hugely successful", Apple

could not justify its existence if it did not help sell all those iPods," she said. She said rampant competition between online music services, of which there are now 230 according to recent figures, could drive more openness and freer file formats. It always works out that consumer needs win out in the long run," she said, and the services that win in the long run are the ones that listen to consumers earliest." Ms Taylor said the limits legal download services place on files could help explain the continuing popularity of file-sharing systems that let people get hold of pirated pop. "People want portability," she said, and with peer-to-peer they have 100% portability." Cory Doctorow", European co-ordinator for the Electronic Frontier Foundation which campaigns for consumers on many cyber-rights issues," expressed doubts that the Marlin system would achieve its aims. "Not one of these systems has ever prevented piracy or illegal copying," he said. He said many firms readily admit that their DRM systems are little protection against skilled attackers such as the organised crime gangs that are responsible for most piracy. Instead, said Mr Doctorow, DRM systems were intended to control the group that electronics firms have most hold over - consumers. The studios and labels perceive an opportunity to sell you your media again and again - the iPod version", the auto version, the American and UK version, the ringtone version," and so on."

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"tech 286.txt Peer-to-peer nets 'here to stay' Peer-to-peer (P2P) networks are here to stay", and are on the verge of being exploited by commercial media firms, says a panel of industry experts. Once several high-profile legal cases against file-sharers are resolved this year, firms will be very keen to try and make money from P2P technology. The expert panel probed the future of P2P at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas earlier in January. The first convictions for P2P piracy were handed out in the US in January. William Trowbridge and Michael Chicoine pleaded guilty to charges that they infringed copyright by illegally sharing music, movies and software. Since the first successful file-sharing network Napster was forced to close down, the entertainment industry has been nervous and critical of P2P technology, blaming it for falling sales and piracy. But that is going to change very soon, according to the panel. The music and film industries have started some big legal cases against owners of legitimate P2P networks - which are not illegal in themselves - and of individuals accused of distributing pirated content over networks. But they have slowly realised that P2P is a good way to distribute content, said Travis Kalanick, founder and chairman of P2P network Red Swoosh," and soon they are all going to want a slice of it. They are just waiting to come up with ""business models"" that work for them", which includes digital rights management and copy-protection standards. But, until the legal actions are resolved, experimentation with P2P cannot not happen, said Michael Weiss, president of StreamCast Networks. Remembering the furore around VCRs when they first came out," Mr Weiss said: ""Old media always tries to stop new media. ""When they can't stop it," they try to control it. Then they figure out how to make money and they always make a lot of money." Once the courts decided that the VCR in itself was not an illegal technology", the film studios turned it into an extremely lucrative business. In August 2004, the San Francisco-based US Court of Appeals ruled in favour of Grokster and StreamCast, two file-sharing networks. The court said they were essentially in the same position that Sony was in the 1980s VCR battle, and said that the networks themselves could not be deemed as illegal. P2P networks usually do not rely on dedicated servers for the transfer of files. Instead it uses direct connections between computers - or clients. There are now many different types of P2P systems than work in different ways. P2P nets can be used

to share any kind of file, like photos, free software, licensed music and any other digital content. The BBC has already decided to embrace the technology. It aims to offer most of its own programmes for download this year and it will use P2P technology to distribute them. The files would be locked seven days after a programme aired making rights management easier to control. But the technology is still demonised and misunderstood by many. The global entertainment industry says more than 2.6 billion copyrighted music files are downloaded every month, and about half a million films are downloaded a day. Legal music download services, like Apple iTunes, Napster, have rushed into the music marketplace to try and lure file-sharers away from free content. Sales of legally-downloaded songs grew tenfold in 2004, with 200 million tracks bought online in the US and Europe in 12 months, the IFPI reported this week. But such download services are very different from P2P networks, not least because of the financial aspect. There are several money-spinning models that could turn P2P into a golden egg for commercial entertainment companies. Paid-for-pass-along, in which firms receive money each time a file is shared," along with various DRM solutions and advertiser-based options are all being considered. ""We see there are going to be different models for commoditising P2P", said Marc Morgenstern, vice president of anti-piracy firm Overpeer. Consumers are hungry for it and we will discover new models together", agreed Mr Morgenstern. But many net users will continue to ignore the entertainment industry's potential controlling grip on content and P2P technology by continuing to use it for their own creations. Unsigned bands, for example, use P2P networks to distribute their music effectively, which also draws the attention of record companies looking for new artists to sign. Increasingly", what you are seeing on P2P is consumer-created content," said Derek Broes, from Microsoft. They will probably play an increasing role in helping P2P spread", he said. Looking into P2P's future, file sharing is just the beginning for P2P networks, as far as Mr Broes is concerned. Once some of these issues are resolved", you are going to see aggressive movement to protect content, but also in ways that are unimaginable now," he said. File-sharing is the tip of the iceberg."

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"tech 287.txt Text message record smashed UK mobile owners continue to break records with their text messaging", with latest figures showing that 26 billion texts were sent in total in 2004. The figures collected by the Mobile Data Association (MDA) showed that 2.4 billion were fired off in December alone, the highest monthly total ever. That was 26% more than in December 2003. The records even surpassed the MDA's own predictions, it said. Every day 78 million messages are sent and there are no signs of a slow down. Before December's bumper text record, the previous highest monthly total was in October 2004, when 2.3 billion were sent. Text messaging is set to smash more records in 2005 too, said the MDA, with forecasts suggesting a total of 30 billion for the year. Even though mobiles are becoming increasingly sophisticated with much more multimedia applications, texting is still one of the most useful functions of mobiles. People are using SMS to do much more too. Booking cinema tickets, text voting," and news or sports text alerts are growing popular. Mobile owners have also given the chance to donate to the Disasters Emergency Committee's (DEC) Asian Tsunami fund by texting ""Donate"" to a simple short code number. Looking further ahead in the year", the MDA's chairman Mike Short, has predicted that more people will go online through their mobiles," estimating 15 billion WAP page impressions. Handsets with GPRS capability - an ""always on"" net connection - will rise to 75%", while 3G mobile ownership growing to five million by the end of 2005. These third generation mobiles offer a high-speed connection whi

ch means more data like video can be received on the phone. Globally, mobile phone sales passed 167 million in the third quarter of 2004, according to a recent report from analysts Gartner. That was 26% more than the previous year. It is predicted that there would be two billion handsets in use worldwide by the end of 2005.

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"tech 288.txt Big war games battle it out The arrival of new titles in the popular Medal Of Honor and Call of Duty franchises leaves fans of wartime battle titles spoilt for choice. The acclaimed PC title Call of Duty has been updated for console formats", building on many of the original's elements. For its part, the long-running Medal of Honor series has added Pacific Assault to its PC catalogue, adapting the console game Rising Sun. Call of Duty: Finest Hour casts you as a succession of allied soldiers fighting on World War 2 battlefronts including Russia and North Africa. It is a traditional first-person-viewed game that lets you control just one character, in the midst of a unit where cohorts constantly bark orders at you. On a near-identical note, Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault does all it can to make you feel part of a tight-knit team and plumb in the middle of all-out action. Its arenas are the war's Pacific battles, including Guadalcanal and Pearl Harbour. You play one character throughout, a raw and rather talkative US soldier. Both games rely on a carefully stage-managed structure that keeps things ticking along. When this works, it is a brilliant device to make you feel part of a story. When it does not, it is tedious. A winning moment is an early scene in Pacific Assault, where you come under attack at the famous US base in Hawaii. You are first ushered into a gunboat attacking the incoming waves of Japanese planes, then made to descend into a sinking battleship to rescue crewman, before seizing the anti-aircraft guns. It is one of the finest set-pieces ever seen in a video game. This notion of shuffling the player along a studiously pre-determined path, forcibly witnessing a series of pre-set moments of action, is a perilous business which can make the whole affair feel stilted rather than organic. The genius of something like Half Life 2 is that it skilfully disguises its linear plotting by various means of misdirection. This pair of games do not really accomplish that, being more concerned with imparting a full-on atmospheric experience. Call of Duty comes with a suitably bombastic score and overblown presentation. Finest Hour has a similar determination, framing everything in moody wartime music, archive footage and lots of reflective voice-overs. Letting you play a number of different roles is an interesting ploy that adds new dimensions to the Call of Duty endeavour, even if it sacrifices the narrative flow somewhat. The game's drawback could be said to be its format; tastes differ, but these wartime shooters often do seem to work better on PC. The mouse control is a big reason why, along with the sharper graphics a top-end computer can muster and the apparent notion that PC games are allowed to get away with a bit more subtlety. Call of Duty on PC was more detailed, plot-wise and graphically, and this new adaptation feels a little rough and ready. Targeting with the PS2 controller proved tricky, not helped by unconvincing collision-detection. You can shoot an enemy repeatedly with zero question as to your aim, yet the bullets will just refuse to hit him. Checkpoints are so few and far between that when you get shot, which happens regularly, you are set harshly far back, and will find yourself covering vast tracts of scorched earth again and again. The game wants to be a challenge, and is, and many players will like it for that. It is as dynamic a battlefield simulator as you will experience and even if it is not as refined as its PC parent, the sense of being part of the action is thoroughly impressive. Both of these games feature military colleagues who are disturbingly bad shots and prone to odd behav

iour. And in Pacific Assault in particular, their commands and comments are irritatingly meaningless. But the teamwork element in titles like this is superficial, designed to add atmosphere and camaraderie rather than affect the gameplay mechanics at all. Of the two games, Pacific Assault gets more things right, including little points like auto-saving intelligently and having tidier presentation. It engages you very well and also looks wonderful, making the most of the lush tropical settings that are reminiscent of the glorious Far Cry, although we had to ramp up the settings on a high-spec machine to get the most out of them. Finest Hour is by no means bad, and it is only because the PC original was so dazzling that this version sometimes feels underwhelming. Those looking for a wartime game with plenty of atmosphere and a hearty abundance of enemies to shoot will be contented. But they will also have a niggling puzzlement as to why it does not break a little more ground rather than just being competent.

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"tech 289.txt Mobiles rack up 20 years of use Mobile phones in the UK are celebrating their 20th anniversary this weekend. Britain's first mobile phone call was made across the Vodafone network on 1 January 1985 by veteran comedian Ernie Wise. In the 20 years since that day", mobile phones have become an integral part of modern life and now almost 90% of Britons own a handset. Mobiles have become so popular that many people use their handset as their only phone and rarely use a landline. The first ever call over a portable phone was made in 1973 in New York but it took 10 years for the first commercial mobile service to be launched. The UK was not far behind the rest of the world in setting up networks in 1985 that let people make calls while they walked. The first call was made from St Katherine's dock to Vodafone's head office in Newbury which at the time was over a curry house. For the first nine days of 1985 Vodafone was the only firm with a mobile network in the UK. Then on 10 January Cellnet (now 02) launched its service. Mike Caudwell, spokesman for Vodafone, said that when phones were launched they were the size of a briefcase, cost about £2,"000 and had a battery life of little more than 20 minutes. ""Despite that they were hugely popular in the mid-80s", he said. They became a yuppie must-have and a status symbol among young wealthy business folk." This was also despite the fact that the phones used analogue radio signals to communicate which made them very easy to eavesdrop on. He said it took Vodafone almost nine years to rack up its first million customers but only 18 months to get the second million. ""It's very easy to forget that in 1983 when we put the bid document in we were forecasting that the total market would be two million people", he said. Cellnet was forecasting half that." Now Vodafone has 14m customers in the UK alone. Cellnet and Vodafone were the only mobile phone operators in the UK until 1993 when One2One (now T-Mobile) was launched. Orange had its UK launch in 1994. Both newcomers operated digital mobile networks and now all operators use this technology. The analogue spectrum for the old phones has been retired. Called Global System for Mobiles (GSM) this is now the most widely used phone technology on the planet and is used to help more than 1.2 billion people make calls. Mr Caudwell said the advent of digital technology also helped to introduce all those things", such as text messaging and roaming that have made mobiles so popular.

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"tech 290.txt Fast moving phone viruses appear Security firms are warning about several mobile phone viruses that can spread much faster than similar bugs. The new strains of the Cabir mobile phone virus use short-range radio technology to leap to any vulnerable phone as soon as it is in range

e. The Cabir virus only affects high-end handsets running the Symbian Series 60 phone operating system. Despite the warnings", there are so far no reports of any phones being infected by the new variants of Cabir. The original Cabir worm came to light in mid-June 2004 when it was sent to anti-virus firms as a proof-of-concept program. A mistake in the way the original Cabir was written meant that even if it escaped from the laboratory, the bug would only have been able to infect one phone at a time. However, the new Cabir strains have this mistake corrected and will spread via short range Bluetooth technology to any vulnerable phone in range. Bluetooth has an effective range of a few tens of metres. The risk of being infected by Cabir is low because users must give the malicious program permission to download on to their handset and then must manually install it. Users can protect themselves by altering a setting on Symbian phones that conceals the handset from other Bluetooth using devices. Finnish security firm F-Secure issued a warning about the new strains of Cabir but said that the viruses do not do any damage to a phone. All they do is block normal Bluetooth activity and drain the phone's battery. Anti-virus firm Sophos said the source code for Cabir had been posted on the net by a Brazilian programmer which might lead to even more variants of the program being created. So far seven versions of Cabir are known to exist, one of which was inside the malicious Skulls program that was found in late November. Symbian's Series 60 software is licenced by Nokia, LG Electronics, Lenovo, Panasonic, Samsung, Sendo and Siemens.

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"tech 291.txt Doors open at biggest gadget fair Thousands of technology lovers and industry experts have gathered in Las Vegas for the annual Consumer Electronics Show (CES). The fair showcases the latest technologies and gadgets that will hit the shops in the next year. About 50",000 new products will be unveiled as the show unfolds. Microsoft chief Bill Gates is to make a pre-show keynote speech on Wednesday when he is expected to announce details of the next generation Xbox. The thrust of this year's show will be on technologies which put people in charge of multimedia content so they can store, listen to, and watch what they want on devices any time, anywhere. About 120,000 people are expected to attend the trade show which stretches over more than 1.5 million square feet. Highlights will include the latest trends in digital imaging, storage technologies, thinner flat screen and high-definition TVs, wireless and portable technologies, gaming, and broadband technologies. The show also includes several speeches from key technology companies such as Intel, Microsoft," and Hewlett Packard among others. ""The story this year remains all about digital and how that is completely transforming and revolutionising products and the way people interact with them"," Jeff Joseph, from the Consumer Electronics Association (CEA) told the BBC News website. It is about personalisation - taking your MP3 player and creating your own playlist"," taking your digital video recorder and watch what you want to watch when - you are no longer at the whim of the broadcasters." Consumer electronics and gadgets had a phenomenal year in 2004", according to figures released by CES organisers, the CEA, on Tuesday. The gadget explosion signalled the strongest growth yet in the US in 2004. Shipments of consumer electronics rose by almost 11% between 2003 and 2004. That trend is predicted to continue, according to CEA analysts, with wholesale shipments of consumer technologies expected to grow by 11% again in 2005. The fastest-growing technologies in 2004 included blank DVD media, Liquid Crystal Display (LCD) TVs, digital video recorders (DVRs)," and portable music players. ""This year we will really begin to see that come to life in what we call place shifting - so if you have your PVR [personal video recorder] in your living room"," you can move that content around the house. ""Some exhibitors will be showcasing

how you can take that content anywhere", " said Mr Joseph. He said the products which will be making waves in the next year will be about the democratisation"" of content - devices and technologies that will give people the freedom to do more with music", video, and images. There will also be more focus on the design of technologies, following the lead that Apple's iPod made, with ease of use and good looks which appeal to a wider range of people a key concern. The CEA predicted that there would be several key technology trends to watch in the coming year. Gaming would continue to thrive, especially on mobile devices, and would reach out to more diverse gamers such as women. Games consoles sales have been declining, but the launch of next generation consoles, such as Microsoft's Xbox and PlayStation, could buoy up sales. Although it has been widely predicted that Mr Gates would be showcasing the new Xbox, some media reports have cast doubt on what he would be talking about in the keynote. Some have suggested the announcement may take place at the Games Developers Conference in the summer instead. With more than 52% of US homes expected to have home networks, the CEA suggested hard drive boxes - or media servers - capable of storing thousands of images, video and audio files to be accessed through other devices around the home, will be more commonplace. Portable devices that combine mobile telephony, digital music and video players, will also be more popular in 2005. Their popularity will be driven by more multimedia content and services which will let people watch and listen to films, TV, and audio wherever they are. This means more storage technologies will be in demand, such as external hard drives, and flash memory like SD cards. CES runs officially from 6 to 9 January.

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"tech 292.txt Microsoft debuts security tools Microsoft is releasing tools that clean up PCs harbouring viruses and spyware. The virus-fighting program will be updated monthly and is a precursor to Microsoft releasing dedicated anti-virus software. Also being released is a software utility that will help users find and remove any spyware on their home computer. Although initially free it is thought that soon Microsoft will be charging users for the anti-spyware tool. The anti-spyware tool is available now and the anti-virus utility is expected to be available later this month. Microsoft's Windows operating system has long been a favourite of people who write computer viruses because it is so ubiquitous and has many loopholes that can be exploited. It has proved such a tempting target that there are now thought to be more than 100",000 viruses and other malicious programs in existence. Latest research suggests that new variants of viruses are being cranked out at a rate of up to 200 per week. Spyware is surreptitious software that sneaks on to home computers, often without users' knowledge. In its most benign form it just bombards users with pop-up adverts or hijacks web browser settings. The most malicious forms steal confidential information or log every keystroke that users make. Surveys have shown that most PCs are infested with spyware. Research by technology firms Earthlink and Webroot revealed that 90% of Windows machines have the malicious software on board and, on average, each one harbours 28 separate spyware programs. Before now Microsoft has left the market for PC security software to specialist firms such as Symantec, McAfee, Trend Micro and many others. It said that its virus cleaning program would not stop machines being infected nor remove the need for other anti-virus programs. On spyware freely available programs such as Ad-Aware and Spybot have become widely used by people keen to keep the latest variants at bay. Microsoft's two security tools have emerged as a result of acquisitions the company has made over the last two years. In 2003 it bought Romanian firm GeCAD Software to get hold of its anti-virus technology. In December 2004 it bought New York-based anti-spyware firm Giant Company Software. Last year Mi

crosoft also released the SP2 upgrade for Windows XP that closed many security loopholes in the software and made it easier for people to manage their anti-virus and firewall programs.

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"tech 293.txt File-swappers ready new network Legal attacks on websites that help people swap pirated films have forced the development of a system that could be harder to shut down. One site behind the success of the BitTorrent file-swapping system is producing its own software that avoids the pitfalls of the earlier program. A test version of the new Exeem program will be released in late January. But doubts remain about the new networks ability to ensure files being swapped are ""quality copies"". In late December movie studios launched a legal campaign against websites that helped people swap pirated movies using the BitTorrent network. The legal campaign worked because of the way that BitTorrent is organised. That file-sharing system relies on links called ""trackers"" that point users to others happy to share the file they are looking for. Shutting down sites that listed trackers crippled the BitTorrent network. One of the sites shut down by the legal campaign was suprnova.org which helped boost the popularity of the BitTorrent system by checking that trackers led to the movies or TV programmes they claimed to. Now the man behind suprnova.org", who goes by the nickname Sloncek, is preparing to release software for a new file-swapping network dubbed Exeem. In an interview with Novastream web radio, Sloncek said Exeem would combine ideas from the BitTorrent and Kazaa file-sharing systems. Like BitTorrent, Exeem will have trackers that help point people toward the file they want. Like Kazaa these trackers will be held by everyone. There will be no centrally maintained list. This, said Sloncek, should make the system less vulnerable to legal action aimed at stopping people swapping pirated movies and music. The Exeem software has been under development for a few months and is currently being tested by a closed group of users. An early public version of the software should be available before February. Sloncek said that currently only a Windows version of the software was in development. There were no plans for a Linux or Mac version. He said that costs of writing the software will be paid for by adverts appearing in the finished version of the program. Despite Suprnova administrator Sloncek's involvement with Exeem, the basic technology appears to have been developed by a firm called Swarm Systems that is based on Caribbean island Saint Kitts and Nevis. Users of the Exeem system will be able to rate files being swapped to help stop the spread of fake files, Sloncek told Novastream. Dr Johan Pouwelse, a researcher at the Delft University of Technology who studies peer-to-peer networks, said Exeem was the next evolution in file-sharing systems. But, he said, "it would struggle to be as popular as BitTorrent and Suprnova because early versions were not taking enough care to make sure good copies of files were being shared. ""Exeem cannot prevent pollution", he said. The rating system in Exeem seems flawed because it is easy to insert both fake files and fake ratings, he said. Studies have shown that organisations working for record labels and movie studios have worked to undermine Kazaa by putting in fakes. By contrast moderators on Suprnova made sure files being shared were high quality. The moderators are the difference between having a system that works and one that's full of crap like Kazaa, he said. There is a fundamental tension between distribution and integrity," he said. Mr Pouwelse said that future versions of file-sharing systems are likely to incorporate some kind of distributed reputation system that lets moderators prove who they are to the network and rate which files are worth downloading. When big files were being shared moderation systems were key, said Mr Pouwelse. He added that the legal attacks on BitTorrent had driven people away from sites such as Suprnova b

ut many users had simply migrated to other tracker listing sites many of which have seen huge increases in traffic. It's hard to compete with free", " he said. No-one from the Motion Picture Association of America was immediately available for comment on the file-sharing development.

tech 294.txt Games win for Blu-ray DVD format The next-generation DVD format Blu-ray is winning more supporters than its rival, according to its backers. Blu-ray, backed by 100 firms including Sony, is competing against Toshiba and NEC-backed HD-DVD to be the format of choice for future films and games. The Blu-Ray Association said on Thursday that games giants Electronic Arts and Vivendi would both support its DVD format. The next generation of DVDs will hold high-definition video and sound. This offers incredible 3D-like quality of pictures which major Hollywood studios and games publishers are extremely keen to exploit in the coming year. In a separate press conference at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, Toshiba announced that DVD players featuring its technology would be on the market by the end of 2005. As we move from standard definition video images to high-definition images", we have a much greater need for storage," Richard Doherty, from Panasonic's Hollywood Laboratories, one of the pioneers of Blu-ray, told the BBC news website. So by utilising blue laser-based technology we can make an optical laser disc that can hold six times as much as today's DVD." " A Blu-ray disc will be able to store 50GB of high-quality data", while Toshiba's HD-DVD will hold 30GB. Mr Doherty added that it was making sure the discs could satisfy all high-definition needs, including the ability to record onto the DVDs and smaller discs to fit into camcorders. Both Toshiba and Blu-ray are hopeful that the emerging DVD format war, akin to the Betamax and VHS fight in the 1980s, can be resolved over the next year when next-generation DVD players start to come out. When players do come out, they will be able to play standard DVDs too, which is good news for those who have huge libraries of current DVDs. But the support from Vivendi and Electronic Arts is a big boost to Blu-ray in the battle for supremacy. Gaming is a \$20 billion industry worldwide," so is as crucial as the film industry in terms of money to be made. " "The technical requirement for game development today demands more advanced optical-disc technologies", " said Michael Heilmann, chief technology officer for Vivendi Universal. Blu-ray offers the capacity", " performance and high-speed internet connectivity to take us into the future of gaming." " EA", a leading games developer and publisher, added that the delivery of high-definition games of the future was vital and Blu-ray had the capacity," functionality and interactivity needed for the kinds of projects it was planning. Sony recently announced it would be using the technology in its next generation of PlayStations. Mr Doherty said gamers were " "ravenous" " for high-quality graphics and technology for the next generation of titles. " "Gamers", especially those working on PCs, are always focused on more capacity to deliver textures, deeper levels," for delivering higher-resolution playback." " He added: " "The focus for games moving forward is on increased immersion. " "Gaming companies really like to focus on creating a world which involves creating complicated 3D models and textures and increasing the resolution", " increasing the frame rate - all of these are part of getting a more immersive experience." " Fitting these models on current DVD technologies means compressing the graphics so much that much of this quality is lost. As games move to more photo-real capability", " the current technology is limiting. " "They are thrilled at the advanced capacity to start to build these immersive environments", " said Mr Doherty. Currently, graphics-intensive PC games also require multiple discs for installation. High-definition DVDs will cut down on that need. Likewise, consoles rely on single discs, so DVDs that can hold six times more data mean much better, high-resolution games. Blu-ray has already won backing from major Hollywood studios, such as MGM Studios, Disney, a

nd Buena Vista, as well as top technology firms like Dell, LG, Samsung and Philips amongst others. While Toshiba's HD-DVD technology has won backing from Paramount, Universal and Warner Bros. The real world benefits (of HD-DVD) are apparent and obvious", " said Jim Cardwell, president of Warner Home Video. Mr Cardwell added that rapid time to market and dependability were significant factors in choosing to go with HD-DVD. Both formats are courting Microsoft to be the format of choice for the next generation Xbox, but discussions are still ongoing. Next generation DVDs will also be able to store images and other data. CES is the largest consumer electronics show in the world, and runs from 6 to 9 January.

tech 295.txt More power to the people says HP The digital revolution is focused on letting people tell and share their own stories, according to Carly Fiorina, chief of technology giant Hewlett Packard. The job of firms such as HP now, she said in a speech at the Consumer Electronics Show (CES), was to ensure digital and physical worlds fully converged. She said the goal for 2005 was to make people the centre of technology. CES showcases 50,000 new gadgets that will be hitting the shelves in 2005. The tech-fest, the largest of its kind in the world, runs from 6 to 9 January. The digital revolution is about the democratisation of technology and the experiences it makes possible", " she told delegates. Revolution has always been about giving power to the people." " She added: ""The real story of the digital revolution is not just new products", " but the millions of experiences made possible and stories that millions can tell." " Part of giving people more control has been about the freeing up of content", such as images, video and music. Crucial to this has been the effort to make devices that speak to each other better so that content can be more easily transferred from one device, such as a digital camera, to others, such as portable media players. A lot of work still needs to be done, however, to sort out compatibility issues and standards within the technology industry so that gadgets just work seamlessly, she said. Ms Fiorina's talk also touted the way technology is being designed to focus on lifestyle, fashion and personalisation, something she sees as key to what people want. Special guest, singer Gwen Stefani, joined her on-stage to promote her own range of HP digital cameras which Ms Stefani has helped design and which are heavily influenced by Japanese youth culture. The digital cameras, which are due to go on sale in the US by the summer, are based on the HP 607 model. The emphasis on personalisation and lifestyle is a big theme at this year's CES, with tiny, wearable MP3 players at every turn and rainbow hues giving colour to everything. Ms Fiorina also announced that HP was working with Nokia to launch a visual radio service for mobiles, which would launch in Europe early this year. The service will let people listen to radio on their mobiles and download relevant content, like a track's ringtone, simultaneously. The service is designed to make mobile radio more interactive. Among the other new products she showcased was the Digital Media Hub, a big upgrade to HP's Digital Entertainment Centre. Coming out in the autumn in the US, the box is a networked, high-definition TV, cable set-top box, digital video recorder and DVD recorder. It has a removable hard drive cartridge, memory card slots, and Light Scribe labelling software which lets people design and print customised DVD labels and covers. It is designed to contain all a household's digital media, such as pre-recorded TV shows, pictures, videos and music so it can all be managed in one place. The hub reflects the increasing move to re-box the PC so that it can work as part of other key centres of entertainment. Research suggests that about 258 million images are saved and shared every day, equating to 94 billion a year. Eighty per cent of those remain on cameras. Media hubs are designed to encourage people to organise them on one box. Ms Fiorina was one of several keynote speakers, who also included Microsoft chief Bill Gates, to s

et out what major technology companies think people will be doing with technologies and gadgets in the next 12 months. In a separate announcement during the keynote speech, Ms Fiorina said that HP would be partnering MTV to replace this year's MTV Asia music award. MTV's Asia Aid will be held in Bangkok on 3 February, and is aimed at helping to raise money for the Asian tsunami disaster.

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"tech 296.txt Gadget market 'to grow in 2005' The explosion in consumer technology is to continue into 2005", delegates at the world's largest gadget show, in Las Vegas, have been told. The number of gadgets in the shops is predicted to grow by 11%, " while devices which talk to each other will become increasingly important. ""Everything is going digital", " Kirsten Pfeifer from the Consumer Electronics Association, told the BBC News website. The Consumer Electronics Show (CES) featured the pick of 2005's products. Consumers are controlling what they want and technologies like HDTVs [high-definition TVs]", digital radio," and digital cameras will remain strong in 2005. ""All the products on show really showed the breadth and depth of the industry." " Despite showing diversity", " some delegates attending complained that the showcase lacked a s much ""wow factor"" as in previous years. The portable technologies on show also reflected one of the buzzwords of CES", " which was the ""time and place shifting"" of multimedia content - being able to watch and listen to video and mu sic anywhere", at any time. At the start of last year's CES, the CEA predicted there would be an average growth of 4% in 2004. That figure was surpassed with the rise in popularity of portable digital music players, personal video record ers and digital cameras. It was clear also that gadgets are becoming a lot more about lifestyle choice," with fashion and personalisation becoming increasingly key to the way gadgets are designed. Part of this has been the rise in spending power of the ""generation X-ers"" who have grown up with technology and who now have the spending power and desire for more devices that suit them. More than 5 7% of the consumer electronics market is made up of female buyers", according t o CEA research. Hybrid devices, which combine a number of multimedia function s," were also in evidence on the show floor. ""A lot of this is driven by just the ability to do it", " said Stephen Baker, a consumer electronics analyst with retail research firm NPD Group. Some of these functions cost next to nothing to add." " As well as the show floor showcasing everything from tiny wearable MP3 players to giant high-definition TVs", several keynote speeches were made by in dustry leaders, such as Microsoft chief Bill Gates. Despite several embarrassing technical glitches during Mr Gate's pre-show speech, he announced several new partnerships - mainly for the US market. He unveiled new ways of letting people take TV shows recorded on personal video recorders and watch them back on porta ble devices. He disappointed some, however, by failing to announce any details of the next generation of the Xbox games console. Another disappointment was th e lack of exposure Sony's new portable games device, the PSP," had at the show. Sony said the much-anticipated gadget would most likely start shipping in March for the US and Europe. It went on sale in Japan before Christmas. There were on ly two PSPs embedded in glass cabinets at the show though and no representative s to discuss further details. A Sony representative told the BBC News website t his was because Sony did not consider it to be part of their ""consumer technol ogy"" offering. Elsewhere at the show", there was a plethora of colour and pla sma screens, including Samsung's 102-inch (2.6 metre) plasma - the largest in t he world. Industry experts were also excited about high-definition technologies coming to the fore in 2005, with new formats for DVDs coming out which will hol d six times as much data as conventional DVDs. With so many devices on the move there were a lot of products on show offering external storage, like Seagate's

5GB pocket sized external hard drive, which won an innovation for engineering and design prize. More than 120,000 trade professionals attended CES in Las Vegas, which officially ran from 6 to 9 January.

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"tech 297.txt Apple unveils low-cost 'Mac mini' Apple has unveiled a new", low-cost Macintosh computer for the masses, billed as the Mac mini. Chief executive Steve Jobs showed off the new machine at his annual MacWorld speech, in San Francisco. The \$499 Macintosh, sold for £339 in the UK," was described by Jobs as the ""most important Mac"" made by Apple. Mr Jobs also unveiled the iPod shuffle", a new music player using cheaper flash memory rather than hard drives, which are used in more expensive iPods. The new computer shifts the company into new territory - traditionally, the firm is known as a design and innovation-led firm rather than as a mass-market manufacturer. The Mac mini comes without a monitor, keyboard and mouse," and a second version with a larger hard drive will also be sold for \$599. The machine - which will be available from 22 January - was described by Jobs as ""BYODKM... bring your own display", keyboard," and mouse"". In an attempt to win over Windows PC customers", Mr Jobs said it would appeal to people thinking of changing operating systems. ""People who are thinking of switching will have no more excuses", he said. It's the newest and most affordable Mac ever."" The new computer has been the subject of speculation for several weeks and while few people will be surprised by the announcement many analysts had already said it was a sensible move. In January", Apple sued a website after it published what it said were specifications for the new computer. Ian Harris, deputy editor of UK magazine Mac Format," said the machine would appeal to PC-owning consumers who had purchased an iPod. ""They want a further taste of Mac because they like what they have seen with iPod." Harris added: ""Everybody thought that Apple was happy to remain a niche maker of luxury computers", and moving into a market dominated by low margin manufacturers like Dell is a bold move. ""But it shows that Apple is keen to capitalise on the mass market success it's had with the iPod. The Mac mini will appeal to PC users looking for an attractive", 'no fuss' computer."" The new iPod shuffle comes in two versions - one offering 512mb of storage for \$99 (£69 in the UK) and a second with one gigabyte of storage for \$149 (£99) - and went on sale Tuesday. The music player has no display and will play songs either consecutively or shuffled. The smaller iPod will hold about 120 songs", said Mr Jobs. Mr Jobs told the delegates at MacWorld that iPod already had a 65% market share of all digital music players.

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"tech 298.txt Napster offers rented music to go Music downloading", for those that have rejected the free peer to peer services, can be a costly business. The cost of paying even as little as 70p per track can add up, particularly for those people who own one of the new generation of players that can store thousands of songs. Paying per track for music is becoming as outmoded as paying per minute for internet access and alternative monthly or yearly subscription models are springing up as a more convenient," and ultimately cheaper way of owning music. ""Music fans are moving away from buying the traditional bundled package of a dozen or more songs that we used to call an album to newer ways that fit their lifestyle; either single tracks or subscriptions services", said Paul Myers, chief executive of Wippit, a UK-based music download service. While iTunes is doing good business with its sales of individual tracks to iPod owners, others are questioning whether the concept of owning music is even valid in the digital age. Napster is due to launch a new rental subscripti

on service - dubbed Napster to Go in the UK in the next few months. The service can be used on players that support Microsoft Windows latest Digital Rights Management technology known as Janus. This includes players made by Samsung, Rio and Creative. Currently on offer in beta-version in the US, the service costs \$15 per month for unlimited downloads. The technology ensures that music downloaded to the player only remains playable while the user subscribes to the service. Users need to update their license on a monthly basis or the tunes will no longer play. This has outraged some digital music lovers, especially as Napster already offers a cheaper service for downloading music to the PC. Napster claims the higher price is a result of record labels charging more for the to-go service and says it also offers greater value"" for customers. Mr Myers is not convinced a rental model will work for consumers. ""We've been offering our unlimited music subscription service for more than three years now and our customers know what they want. Format interoperability", excellent value and the reassurance that music purchased from Wippit is theirs to keep and enjoy on whatever device they choose," he said. Who wants to download a track that won't play next month if you decide to unsubscribe to the service or change portable player for an iPod or the latest mobile phone?"" Wippit offers a download subscription service for £4.99 per month or £50 per year. It has a catalogue of around 60",000 songs.

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"tech 299.txt Rings of steel combat net attacks Gambling is hugely popular", especially with tech-savvy criminals. Many extortionists are targeting net-based betting firms and threatening to cripple their websites with deluges of data unless a ransom is paid. But now deep defences are being put in place by some of the UK's biggest net firms to stop these attacks. Increasing numbers of attacks and the huge amounts of data being used to try to bump a site off the web are prompting firms to adopt the measures. "Net firms are realising that it's not just about anti-virus and firewalls", said Paul King, chief security architect at Cisco. There are more things that can be done in the network to protect data centres." Mr King said the only way to properly combat these so-called Distributed Denial-of-Service attacks was with intelligent net-based systems. Many of the gambling sites suffering DDoS attacks are in offshore data and hosting centres", so any large scale data flood could knock out access to many more sites than just the one the criminals were targeting, said Mr King. This overspill effect was only likely to grow as attacks grow in size and scale. Malcolm Seagrave, security expert at Energis, said the most common types of attacks hit sites with 10 megabytes of data over short periods of time. Bigger attacks sending down 200 megabytes of traffic or more were rarely seen," he said. "It does feel like they are turning the dial because you see this traffic gradually growing", he said. So far there have been no attacks involving gigabytes of data, said Mr Seagrave. However, he added that it was only a matter of time before such large attacks were mounted. Maria Capella, spokeswoman for net provider Pipex, said that when DDoS attacks were at their height, customers were getting hit every four to five days. The defences being put in place constantly monitor the streams of data flowing across networks and pluck out the traffic destined for target sites. It's about understanding what's genuine traffic and keeping attack traffic from going to the site", she said. We study the profile of their traffic and as soon as we see an anomaly in the profile that's when we start to get the backbone engineering boys to see if we are going to sustain an attack," said Ms Capella. This traffic can be hard to spot because DDoS attacks typically use thousands of computers in many different countries, each participating machine only sends a small part of the entire data flood. Typi

cally these computers have been infected by a virus or worm which reports its success and the net address of compromised machines back to the malicious hacker or hi-tech criminal that set off the virus. Hijacked computers are known as zombies or 'bots and collections of them are called 'bot nets. Many spammers rent out 'bot nets to help them anonymously send junk mail. Most of the zombies are based outside the country that hosts the target site so getting the attacking PCs shut off can be difficult. Often Pipex and other net suppliers do get advance notice that an attack is about to happen. The serious players tend to precede an attack with some kind of ransom e-mail", said Ms Capella. We ask, as part of the service we provide," that customers notify us of anything they have in advance that would give us forewarning." Once an attack is spotted dedicated net hardware takes over to remove the attack traffic and ensure that sites stay up. Energis took a similar approach", said Mr Seagrave. "We have technology out there that allows us to detect attacks in minutes rather than let network engineers spend hours pulling the information together", said Mr Seagrave. Also net firms were starting to work more closely together on the problem of DDoS attacks and pool information about where they are coming from. Information gathered on attacks and where they originated has led to some arrests. He said Energis also did its own intelligence work to get in insight into which sites criminal gangs plan to target. We have people in places where they shouldn't be, monitoring tech sites," he said. Sometimes though, he said, spotting the next victim was easy. You can see them going alphabetically through the list with the gambling sites", trying one after another," said Mr Seagrave.

tech 300.txt Apple Mac mini gets warm welcome The Mac mini has been welcomed by Apple fans, industry experts and PC users. The release of the tiny, low-cost machine is seen as a good move for Apple which currently has a small share of the desktop computer market. Mac watchers and some analysts say the Mac mini will go a long way to help Apple appeal to the mass of consumers. They speculate that the Mac mini will be bought by iPod owners and those wanting an easy-to-use and administer second home computer. It's the bravest move they have made yet", said Jonny Evans, news editor at Macworld magazine. Mr Evans said the combination of low cost, small size and huge numbers of iPod users could make it a big success. He thought that the machine would appeal to those that like Apple technology but who before now have balked at paying high prices for its hardware. It's deeply affordable", he said. Plus you know that you do not get viruses or all of the associated problems." Already", he said, "PC owning friends had declared that they would be buying one. Interest in the new products launched at Macworld expo was so strong that websites for Apple's store and the show struggled to cope with demand. According to response statistics gathered by Netcraft many visiting the Apple store in the wake of Mr Jobs' speech suffered lengthy response times. The Macworld Expo site was completely overwhelmed and went offline. "I think fundamentally it's a good idea because it's cheap even for a PC", said Nick Ross, deputy labs editor at PC Pro. Apple's work on making things easy to use would also help the Mac mini win fans, he said. I think people expect it just to work now and really it should", he said. The Mac mini could find a role in homes that need a second computer that is easy to install and administer, he said. For browsing the web", e-mail and all kinds of basic duties it's going to be absolutely adequate," said Mr Ross. Ian Fogg, broadband and personal technology analyst at Jupiter Research, agreed that the Mac mini could be very popular. Apple has been hoping that sales of the iPod will have a halo effect on the sales of the Mac", he said. Before now, he said, Apple has been seen as a premium brand. But, he said, the Mac mini changed that perception. It's a particularly good price when you see that it's Apple that is doing it", he said. Apple expects the Mac mini to sell for £339 in the UK

and \$499 in the US. Adding extras such as a larger hard drive, more memory and networking options will increase the basic price. It will go on sale from 22 January. For consumers interested in style", design and small size - which is what the majority of iPod customers are interested in - it's a natural next step," said Mr Fogg. Apple has traditionally done well in the market that the Mac mini is aimed at, said Mr Fogg, who also expected many PC makers to release copycat devices in reaction. His only misgivings were over how easy other consumers, other than iPod owners, would find using the machine. He said anyone wanting to use the Mac mini with the peripherals from an old computer may find it odd to have something so small and sleek next to a hulking monitor. They'd be much more likely to pair a Mac mini with a LCD or flat panel monitor which increases the upgrade cost", he said. Those with flat screens and LCD monitors are likely to have bought them recently and not be in the market for a new machine. There are also questions over whether the Mac mini will work with very old peripherals, such as display, keyboard and mouse. The Mac mini also fell short of being a media server that can be a video recorder as well as a store for all the digital music, movies and images people accumulate, said Mr Fogg. The Mac mini is not quite ready for that yet", he said. It does not have the right connectors that fit a TV screen or enough storage." Said Mr Fogg: ""It's very much a computer." One dissenting opinion came from Brian Gammage", vice-president of research at analysts Gartner. He said: ""I don't think it changes the world." Although the Mac mini was very cheap for an Apple computer", it was still expensive compared to many PCs. Also, he said," it appealed in categories that few consumers care about when buying a home computer. ""The PC world is a pile-em-high", sell-em-cheap market," he said, and all of them are pretty interchangeable." "Since the days when Apple ruled the personal computing world its market share has been on a long", slow decline, he said. Every few years it does something to give its market share a kick then it starts to go back down again," said Mr Gammage. The release of the Mac mini fit perfectly with this trend, he said.

tech 301.txt Rivals of the £400 Apple... The Mac mini is the cheapest Apple computer ever. But though it is cheap for a Mac how does it compare to PCs that cost about the same amount? Dot.life tries to find out if you can get more for your money if you stick with the beige box. An extremely small computer that is designed to bring the Macintosh to the masses. Apple offer a less powerful Mac Mini for £339 but the £399 models has a 1.4ghz Power PC chip, 80 gigabyte hard drive, combined CD burner/DVD player. It comes equipped with USB and Firewire ports for peripheral connections, Ethernet port for broadband, a port for standard video output and an audio/headphone jack. The machine comes with Mac OS X, the Apple operating system, the software suite iLife, which includes iTunes, iPhoto, iMovie, iDVD and GarageBand. A monitor, keyboard or mouse. There is also no built-in support for wireless technology or any speakers. The lack of a DVD burner is an omission in the age of backing-up important software. Wireless and a dvd burner can be added at extra cost. Apple are targeting people who already have a main computer and want to upgrade - especially PC users who have used an Apple iPod. Compact and stylish, the Mac mini would not look out of place in any home. Apple computers are famously user friendly and offer much better network security, which means fewer viruses. The package of software that comes with the machine is the best money can buy. The Mac mini is just a box. If you don't already have a monitor etc, adding them to the package sees the value for money begin to dwindle. Macs don't offer the upgrade flexibility of a PC and the machine's specifications lack the horse power for tasks such as high-end video editing or games. The Mac Mini puts the Macintosh within the reach of everyone", an Apple spokesman said. It will bring more customers to the platform," especially PC users and owners."" An entry-level

machine designed for basic home use. A 2.6ghz Intel Celeron chip", 40 gigabyte hard drive, 256mb, combined CD burner/DVD player. It comes equipped with a 17 inch monitor, keyboard and mouse. The machine has 6 USB ports and an Ethernet port for broadband connection. There's also a port for standard video output. The machine comes with Windows XP home edition. It provides basic home tools such as a media player and word processor. A DVD burner, or any wireless components built in. Wireless and a dvd burner can be added at extra cost. Homes and small offices, including those looking to add a low cost second computer. Cost is the clear advantage. The Dell provides enough power and software for basic gaming and internet surfing. It's easily upgradeable so a bigger hard drive," better sound and graphics cards can be added. The Dell is hardly stylish and the hard drive is on the small size for anyone wanting to store photos or a decent sized digital music collection. ""This machine is for small businesses and for people who want a second computer for basic home use", perhaps in a kids bedroom," a spokesman for Dell said. I think we offer better value once you realise all the extras needed for the Mac Mini." A desktop computer that PC Pro magazine dubbed best performer in a group test of machines that cost only £399 (£469 including VAT). A good basic PC that", according to PC Pro," has ""superb upgrade potential"". For your money you get a 1.8GHz AMD Sempron processor", 512MB of Ram, 120GB hard drive, DVD writer, 16-inch monitor, mouse, keyboard and Windows XP2 Much more than the basics. It cannot handle 3D graphics and has no Firewire slots. Those on a limited budget who want a machine they can add to and improve as their cash allows. It's cheap and has plenty of room to improve but that could end up making it expensive in the long run. It's a good basic workhorse. It's not pretty and has a monitor rather than a flat-panel display. Some of the upgrades offered by JAL to the basic model are pricey. You might find that you want to chop and change quite quickly. Nick Ross, deputy labs editor at PC Pro," said the important point about buying a cheap and cheerful PC is the upgrade path. Interest has switched from processor power to graphics and sound cards as that's what makes the difference in games. ""Even manufacturers are not going to be marketing machines as faster", he said, they'll emphasise the different features."" A computer built from bits you buy and put together yourself. A surprisingly good PC sporting an AMD Athlon XP 2500 processor", 512 megabytes Ram, a graphics card with 128 Ram on board plus TV out, a 40 GB hard drive, CD-writer and DVD player, Windows XP Home. Anything else. You're building it so you have to buy all the software you want to install and do your own trouble-shooting and tech support. Building your own machine is easier than it used to be but you need to read specifications carefully to make sure all parts work together. Experienced and keen PC users. Building your own PC, or upgrading the one you have, is a great way to improve your understanding of how it all works. It's cheap," you can specify exactly what you want and you get the thrill of putting it together yourself. And a bigger thrill if everything works as it should. Once it's built you won't be able to do much with it until you start buying software for it. If it starts to go wrong it might take a lot of fixing. As Gavin Cox of the excellent buildyourown.org.uk website put it: ""It will be tough to obtain/build a PC to ever be as compact and charming as the Mac mini."""Performance-wise", it's not 'cutting edge' and is barely entry-level by today's market, but up against the Mac mini, I believe it will hold its own and even pull a few more tricks," says Gavin Cox. The good news is that the machine is eminently expandable. By contrast, says Mr Cox, the Mac mini is almost disposable.

tech 302.txt Speak easy plan for media players Music and film fans will be able to control their digital media players just by speaking to them, under plans in development by two US firms. ScanSoft and Gracenote ar

e developing technology to give people access to their film and music libraries simply by voice control. They want to give people hands-free access to digital music and films in the car, or at home or on the move. Huge media libraries on some players can make finding single songs hard. Voice command-and-control unlocks the potential of devices that can store large digital music collections", " said Ross Blanchard, vice president of business development for Gracenote. These applications will radically change the car entertainment experience", allowing drivers to enjoy their entire music collections without ever taking their hands off the steering wheel," he added. Gracenote provides music library information for millions of different albums for jukeboxes such as Apple's iTunes. The new technology will be designed so that people can play any individual song or movie out of a collection, just by saying its name. Users will also be able to request music that fits a mood or an occasion, or a film just by saying the actor's name. Speech is a natural fit for today's consumer devices", particularly in mobile environments," said Alan Schwartz, vice president of SpeechWorks, a division of ScanSoft. Pairing our voice technologies with Gracenote's vast music database will bring the benefits of speech technologies to a host of consumer devices and enable people to access their media in ways they've never imagined." The two firms did not say if they were developing the technology for languages other than English. Users will also be able to get more information on a favourite song they have been listening to by asking: ""What is this?"" Portable players are becoming popular in cars and a number of auto firms are working with Apple to device interfaces to control the firm's iPod music player. But with tens of thousands of songs able to be stored on one player", voice control would make finding that elusive track by Elvis Presley much easier. The firms gave no indication about whether the iPod, or any other media player, were in mind for the use of the voice control technology. The companies estimate that the technology will be available in the fourth quarter of 2005.

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"tech 303.txt US peer-to-peer pirates convicted The first convictions for piracy over peer-to-peer networks have been handed down in the US. New Yorker William Trowbridge and Texan Michael Chicoine have pleaded guilty to charges that they infringed copyright by illegally sharing music", movies and software. The two men faced charges following raids in August on suspected pirates by the FBI. The pair face jail terms of up to five years and a \$250,000 (£130,000) fine. In a statement the US Department of Justice said the two men operated the central hubs in a piracy community organised across the Direct Connect peer-to-peer network. The piracy group called itself the Underground Network and membership of it demanded that users share between one and 100 gigabytes of files. Direct Connect allows users to set themselves up as central servers that act as co-ordinating spots for sharers. Users would swap files, such as films and music, by exchanging data over the network. During its investigation FBI agents reportedly downloaded 84 movies, 40 software programs," 13 games and 178 ""sound recordings"" from the five hubs that made up the larger piracy group. The raids were organised under the umbrella of Operation Digital Gridlock which was aimed at fighting ""criminal copyright theft on peer-to-peer networks"". In total", six raids were carried out in August. Five were on the homes of suspected copyright thieves and one on a net service firm. The Department of Justice said that both men pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit felony copyright infringement. They also pleaded guilty to acting for commercial advantage. The two men are due to be sentenced on 29 April.

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"tech 304.txt Format wars could 'confuse users' Technolog

y firms Sony", Philips, Matsushita and Samsung are developing a common way to stop people pirating digital music and video. The firms want to make a system that ensures files play on the hardware they make but also thwarts illegal copying. The move could mean more confusion for consumers already faced by many different, and conflicting, content control systems, experts warned. They say there are no guarantees the system will even prevent piracy. Currently many online stores wrap up downloadable files in an own-brand control system that means they can only be played on a small number of media players. Systems that limit what people can do with the files they download are known as Digital Rights Management systems. By setting up the alliance to work on a common control system," the firms said they hope to end this current fragmentation of file formats. In a joint statement the firms said they wanted to let consumers enjoy ""appropriately licensed video and music on any device"," independent of how they originally obtained that content"". The firms hope that it will also make it harder for consumers to make illegal copies of the music", movies and other digital content they have bought. Called the Marlin Joint Development Association, the alliance will define basic specifications that every device made by the electronics firms will conform to. Marlin will be built on technology from rights management firm Intertrust as well as an earlier DRM system developed by a group known as the Coral Consortium. The move is widely seen as a way for the four firms to decide their own destiny on content control systems instead of having to sign up for those being pushed by Apple and Microsoft. Confusingly for consumers," the technology that comes out of the alliance will sit alongside the content control systems of rival firms such as Microsoft and Apple. ""In many ways the different DRM systems are akin to the different physical formats", such as Betamax and VHS, that consumers have seen in the past," said Ian Fogg, personal technology and broadband analyst at Jupiter Research. The difference is that it is very fragmented", he said. It's not a two-horse race, it's a five, six," seven or even eight-horse race"" Mr Fogg said consumers had to be very careful when buying digital content to ensure that it would play on the devices they own. He said currently there were even incompatibilities within DRM families. Although initiatives such as Microsoft's ""Plays for Sure"" program could help remove some of the uncertainty", he said, life was likely to be confusing for consumers for some time to come. Shelley Taylor, analyst and author of a report about online music services, said the locks and limits on digital files were done to maximise the cash that firms can make from consumers. Apple's iTunes service was a perfect example of this," she said. ""Although iTunes has been hugely successful", Apple could not justify its existence if it did not help sell all those iPods," she said. She said rampant competition between online music services, of which there are now 230 according to recent figures, could drive more openness and freer file formats. It always works out that consumer needs win out in the long run", she said, and the services that win in the long run are the ones that listen to consumers earliest." Ms Taylor said the limits legal download services place on files could help explain the continuing popularity of file-sharing systems that let people get hold of pirated pop. ""People want portability", she said, and with peer-to-peer they have 100% portability." Cory Doctorow", European co-ordinator for the Electronic Frontier Foundation which campaigns for consumers on many cyber-rights issues," expressed doubts that the Marlin system would achieve its aims. ""Not one of these systems has ever prevented piracy or illegal copying", he said. He said many firms readily admit that their DRM systems are little protection against skilled attackers such as the organised crime gangs that are responsible for most piracy. Instead, said Mr Doctorow, DRM systems were intended to control the group that electronics firms have most hold over - consumers. The studios and labels perceive an opportunity to sell you your

media again and again - the iPod version", the auto version, the American and UK version, the ringtone version," and so on.""

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"tech 305.txt Mobiles get set for visual radio The growth in the mobile phone market in the past decade has been nothing less than astonishing", but the ability to communicate on the go is not the only reason we are hooked. Games, cameras and music players have all been added to our handsets in the last few years, but 2005 could see another big innovation that won't just see a change in our mobile phone habits - it might alter the way we listen to the radio. Finnish handset giant Nokia has been working on a technology called Visual Radio, which takes an existing FM signal from a radio station and enables that station to add enhancements such as information and pictures. It is not the first time that such an idea has been suggested - the early days of DAB Digital Radio had similar intentions that never really saw the light of day. One problem is that the name Visual Radio leads people to think of television but Reidar Wasenius, a senior project manager at Nokia," was adamant that Visual Radio should not be confused with the more traditional medium. He said: ""I'm very happy to say it's not television", what we're talking about is an enhancement of radio as we know it today. ""If you have a Visual Radio enabled handset", when you hear an artist you don't know, or there's a competition or vote that you'd like to participate in," you pull out your handset and with one click you turn on a visual channel parallel to the on-air broadcast you've just been listening to." That visual channel is run from a computer within the radio station", and sends out different kinds of information to the handset depending on what you are listening to. As well as details on the track or artist of a particular song, there is also the ability to interact immediately with the radio station itself," in a similar way to digital television's ""red button"" content. Possible interactive content includes competitions", votes and even the chance to rate the song that is playing. But the interactive aspect will make the service especially attractive to radio stations, who will be able to track the number of people taking part in such activities on a real-time basis. This in turn should lead to an additional source of revenue, as it is very likely that advertisers will be keen to exploit new opportunities to reach listeners. As the Visual Radio content is transmitted by existing GPRS technology you would need to have that service enabled by your network. And there will be a cost for the service as well," although it may depend on your usage. ""If you enjoy the visual channel occasionally and interact it'll be two or three pounds per month", said Mr Wasenius. But typically what we see happening is the operator offering a package deal for an 'all you can eat' arrangement per month." The payment system could therefore be similar to the way that broadband internet works versus dial-up connections. One thing that is for sure - assuming that Nokia retains its market share in handsets", it is estimating that there will be 100 million Visual Radio-enabled mobile phones in circulation by the end of 2006. ""Basically", Visual Radio is not really revolutionary," but rather an evolution where we are providing tools with which people can participate in radio much more easily than ever before." The first Visual Radio service in the UK will begin in a few months time with Virgin Radio", who are positive about the impact it could have on their listeners. Station manager Steve Taylor commented: ""Listeners can interact with the radio station in a new way. ""Not only does this give listeners more information on the music we play but means they can instantly purchase things they like; mp3 music downloads and the latest gig tickets." Initially Visual Radio functionality will be limited to two Nokia handsets due out soon - the 3230 and 7710 - but if successful", it is very likely that other manufacturers will

I want to join them. Listen again to the interview on the Radio Five Live website.

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"tech 306.txt Gamers could drive high-definition TV", files, and games have been gearing up for some time now for the next revolution to transform the quality of what is on our screens. It is called high-definition - HD for short - and it is already hugely popular in Japan and the US. It is set, according to analysts, to do for images what CDs did for sound. Different equipment able to receive HD signals is needed though and is expensive. But Europe's gamers may be the early adopters to drive demand. Europeans will have to wait until at least 2006 until they see mainstream HDTV. To view it, it needs to be transmitted in HD format, and people need special receivers and displays that can handle the high-quality resolution. The next generation of consoles, however, are expected to start appearing at the end of 2005, "start of 2006. And most new computer displays and plasma sets are already capable of handling such high-resolution pictures. ""In the next generation [of consoles] HD support is mandatory", Dr Mark Tuffy games systems director at digital content firm THX told the BBC News website. Every game is going to be playable in HD. ""So consumers who have gone out and spent all this money on HDTVs", and who have no content to watch," are going to be blown away by these really high-detail pictures. ""It's going to change really the way they look at gaming." At the end of last year", Chris Deering, Sony's European president, made a prediction that 20 million European households would have HDTV sets by 2008. A previous prediction from analysts Datamonitor put the figure at 4.6 million by 2008, an increase from an estimated 50,000 sets at the end of 2003. But those in Europe may see little point in buying what is quite an expensive bit of technology - about £2,000 - if there are few programmes or films to watch on them. Satellite broadcaster BSkyB is planning HDTV services in 2006 and the BBC intends to produce all of its content in HD by 2010. Until broadcast rights, format standards - and the practicalities of updating equipment - are agreed, TV content will be limited. All TV images are made up of pixels which go across the screen, and scan lines which go down the screen. Most standard UK TV pictures are made up of 625 lines and about 700 pixels. HD offers up to 1,080 active lines, with each line made up of 1,920 pixels. This means the picture is up to six times as sharp as standard TV. ""Probably", in the UK [gaming] is going to be the only thing you are going to really be able to show off, as in 'look what this TV can do', until HD is really adopted by broadcasters," explains Dr Tuffy. But gamers are also the ideal target audience for HD because they always crave better quality graphics, and more immersive gaming experiences. They are used to spending money on hardware to match a game's requirements. Demographics have changed too and the sweet spot" for the games industry is the gamer in his or her late 20s. This means they are likely to have higher disposable incomes and can afford the price of big-screen", high-definition display technologies and HD projectors, earlier than others. Higher capacity storage discs, such as HD-DVD and blue-ray, are set to be standard in the next round of games consoles - allowing developers more room for detailed graphics. For console developers though, HD offers some production changes. It could make games production slightly more expensive," thinks Dr Tuffy. ""But we may see the cross-platform development of games becoming more common because they will more easily be able to take a PC game and apply it to a console", he says. You are literally going to get to the point, with a Lord of the Rings game for example, is going to be closer and closer to the actual film," especially the CGI stuff from the DVD. ""And the transition when they move from a cut scene to the game", just now they have almost got it seamless." Wi

th HD", he says, the transition will be completely seamless and the same quality as the big-screen cinema release. This could herald an increasing convergence between the film and gaming industry. But it may not be until the generation after the next games consoles where the two industries really collide. At that point, says Dr Tuffy, games could become more or less interactive movies.

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"tech 307.txt How to make a greener computer The hi-tech industry is starting to get more environmentally aware. Bill Thompson thinks it's about time. My first car ran on four star petrol and pumped vast quantities of lead into the atmosphere as I drove around Cambridge. Now you can't buy petrol with lead additives", and we're all better off as a result. Chip giant Intel recently began shipping computer circuit boards that are lead free too, reflecting a growing awareness on the part of the technology industry that products have to be designed and built in more environmentally friendly ways. Apart from reducing the use of toxic materials like arsenic, mercury, cadmium and other heavy metals in the products themselves, the manufacturing process is also being cleaned up, with fewer complex and potentially damaging organic chemicals used as solvents. And work is going into making power supplies that are more energy efficient, since current transformers are astonishingly wasteful as they charge our laptops, mobiles and music players. One of the key aspects of the new approach is to design products that are easier to recycle. If you have got a phone or a computer with toxic chemicals or heavy metals in it then extracting them can be tricky and expensive. A well-designed electronic component is able to be recycled at low cost. This is going to be very important to hardware manufacturers in Europe since from August the new Waste Electronic and Electrical Equipment directive will oblige them to accept returned products for recycling. They will end up paying if they build things that are expensive or impossible to take apart and will find their profits hit, something which is likely to motivate them where appeals to the wider public interest might fall on deaf ears. It is, as they say, about time. We have a long and depressing history of developing new technologies with complete disregard for their potential impact on the environment, and waiting until there is a crisis looming before we try to redesign them to cause less damage. The car engine is a case in point: lead additives helped stop petrol vapour exploding too early in the cylinder, a phenomenon called 'knocking', so they were simply used without any real thought for the fact that the lead would end up in the atmosphere. Redesigning engines and making petrol slightly different was a lot more work, so it took decades before it was done. We're seeing the same thing in the technology industry and, as a result, there are billions of devices, from old mobile phones to antique handhelds, that will have to be recycled in years to come. If Apple gets its way then a lot of people are going to be buying a new Mac Mini and throwing away their old PC, keeping the monitor and other peripherals. Even if Apple does not get its way, four or five-year-old computers are not good enough to run modern programs and it's not unreasonable to replace them. But what do we do with the old ones? I've just looked around my office and I find two monitors, an old 386 PC, two old handhelds, three ancient laptops, four antique mobile phones, a collection of rechargeable batteries and even a Sun workstation that is no longer really much use. They are all old enough to be hazardous waste - the monitors alone will be full of arsenic and lead - but it's possible that some of the components could be useful. I could take them up to the council recycling centre, but it's a 10-mile drive away across town, and like many other people my commitment to recycling is shallow at best. Here in Cambridge we have green bins for compostable waste, a box for glass, cans and paper that can be recycled, and a black bin fo

r the rest. There are bottle banks and clothing banks scattered around town and in supermarket car parks. Would it be too much to ask for an electronics recycling box too? I'd probably remember to take my old mobile with me to the supermarket and drop it in a box - at least eventually. Bill Thompson is a regular commentator on the BBC World Service programme Go Digital.

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"tech 308.txt Microsoft makes anti-piracy move Microsoft says it is clamping down on people running pirated versions of its Windows operating system by restricting their access to security features. The Windows Genuine Advantage scheme means people will have to prove their software is genuine from mid-2005. It will still allow those with unauthorised copies to get some crucial security fixes via automatic updates", but their options would be "limited". Microsoft releases regular security updates to its software to protect PCs. Either PCs detect updates automatically or users manually download fixes through Microsoft's site. Those running pirated Windows programs would not have access to other downloads and "add-ons" that the software giant offers. People who try to manually download security patches will have to let Microsoft run an automated checking procedure on their computer or give an identification number. Microsoft's regular patches which it releases for newly-found security flaws are important because they stop worms", viruses and other threats penetrating PCs. Some security experts are concerned that restricting access to such patches could mean a rise in such attacks and threats, with more PCs left unprotected. But Graham Cluley, senior consultant at security firm Sophos," told the BBC News website that it was a positive decision. ""It sounds like their decision to allow critical security patches to remain available to both legitimate and illegitimate users of Windows is good news for everyone who uses the net", he said. Windows Genuine Advantage was first introduced as a pilot scheme in September 2004 for English-language versions of Windows. Microsoft's Windows operating system is heavily exploited by virus writers because it is so widespread and they are constantly seeking out new security loopholes to take advantage of. The company is trying to tackle security threats whilst cracking down on pirated software at the same time. Software piracy has cost the company billions, it says. The company announced earlier in January that it was releasing security tools to clean up PCs harbouring viruses and spyware, which 90% of PCs are infected with. The virus-fighting program, updated monthly, is a precursor to Microsoft's dedicated anti-virus software. Last year it introduced the Windows XP Counterfeit Project, a UK-based pilot scheme, which ran from November to December. The scheme meant that anyone with pre-installed copies of the operating system in PCs bought before November could replace counterfeit versions of Windows XP with legal ones for free. It is also increasing efforts to squash software piracy in China, Norway and the Czech Republic, where pirated software is a huge problem, by offering discounts on legitimate software to users of pirated copies Windows. China in particular is a problem", with piracy estimated at 92%," said Mr Cluley.

tech 309.txt What's next for next-gen consoles? The next generation of video games consoles are in development but what will the new machines mean for games firms and consumers? We may not know when they will be released, what they will be called or even what they will be able to do but one thing is certain - they are coming. Sony, Microsoft and Nintendo are all expected to release new machines in the next 18 months. The details of PlayStation 3, Xbox 2 (codename Xenon) and Nintendo's so-called Revolution are still to be finalised but developers are having to work on titles for the new machines regardless. We know maybe what the PS3 will do", but we can only guess," said Rory Arme

s, studio general manager for video game giant Electronic Arts in Europe. It's a horrendous effort in the first year", " he admitted. Microsoft had delivered development kits to EA, said Mr Armes, but he said the company was still waiting on Sony and Nintendo to send kits. Although the details may not be nailed down, Mr Armes said EA was beginning to get a sense of the capabilities of the new machines. The rumours are that PlayStation 3 will have a little more under the hood [than Xbox 2]", he said. Microsoft is obviously a software company first and foremost," while Sony has more experience in hardware. I think Sony will be able to push more into a box at cost." " What is certain is that the new machine will provide great leaps in processing and graphical power. It is also likely that they will contain convergence technologies to make the machines more of an entertainment hub. At the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas Microsoft boss Bill Gates said Xbox 2 would be part of his vision of the digital lifestyle. While short on detail", " he painted a picture of a machine that would complement a PC and offer ""great video gaming but video gaming for a broader set of people", more communications, more media," more connectivity"" . Sony is thought to have a similar vision for PS3 while Nintendo remain focused on a machine purely for games. Until it is clear precisely what the new machines can do", developers are working on a first round of titles to harness the new horsepower. Gary Dunn, development director at Codemasters," said the company had a central technology group which was at the forefront of preparing for the next generation of consoles. ""We are working on new libraries of effects. A lot of the major techniques are already out there and in use in PC gaming", " such as pixel shaders and normal mapping." " Mr Dunn said he expected the introduction of real-world physics to be a major part of the new consoles. ""We want to increase that level of immersion and realism in gaming to people can lose themselves in a game." " In the first year at least", developers said gamers should not expect games which harness the full potential of the machines. Graphical spit and polish and better physics in line with the capabilities of current high-end graphics cards for PCs should be expected. Simon Gardner, president of Climax's Action Studio," said: ""It's definitely an exciting time. We want to give more freedom to the player. We want to give players an emotional connection to the characters they play. ""The environments will be much more believable and dramatic", " growing and changing as you play. ""There will be a breadth of effects", " more involving worlds to play in. ""It's a bit like being an artist and being given a bigger canvas and a smaller brush. We're being given more tools. ""For the average consumer", " we can get things of a more filmic quality." " Gerhard Florin", head of EA in Europe," said gamers should expect titles that blur the line between films and video games. Many will be sceptical - gamers were given similar predictions during the last transition of console hardware - but this time it would seem to be more likely. ""PS3 will provide graphics indistinguishable from movies", " said Mr Florin. He said the distribution method for games would also change radically in the next round of consoles. A gamer could buy a starter disc for 10 euros. When he goes home he goes online and he could buy AI and levels as you go. ""It's much smarter if you can get levels as you go." " Mr Armes warned that developers still had to learn how to tell stories effectively in the medium. ""In some ways we are trying to forget about the hardware", " go in the opposite direction. We have been very bad at letting technology design our creativity. ""What we have to do as a company is start ignoring the technology and learning our craft in telling stories." " Mr Gardner agreed: ""We can throw more polygons around and have better AI but if it doesn't make for a better game then that's not very useful." " Developers will certainly have the tools with the new machines", but how they employ them is still to be decided.

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"tech 310.txt Latest Opera browser gets vocal Net browser  
Opera 8.0", due for official release at the end of next month," will be ""the m  
ost accessible browser on the market""", according to its authors. The latest  
version of the net browser can be controlled by voice command and will read pag  
es aloud. The voice features, based on IBM technology," are currently only avai  
lable in the Windows version. Opera can also magnify text by up to 10 times and  
users can create ""style sheets""", its developers say. This will enable them t  
o view pages with colours and fonts that they prefer. But the browser does not  
yet work well with screen reader software often used by blind people," so its a  
ccessibility features are more likely to appeal to those with some residual vis  
ion. ""Our mission was always to provide the best internet experience for every  
one"," said Opera spokeswoman, Berit Hanson. So we would obviously not want to  
exclude disabled computer users." Another feature likely to appeal to people  
with low vision is the ability to make pages fit to the screen width"," which e  
liminates the need for horizontal scrolling. The company points out that this  
will also appeal to anyone using Opera with a handheld device. The company says  
that features like voice activation are not solely aimed at visually impaired p  
eople. ""Our idea was to take a first step in making human-computer interaction  
more natural", said Ms Hanson. People are not always in a situation where they  
can access a keyboard," so this makes the web a more hands-free experience." U  
nlike commercially available voice recognition software"," Opera does not have  
to be ""trained"" to recognise an individual voice. Around 50 voice commands ar  
e available and users will have to wear a headset which incorporates a micropho  
ne. The voice recognition function is currently only available in English. Oper  
a is free to download but a paid-for version comes without an ad banner in the  
top right hand corner and with extra support. Opera began life as a research pr  
oject - a spin-off from Norwegian telecoms company Telenor. Its browser is used  
by an estimated 10 million people on a variety of operating systems and a numbe  
r of different platforms.

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"tech 311.txt Mobile games come of age The BBC News websi  
te takes a look at how games on mobile phones are maturing. A brief round-up fo  
llows but you can skip straight to the reviews by clicking on the links below.  
Part two will follow on Monday. Reviews of Call of Duty", Splinter Cell - Pand  
ora Tomorrow," Lord of the Rings and Pocket Kingdom will follow on Monday If yo  
u think of Snake when some mentions ""mobile games"" then you could be in for a  
bit of a surprise. This is because mobile games have come a long way in a very  
short time. Even before Nokia's N-Gage game phone launched in late 2003", many  
mobile operators were realising that there was an audience looking for somethin  
g to play on their handset. And given that many more people own handsets than  
own portable game playing gadgets such as the GameBoy it could be a very lucrat  
ive market. That audience includes commuters wanting something to fill their ti  
me on the way home, game fans looking for a bit of variety and hard core gamers  
who like to play every moment they can. Life for all these types of player has  
got immeasurably better in the last year as the numbers of titles you can downl  
oad to your phone has snowballed. Now sites such as Wireless Gaming Review list  
more than 200 different titles for some UK networks and the ranges suit every p  
ossible taste. There are ports of PC and arcade classics such as Space Invader  
s, Lunar Lander and Bejewelled. There are also versions of titles, such as Coli  
n McRae Rally, that you typically find on PCs and consoles. There are shoot-e  
m-ups, adventure games, strategy titles and many novel games only found on hand  
sets. Rarely now does an action movie launch without a mobile game tie-in. Incr

easingly such launches are all part of the promotional campaign for a film, understandable when you realise that a good game can rack up millions of download s. The returns can be pretty good when you consider that some games cost £5. What has also helped games on mobiles thrive is the fact that it is easier than ever to get hold of them thanks to technology known as Wap push. By sending a text message to a game maker you can have the title downloaded to your handset. Far better than having to navigate through the menus of most mobile operator portals. The number of handsets that can play games has grown hugely too. Almost half of all phones now have Java onboard meaning that they can play the increasingly sophisticated games that are available - even the ones that use 3D graphics. The minimum technology specifications that phones should adhere to are getting more sophisticated which means that games are too. Now double key presses are possible making familiar tactics such as moving and strafing a real option. The processing power on handsets means that physics on mobile games is getting more convincing and the graphics are improving too. Some game makers are also starting to take advantage of the extra capabilities in a mobile. Many titles, particularly racing games," let you upload your best time to see how you compare to others. Usually you can get hold of their best time and race against a ""ghost"" or ""shadow"" to see if you can beat them. A few games also let you take on people in real time via the network or", if you are sitting close to them, via a Bluetooth short-range radio technology. With so much going on it is hard to do justice to the sheer diversity of what is happening. But these two features should help point you in the direction of the game makers and give you an idea of where to look and how to get playing.

TOO FAST TOO FURIOUS (DIGITAL BRIDGES)

As soon as I start playing this I remember why I never play driving games - because I'm rubbish at them. No matter if I drive the car via joystick or keypad I just cannot get the hang of braking for corners or timing a rush to pass other drivers. The game rewards replay because to advance you have to complete every section within a time limit. Winning gives you cash for upgrades. Graphically the rolling road is a convincing enough evocation of speed as the palm trees and cactus whip by and the city scrolls past in the background. The cars handle pretty well despite my uselessness but it was not clear if the different models of cars were appreciably different on the track. The only niggle was that the interface was a bit confusing especially when using a joystick rather than the keypad to play.

FATAL FORCE (MACROSPACE)

A futuristic shooter that lets you either play various deathmatch modes against your phone or run through a series of scenarios that involves killing aliens invading Earth. Graphics are a bit cartoon-like but only helps to make clear what is going on and levels are well laid out and encourage you to leap about exploring. Both background music and sounds effects work well. The scenarios are well scripted and you regularly get hints from the Fatal Force commanders. Weapons include flamethrowers, rocket launchers, grenades and at a couple of points you even get chance to use a mech for a short while. With the right power-up you can go into a Matrix-style bullet time to cope with the onslaught of aliens. The game lets you play via Bluetooth if others are in range. Online the game has quite a following with clans, player rankings and even new downloadable maps.

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"tech 312.txt Web radio takes Spanish rap global Spin the radio dial in the US and you are likely to find plenty of Spanish-language music. But what you will not find is much Spanish-language hip-hop. Hip-hop and rap are actually quite popular in the Spanish-speaking world", but local artists are having trouble marketing their work abroad. But now, a US company is bringing rap and hip-hop en espanol to computer users everywhere. Los Caballeros de P

lan G are one of Mexico's hottest hip-hop acts. They have a devoted fan base in their native Monterrey. But most Mexican hip-hop fans, not to mention fans in most of the Spanish-speaking world," rarely get a chance to hear the group's tracks on the radio. ""You can't really just go on the radio and listen to hip-hop in Spanish... it's just not accessible", says Manuel Millan, a native of San Diego, California. It's really hard for the Spanish hip-hop scene to get into mainstream radio. You usually have a very commercialised sound and the groups are not really known around the country or around the world."" Millan and two friends set out to change that - they wanted to make groups like Los Caballeros de Plan G accessible to fans globally. Mainstream radio stations were not going to play this kind of music", and starting their own broadcast station was economically impossible. So, Millan and his friends launched a website called latinohiphopradio.com. The name says it all: it is web-based radio, devoted to the hottest Spanish language rap and hip-hop tracks. The site, which is in both English and Spanish, is meant to be easy to navigate. All the user has to do is download a media player. There are no DJs. It is just music streamed over the net for free. Suddenly, with the help of the website," Los Caballeros de Plan G are producing ""export quality"" rap. The web might be just the right medium for Spanish language hip-hop right now. The genre is in what Millan calls its ""infant stage"". But the production values are improving", and artists such as Argentina's Mustafa Yoda are pushing to make it better and better. Mustafa Yoda is currently one of the hottest tracks on latinohiphopradio.com. ""He's considered the Eminem of Argentina", and the Latin American hip-hop scene, Millan says. He really hasn't had that much exposure as far as anywhere in the world," but he's definitely the one to look out for as far as becoming the next big thing in the Spanish-speaking world." Currently", the Chilean group Makisa is also in latinohiphopradio.com's top 10," as is Cuban artist Papo Record. ""Every country's got its own cultural differences and they try to put those into their own songs", Millan says. Latinohiphopradio.com has been up and running for a couple of months now. The site has listeners from across the Spanish speaking world. Right now, Mexico leads the way, accounting for about 50% of listeners. But web surfers in Spain are logging in as well - about 25% of the web station's traffic comes from there. That is not surprising as many consider Spain to be the leader in Spanish-language rap and hip-hop. Millan says that Spain is actually just behind the United States and France in terms of overall rap and hip-hop production. That might be changing, though, as more and more Latin American artists are finding audiences. But one Spaniard is still firmly in latinohiphopradio.com's top 10. His name is Tote King and Manuel Millan says that he is the hip-hop leader in Spain. On his track Uno Contra Veinte Emcees, or One Against 20 Emcees, Tote King shows he is well aware of that fact. It's basically him bragging that he's one of the best emcees in Spain right now", Millan says. And it's pretty much true. He has the tightest productions, and his rap flow is impeccable," it's amazing." Latinohiphopradio.com is hoping to expand in the coming year. Millan says they want to include more music and more news from the world of Spanish language hip-hop and rap. Clark Boyd is technology correspondent for The World", a BBC World Service and WGBH-Boston co-production.

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"tech 313.txt What high-definition will do to DVDs First it was the humble home video", then it was the DVD, and now Hollywood is preparing for the next revolution in home entertainment - high-definition. High-definition gives incredible, 3D-like pictures and surround sound. The DVD disks and the gear to play them will not be out for another year or so, and there are still a number of issues to be sorted out. But when high-definition films do co

me out on the new format DVDs, it will profoundly change home entertainment. For Rick Dean, director of business development for digital content company THX, a high-definition future is an exciting prospect. He has worked on the Star Wars DVD trilogy, *Finding Nemo*, *The Incredibles* and *Indiana Jones*. ""There was a time not so long ago when the film world and the video world were two completely separate worlds", he told the BBC News website. The technology we are dealing with now means they are very much conjoined. ""The film that we see in theatres is coming from the same digital file that we take the home video master", he says. But currently, putting a master feature film onto DVD requires severe compression because current DVD technology cannot hold as much as high-definition films demand. As much as you compress the picture data rate wise", you also take qualities away from the picture that we fight so hard to keep in the master," he explains. I would love to be able to show people what projects that we worked on really look like in the high-def world and I find it very exciting." High-definition DVDs can hold up to six times more data than the DVDs we are used to. It will take time though to persuade people who spent money on DVD players to buy the different players and displays required to watch high-definition DVDs in 18 months' time. Mr Dean is confident though: ""I think if they see real HD [high-definition]", not some heavily compressed version of it," there is such a remarkable difference. ""I have heard comments from people who say the images pop off the screen." High-definition will mean some changes for those working behind the scenes too. On the whole", producing films for high-definition DVDs will be easier in some ways because less compression is needed. Equally," it may mean Hollywood studios ask for more to be put onto the average DVD. ""When we master movies right now", our data rates are running at about 1.2 gigabits per second," says Mr Dean. Our DVDs that we put out today have to be squashed down to about five or six megabits per second. ""That's a huge amount of compression that has to be applied - about 98%. So if you have anything that allows more space", you don't have to compress so hard." Studios could fit a lot more marketing material", games, and features, onto high-capacity DVDs. Currently, an entire DVD project can take up to three months, says Mr Dean. Although the step of down-converting will be bypassed, this will realistically only save a day's work, says Mr Dean. One of the most time consuming elements is building DVD navigation and menu systems. On the fairly complex Star Wars disks, making sure the menu buttons worked took 45 human hours alone. If studios want to cash in on the extra space, it could mean extra human hours," for which someone has to pay. ""If the decision on the studio side is that they are going to put a lot more on these disks", it could be more expensive because of all the extra navigation that is required." And if studios do focus on delivering more ""added value content""", thinks Mr Dean, ultimately it could mean that they will want more money for it. Those costs could filter down to the price ticket on a high-definition DVD. But if the consumer is not willing to pay a premium price, studios will listen," thinks Mr Dean. High-definition throws up other challenge to film makers and DVD production alike. More clarity on screen means film makers have to make doubly sure that attention to detail is meticulous. ""When we did the first HD version of Star Wars Episode I", everybody was very sun-tanned," but that was make-up. ""In the HD version of Episode I", all these make-up lines showed up, explains Mr Dean. The restoration of the older Star Wars episodes revealed some interesting items too. There are scans of a corridor [on the Death Star] and fairly plainly in one of those shots," there is a file cabinet stuck behind one of the doorways. ""You never used to be able to see it because things are just blurred enough during the pan that you just didn't see it." What high-definition revolution ultimately means is that the line between home entertainment and cinema worlds will blur. With home theatre systems turning living room

ms into cinemas", this line blurs even further. It could also mean that how we get films, and in what format," will widen. ""In the future we are going to look towards file delivery over IP [internet protocol - broadband]", giving a DVD-like experience from the set-top box to the hard drive," says Mr Dean. But that is some time off for most, and for now, people still like to show off something physical in their bookshelves.

tech 314.txt Junk e-mails on relentless rise Spam traffic is up by 40%, putting the total amount of e-mail that is junk up to an astonishing 90%. The figures, from e-mail management firm Email Systems, will alarm firms attempting to cope with the amount of spam in their in-boxes. While virus traffic has slowed down, denial of service attacks are on the increase according to the firm. Virus mail accounts for just over 15% of all e-mail traffic analysis by the firm has found. It is no longer just multi-nationals that are in danger of so-called denial of service attacks, in which websites are bombarded by requests for information and rendered inaccessible. Email Systems refers to a small UK-based engineering firm, which received a staggering 12 million e-mails in January. The type of spam currently being sent has subtlety altered in the last few months, according to Email Systems analysis. Half of spam received since Christmas has been health-related with gambling and porn also on the increase. Scam mails, offering ways to make a quick buck, have declined by 40%. January is clearly a month when consumers are less motivated to purchase financial products or put money into dubious financial opportunities", said Neil Hammerton, managing director of Email Systems. Spammers seem to have adapted their output to reflect this", focussing instead on medically motivated and pornographic offers, presumably intentionally intended to coincide with what is traditionally considered to be the bleakest month in the calendar," he said.

tech 315.txt Warning over tsunami aid website Net users are being told to avoid a scam website that claims to collect cash on behalf of tsunami victims. The site looks plausible because it uses an old version of the official Disasters Emergency Committee webpage. However, DEC has no connection with the fake site and says it has contacted the police about it. The site is just the latest in a long list of scams that try to cash in on the goodwill generated by the tsunami disaster. The link to the website is contained in a spam e-mail that is currently circulating. The message's subject line reads Urgent Tsunami Earthquake Appeal"" and its text bears all the poor grammar and bad spelling that characterises many other phishing attempts. The web address of the fake site is decuk.org which could be close enough to the official www.dec.org.uk address to confuse some people keen to donate. Patricia Sanders", spokeswoman for the Disaster Emergency Committee said it was aware of the site and had contacted the Computer Crime Unit at Scotland Yard to help get it shut down. She said the spam e-mails directing people to the site started circulating two days ago shortly after the domain name of the site was registered. It is thought that the fake site is being run from Romania. Ms Sanders said DEC had contacted US net registrars who handle domain ownership and the net hosting firm that is keeping the site on the web. DEC was going to push for all cash donated via the site to be handed over to the official organisation. BT and DEC's hosting company were also making efforts to get the site shut down, she said. Ms Sanders said sending out spam e-mail to solicit donations was not DEC's style and that it would never canvass support in this way. She said that DEC hoped to get the fake site shut down as soon as possible. All attempts by the BBC News website to contact the people behind the site have failed. None of the e-mail addresses supplied on the site work and the real owner of the domain is obscured in publicly available net records. This is not the first attempt to cash in on the outpouring of goodwill that has accompanied appeals for tsunami aid. One e-mail sent out

in early January came from someone who claimed that he had lost his parents in the disaster and was asking for help moving an inheritance from a bank account in the Netherlands. The con was very similar to the familiar Nigerian forward fee fraud e-mails that milk money out of people by promising them a cut of a much larger cash pile. Other scam e-mails included a link to a website that supposedly let people donate money but instead loaded spyware on their computers that grabbed confidential information. In a monthly report anti-virus firm Sophos said that two e-mail messages about the tsunami made it to the top 10 hoax list during January. Another tsunami-related e-mail is also circulating that carries the Zar worm which tries to spread via the familiar route of Microsoft's Outlook e-mail program. Anyone opening the attachment of the mail will have their contact list plundered by the worm keen to find new addresses to send itself to.

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"tech 316.txt More women turn to net security Older people and women are increasingly taking charge of protecting home computers against malicious net attacks", according to a two-year study. The number of women buying programs to protect PCs from virus, spam and spyware attacks rose by 11.2% each year between 2002 and 2004. The study, for net security firm Preventon, shows that security messages are reaching a diversity of surfers. It is thought that 40% of those buying home net security programs are retired. For the last three years, that has gone up by an average of 13.2%. But more retired women (53%) were buying security software than retired men. The research reflects the changing stereotype and demographics of web users, as well as growing awareness of the greater risks that high-speed broadband net connections can pose to surfers. The study predicts that 40% of all home PC net security buyers will be women in 2005. They could even overtake men as the main buyers by 2007, if current rates persist," according to the research. ""I think older people have become more vigilant about protecting their PCs as we tend to be more cautious and want an insurance policy in case something does go wrong""", said one over-60 woman who took part in the research. ""You started off with young male stereotype computer users for last 10 years""", Paul Goosens, head of Preventon told the BBC News website. Now we are seeing real people - both sexes and very often it is women who have more access at home." But net service providers still need to take more responsibility in making sure people are educated about net threats before they go online", particularly if they are new to broadband, he said. Programs also need to be tailored so that they can be installed by dial-up users with a slower connection too, said Mr Goosens. Security software should be easy to use, with simple interfaces and instructions written in non-technical language, he added. The nature of the security threats are also becoming more than just about e-mail viruses. High-profile complaints about rogue diallers, and spyware or other programs that surreptitiously install themselves on computers, have also raised awareness about the need to have a combination of anti-virus, firewall and spyware-removal programs too. Without protection, these kinds of programs can be picked up just through surfing the web normally. More than 30,000 PCs a day globally are being recruited into networks that spread spam and viruses, a study from security from Symantec showed last year. Viruses written to make headlines by infecting millions are also getting rarer, according to net security experts. Programs are being unleashed to directly profit criminal gangs, many based in Eastern Europe, over those which are designed to show off technical skills or cause nuisance. The research shows that more people are taking these criminal net threats more seriously because, said Mr Goosens, "they are reported in the press much more. ""You are seeing older users being educated by the media and are seeing them picking up on this threat. They are asking the right questi

ons", he explained. It is more likely the younger users who naively assume that because they are using a reputable service provider," that they are safe to connect to the net." " An unprotected computer on a broadband connection can be breached and infected with viruses or spyware within minutes. By the end of the year it is thought that more than 30% of UK homes will have broadband net access. In July last year", the number of UK households accessing the net via broadband surpassed those using dial-up for the first time, according to the Office of National Statistics.

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"tech 317.txt Sony PSP console hits US in March US gamers will be able to buy Sony's PlayStation Portable from 24 March", but there is no news of a Europe debut. The handheld console will go on sale for \$250 (£132) and the first million sold will come with Spider-Man 2 on UMD, the disc format for the machine. Sony has billed the machine as the Walkman of the 21st Century and has sold more than 800,000 units in Japan. The console (12cm by 7.4cm) will play games, movies and music and also offers support for wireless gaming. Sony is entering a market which has been dominated by Nintendo for many years. It launched its DS handheld in Japan and the US last year and has sold 2.8 million units. Sony has said it wanted to launch the PSP in Europe at roughly the same time as the US," but gamers will now fear that the launch has been put back. Nintendo has said it will release the DS in Europe from 11 March. ""It has gaming at its core", but it's not a gaming device. It's an entertainment device," said Kaz Hirai, president of Sony Computer Entertainment America.

tech 318.txt Ask Jeeves joins web log market Ask Jeeves has bought the Bloglines website to improve the way it handles content from web journals or blogs. The Bloglines site has become hugely popular as it gives users one place in which to read, search and share all the blogs they are interested in. Ask Jeeves said it was not planning to change Bloglines but would use the 300 million articles it has archived to round out its index of the web. How much Ask Jeeves paid for Bloglines was not revealed. Bloglines has become popular because it lets users build a list of the blogs they want to follow without having to visit each journal site individually. To do this it makes use of a technology known as Really Simple Syndication (RSS) that many blogs have adopted to let other sites know when new entries are made on their journals. The acquisition follows similar moves by other search sites. Google acquired Pyra Labs, makers of the Blogger software, in 2003. In 2004 MSN introduced its own blog system and Yahoo has tweaked its technology to do a better job of handling blog entries. Jim Lanzone, vice president of search properties at Ask Jeeves in the US, said it did not acquire Bloglines just to get a foothold in the blog publishing world. He said Ask Jeeves was much more interested in helping people find information they were looking for rather than helping them write it. The universe of readers is vastly larger than the universe of writers", he said. Mr Lanzone said the acquisition would sit well with Ask's My Jeeves service which lets people customise their own web experience and build up a personal collection of useful links. Search engines are about discovering information for the first time and RSS is the ideal way to keep track of and monitor those sites," he said. It would also help drive information and entries from blogs to the portals that Ask Jeeves operates. There would be no instant sweeping changes to Bloglines, said Mr Lanzone. Our intent is to take our time to figure out the right business model not to try to monetise it right away", he said. Though Mr Lanzone added that Ask Jeeves would be helping organise the database of 300m blog entries Bloglines holds with its own net indexing technology. Being able to search the blogosphere as one corpus of information will be very useful in its own right," sai

d Mr Lanzone. Rumours about the acquisition were broken by the Napsterization w eblog which said it got the hint from Ask Jeeves insiders.

tech 319.txt Why Cell will get the hard sell The world is casting its gaze on the Cell processor for the first time, but what is so important about it, and why is it so different? The backers of the processor are big names in the computer industry. IBM is one of the largest and most respected chip-makers in the world, providing cutting edge technology to large businesses. Sony will be using the chip inside its PlayStation 3 console, and its dominance of the games market means that it now has a lot of power to dictate the future of computer and gaming platforms. The technology inside the Cell is being heralded as revolutionary, from a technical standpoint. Traditional computers - whether they are household PCs or PlayStation 2s - use a single processor to carry out the calculations that run the computer. The Cell technology, on the other hand, uses multiple Cell processors linked together to run lots of calculations simultaneously. This gives it processing power an order of magnitude above its competitors. Whilst its rivals are working on similar technology, it is Sony's which is the most advanced. The speed of computer memory has been slowly increasing over the last few years, but the memory technology that accompanies the Cell is a huge leap in performance. Using a technology called XDR, created by American firm Rambus, memory can run up to eight times faster than the current standard being promoted by Intel. Perhaps more important than any of the technology is the Cell's role in the imminent war on living rooms"". The big trend predicted for this year is the convergence of computers with home entertainment devices such as DVD players and hi-fis. Companies like Microsoft and Sony believe that there is a lot of money to be made by putting a computer underneath the TV of every household and then offering services such as music and video downloads", as well as giving an individual access to all the media they already own in one place. Microsoft has already made its first tactical move into this area with its Windows Media Center software, which has been adopted by many PC makers. Sony had a stab at something similar with the PSX - a variation on the PlayStation - last year in Japan, although this attempt was generally seen as a failure. Both companies believe that increasing the capabilities of games consoles, to make them as powerful as PCs, will make the technology accessible enough to persuade buyers to give them pride of place on the video rack. Sony and IBM want to make sure that the dominance of the PC market enjoyed by Microsoft and Intel is not allowed to extend to this market. By creating a radically new architecture, and using that architecture in a games console that is sure to be a huge seller, they hope that the Cell processor can become the dominant technology in the living room, shutting out their rivals. Once they have established themselves under the TV, there is no doubt that they hope to use this as a base camp to extend their might into our traditional PCs and instigate a regime change on the desktop. Cell is, in fact, specifically designed to be deployed throughout the house. The links between the multiple processors can also be extended to reach Cell processors in entirely different systems. Sony hopes to put Cells in televisions, kitchen appliances and anywhere that could use any sort of computer chip. Each Cell will be linked to the others, creating a vast home network of computing power. Resources of the Cells across the house can be pooled to provide more power, and the links can also be used to enable devices to talk to each other, so that you can programme your microwave from your TV, for example. This digital home of the future depends on the widespread adoption of the Cell processor and there are, as with all things, a number of reasons it could fail. Because the processor is so different, it requires programmers to learn a different way of writing software, and it may be that the changeover is simply too difficult for them to master. You can also guarantee that Microsoft and Intel ar

e not going to sit around and let Cell take over home computing without a fight. Microsoft is going to be pushing its Xbox 2 as hard as possible to make sure that its technology, not Sony's, will be under your tree next Christmas. Intel will be furiously working on new designs that address the problems of its current chips to create a rival technology to Cell, so that it doesn't lose its desktop PC dominance. If Cell succeeds in becoming the living room technology of choice, however, it could provide the jump-start to the fully digital home of the future. The revolution might not be televised, but it could well be played with a videogame controller.

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"tech 320.txt PlayStation 3 processor unveiled The Cell processor", which will drive Sony's PlayStation 3, will run 10-times faster than current PC chips, its designers have said. Sony, IBM and Toshiba, who have been working on the Cell processor for three years, unveiled the chip on Monday. It is being designed for use in graphics workstations, the new PlayStation console, and has been described as a supercomputer on a chip. The chip will run at speeds of greater than 4 GHz, the firms said. By comparison, rival chip maker Intel's fastest processor runs at 3.8 GHz. Details of the chip were released at the International Solid State Circuits Conference in San Francisco. The new processor is set to ignite a fresh battle between Intel and the Cell consortium over which processor sits at the centre of digital products. The PlayStation 3 is expected in 2006, while Toshiba plans to incorporate it into high-end televisions next year. IBM has said it will sell a workstation with the chip starting later this year. Cell is comprised of several computing engines, or cores. A core based on IBM's Power architecture controls eight "synergistic" processing centres. In all, they can simultaneously carry out 10 instruction sequences, compared with two for current Intel chips. Later this year, Intel and Advanced Micro Devices plan to release their own "multicore" chips, which also increase the number of instructions that can be executed at once. The Cell's specifications suggest the PlayStation 3 will offer a significant boost in graphics capabilities but analysts cautioned that not all the features in a product announcement will find their way into systems. "Any new technology like this has two components," said Steve Kleynhans, an analyst with Meta Group. He said: It has the vision of what it could be because you need the big vision to sell it. "Then there's the reality of how it's really going to be used," which generally is several levels down the chain from there. While the PlayStation 3 is likely to be the first mass-market product to use Cell, the chip's designers have said the flexible architecture means that it would be useful for a wide range of applications, from servers to mobile phones. Initial devices are unlikely to be any smaller than a games console, however, because the first version of the Cell will run hot enough to need a cooling fan. And while marketing speak describes the chip as a "supercomputer" - it remains significantly slower than the slowest computer on the list of the world's top 500 supercomputers. IBM said Cell was "OS neutral" and would support multiple operating systems simultaneously but designers would not confirm if Microsoft's Windows was among those tested with the chip. If Cell is to challenge Intel's range of chips in the marketplace, it will need to find itself inside PCs, which predominantly run using Windows.

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"tech 321.txt Consumer concern over RFID tags Consumers are very concerned about the use of radio frequency ID (RFID) tags in shops", a survey says. More than half of 2,000 people surveyed said they had privacy wor

ries about the tags, which can be used to monitor stock on shelves or in warehouses. Some consumer groups have expressed concern that the tags could be used to monitor shoppers once they had left shops with their purchases. The survey showed that awareness of tags among consumers in Europe was low. The survey of consumers in the UK, France, Germany and the Netherlands was carried out by consultancy group Capgemini. The firm works on behalf of more than 30 firms who are seeking to promote the growth of RFID technology. The tags are a combination of computer chip and antenna which can be read by a scanner - each item contains a unique identification number. More than half (55%) of the respondents said they were either concerned or very concerned that RFID tags would allow businesses to track consumers via product purchases. Fifty nine percent of people said they were worried that RFID tags would allow data to be used more freely by third parties. Ard Jan Vetham, Capgemini's principal consultant on RFID, " said the survey showed that retailers needed to inform and educate people about RFID before it would become accepted technology. ""Acceptance of new technologies always has a tipping point at which consumers believe that benefits outweigh concerns. ""With the right RFID approach and ongoing communication with consumers",, the industry can reach this point." He said that the survey also showed people would accept RFID if they felt that the technology could mean a reduction in car theft or faster recovery of stolen items. The tags are currently being used at one Tesco distribution centre in the UK - the tags allow the rapid inventory of bulk items. They are also in use as a passcard for the M6 Toll in the Midlands", in the UK. Mr Vetham said the majority of people surveyed (52%) believed that RFID tags could be read from a distance. He said that was a misconception based on a lack of awareness of the technology. At least one consumer group - Consumers Against Supermarket Privacy Invasion and Numbering (Caspian) - has claimed that RFID chips could be used to secretly identify people and the things they are carrying or wearing. All kinds of personal belongings, including clothes, could constantly broadcast messages about their whereabouts and their owners, it warned.

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"tech 322.txt Mobiles 'not media players yet' Mobiles are not yet ready to be all-singing", all-dancing multimedia devices which will replace portable media players, say two reports. Despite moves to bring music download services to mobiles, people do not want to trade multimedia services with size and battery life," said Jupiter. A separate study by Gartner has also said real-time TV broadcasts to mobiles is ""unlikely"" in Europe until 2007. Technical issues and standards must be resolved first", said the report. Batteries already have to cope with other services that operators offer, like video playback, video messaging, megapixel cameras and games amongst others. Bringing music download services based on the success of computer-based download services will put more demands on battery life. Fifty percent of Europeans said the size of a mobile was the most important factor when it came to choosing their phone," but more power demands tend to mean larger handsets. ""Mobile phone music services must not be positioned to compete with the PC music experience as the handsets are not yet ready",, said Thomas Husson, mobile analyst at Jupiter research. Mobile music services should be new and different",, and enable operators to differentiate their brands and support third generation network launches." Other problems facing mobile music include limited storage on phones", compared to portable players which can hold up to 40GB of music. The mobile industry is keen to get into music downloading, after the success of Apple's iTunes, Napster and other net music download services. With phones getting smarter and more powerful, there are also demands to be able to watch TV on the move. In the US, servi

ces like TiVo To Go let people transfer pre-recorded TV content onto their phones. But, the Gartner report on mobile TV broadcasting in Europe suggests direct broadcasting will have to wait. Currently, TV-like services, where clips are downloaded, are offered by several European operators, like Italy's TIM and 3. Mobile TV will have to overcome several barriers before it is widely taken up though, said the report. Various standards and ways of getting TV signals to mobiles are being worked on globally. In Europe, trials in Berlin and Helsinki are making use of terrestrial TV masts to broadcast compressed signals to handsets with extra receivers. A service from the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation lets people watch TV programmes on their mobiles 24 hours a day. The service uses 3GP technology, one of the standards for mobile TV. But at the end of 2004, the European Telecommunications Institute (Etsi) formally adopted Digital Video Broadcasting Handheld (DVB-H) as the mobile TV broadcasting standard for Europe. Operators will be working on the standard as a way to bring real-time broadcasts to mobiles, as well as trying to overcome several other barriers. The cost and infrastructure needs to set up the services will need to be addressed. Handsets also need to be able to work with the DVB-H standard. TV services will have to live up to the expectations of the digital TV generation too, which expects good quality images at low prices, according to analysts. People are also likely to be put off watching TV on such small screens, said Gartner. Digital video recorders, like Europe's Sky+ box, and video-on-demand services mean people have much more control over what TV they watch. As a result, people may see broadcasting straight to mobiles as taking away that control. More powerful smartphones like the XDA II, Nokia 6600, SonyEricsson P900 and the Orange E200, offering web access, text and multimedia messaging, e-mail, calendar and gaming are becoming increasingly common. A report by analysts InStat/MDR has predicted that smartphone shipments will grow by 44% over the next five years. It says that smartphones will make up 117 million out of 833 million handsets shipped globally by 2009.

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"tech 323.txt Blind student 'hears in colour' A blind student has developed software that turns colours into musical notes so that he can read weather maps. Victor Wong", a graduate student from Hong Kong studying at Cornell University in New York State," had to read coloured maps of the upper atmosphere as part of his research. To study ""space weather"" Mr Wong needed to explore minute fluctuations in order to create mathematical models. A number of solutions were tried", including having a colleague describe the maps and attempting to print them in Braille. Mr Wong eventually hit upon the idea of translating individual colours into music," and enlisted the help of a computer graphics specialist and another student to do the programming work. ""The images have three dimensions and I had to find a way of reading them myself", Mr Wong told the BBC News website. For the sake of my own study - and for the sake of blind scientists generally - I felt it would be good to develop software that could help us to read colour images."" He tried a prototype version of the software to explore a photograph of a parrot. In order to have an exact reference to the screen", a pen and tablet device is used. The software then assigns one of 88 piano notes to individually coloured pixels - ranging from blue at the lower end of this scale to red at the upper end. Mr Wong says the application is still very much in its infancy and is only useful for reading images that have been created digitally. ""If I took a random picture and scanned it and then used my software to recognise it", it wouldn't work that well."" Mr Wong has been blind from the age of seven and he thinks that having a ""colour memory"" makes the software more useful than it would be to a scientist who had never had any vi

sion. ""As the notes increase in pitch I know the colour's getting redder and redder", " and in my mind's eye a patch of red appears." " The colour to music software has not yet been made available commercially", and Mr Wong believes that several people would have to work together to make it viable. But he hopes that one day it can be developed to give blind people access to photographs and other images.

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"tech 324.txt Apple attacked over sources row Civil liberties group the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) has joined a legal fight between three US online journalists and Apple. Apple wants the reporters to reveal 20 sources used for stories which leaked information about forthcoming products", including the Mac Mini. The EFF, representing the reporters," has asked California's Superior court to stop Apple pursuing the sources. It argues that the journalists are protected by the American constitution. The EFF says the case threatens the basic freedoms of the press. Apple is particularly keen to find the source for information about an unreleased product code-named Asteroid and has asked the journalists' e-mail providers to hand over communications relevant to that. ""Rather than confronting the issue of reporter's privilege head-on", Apple is going to the journalist's ISPs for his e-mails," said EFF lawyer Kurt Opsahl. This undermines a fundamental First Amendment right that protects all reporters. ""If the court lets Apple get away with this", and exposes the confidences gained by these reporters, potential confidential sources will be deterred from providing information to the media and the public will lose a vital outlet for independent news, analysis and commentary," he said. The case began in December 2004 when Apple asked a local Californian court to get the journalists to reveal their sources for articles published on websites AppleInsider.com and PowerPage.org. Apple also sent requested information from the Nfox.com, the internet service provider of PowerPage's publisher Jason O-Grady. As well as looking at how far corporations can go in preventing information from being published, the case will also examine whether online journalists have the same privileges and protections as those writing for newspapers and magazines. The EFF has gained some powerful allies in its legal battle with Apple, including Professor Tom Goldstein, former dean of the Journalism School at the University of California and Dan Gillmor, a well-known Silicon Valley journalist. Apple was not immediately available for comment.

tech 325.txt Mobile audio enters new dimension As mobile phones move closer to being a ubiquitous, all-in-one media player, audio is becoming ever more important. But how good can that sound be from such a small device? The sound of a buzzing bee jumps from left to right before disappearing around the back of my head. The surround sound demo is unremarkable when heard on a multi-speaker home cinema system but startling when emerging from a small mobile phone. British firm Sonaptic is one of a number of companies to have developed 3D audio technology that emerges from stereo speakers. Firms AM3D and SRS both offer stereo-widening technology for mobile phones. But Sonaptic's managing director David Monteith says his firm is the only company to offer positional 3D audio on a mobile. There are quite a few basic technologies out there", making the sound seem a bit bigger," headphones a bit nicer. ""No-one has really tried before to make proper 3D positional audio - where an individual channel can be moved around." " Sonaptic has been working with Japanese mobile network NTT DoCoMo to set standards for 3D audio on mobile phones. In the last few months handsets from NEC", " Fujitsu and Mitsubishi have been released on to the Japanese market which have chips produced by Yamaha and Rohm with Sonaptic's technology. ""The technology has been around on PCs and games consoles for some time but

t what we are doing is making it more efficient so it can go on a small consumer device like a mobile phone", " said Mr Monteith. The technology works through applying the science of psychoacoustics and grew out of medical research done by the company's research director Dr Alastair Sibbald. We are basically trying to fool your ears into thinking sound is coming from areas it actually isn't. ""Your brain uses certain bits of information which we are effectively synthesising on a mobile phone handset." " The structure of the ear works as a 3D encoder for sound - helping the brain understand from where sound is emanating. Sonaptic's audio processing algorithms mimic that 3D encoding", giving the impression that sound is coming from the left, right," and behind a listener when in fact it is coming from a single source. Mr Monteith says: ""If the sound is off to one side it will get to one ear before the other - if it is on the right it has to bend around your head to get to your left ear. ""The shape of your ear causes differences in sound from one ear to the other. We are synthesising those differences." " Sonaptic hopes the technology will have a big impact in the growing market of mobile gaming and music downloading. ""Handhelds often have limitations - screens will be small by definition. ""If you want to get impact from media you are running - either a movie", " a game or watching TV - if you want it to be more immersive then our technology can help." " A fishing game is the first title to use the technology", " creating a 3D sound field while the gamer plays. Driving games and shoot 'em ups using the technology are in development. The technology can also be used for music - giving songs a much more expansive and immersive feel. Sonaptic offers its technology on a chip or in software and is about to release a new version which significantly improves the efficiency of the audio processing. ""It's important we only use 10 or 15% of the processor otherwise you won't be able to play a game on the handset", " explained Mr Monteith. The company is now looking to the US and European markets, where it has been working with network Vodafone. We have focused first on Japan because it has a very advanced mobile phone market. ""We knew Japan would be the first place to have the handsets that could use our technology. ""There should be handsets out in the UK in the next six months." "

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"tech 326.txt DVD copy protection strengthened DVDs will be harder to copy thanks to new anti-piracy measures devised by copy protection firm Macrovision. The pirated DVD market is enormous because current copy protection was hacked more than five years ago. Macrovision says its new RipGuard technology will thwart most", but not all," of the current DVD ripping (copying) programs used to pirate DVDs. ""RipGuard is designed to... reduce DVD ripping and the resulting supply of illegal peer to peer", " said the firm. Macrovision said the new technology will work in nearly all"" current DVD players when applied to the discs", but it did not specify how many machines could have a problem with RipGuard. Some BBC News website users have expressed concerns that the new technology will mean that DVDs will not work on PCs running the operating system Linux. The new technology will be welcomed by Hollywood film studios which are increasingly relying on revenue from DVD sales. The film industry has stepped up efforts to fight DVD piracy in the last 12 months," taking legal action against websites which offer pirated copies of DVD movies for download. ""Ultimately", we see RipGuard DVD... evolving beyond anti-piracy, and towards enablement of legitimate online transactions, interoperability in tomorrow's digital home, and the upcoming high-definition formats," said Steve Weinstein, executive vice president and general manager of Macrovision's Entertainment Technologies Group. Macrovision said RipGuard would also prevent against rent", " rip and return"" - where people would rent a DVD", copy it and then return the original. R

ipGuard is expected to be rolled out on DVDs from the middle of 2005, the company said. The new system works specifically to block most ripping programs - if used, those programs will now most likely crash, the company said. Macrovision has said that Rip Guard can be updated if hackers find a way around the new anti-copying measures.

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"tech 327.txt Millions buy MP3 players in US One in 10 adult Americans - equivalent to 22 million people - owns an MP3 player", according to a survey. A study by the Pew Internet and American Life Project found that MP3 players are the gadget of choice among affluent young Americans. The survey did not interview teenagers but it is likely that millions of under-18s also have MP3 players. The American love affair with digital music players has been made possible as more and more homes get broadband. Of the 22 million Americans who own MP3 players, 59% are men compared to 41% of women. Those on high income - judged to be \$75,000 (£39,000) or above - are four times more likely to have players than those earning less than \$30,000 (£15,000). Broadband access plays a big part in ownership too. Almost a quarter of those with broadband at home have players, compared to 9% of those who have dial-up access. MP3 players are still the gadget of choice for younger adults. Almost one in five US citizens aged under 30 have one. This compares to 14% of those aged 30-39 and 14% of those aged 40-48. The influence of children also plays a part. Sixteen percent of parents living with children under 18 have digital players compared to 9% of those who don't. The ease of use and growth of music available on the net are the main factors for the upsurge in ownership," the survey found. People are beginning to use them as instruments of social activity - sharing songs and taking part in podcasting - the survey found. "IPods and MP3 players are becoming a mainstream technology for consumers" said Lee Rainie, director of the Pew Internet and American Life Project. "More growth in the market is inevitable as new devices become available", as new players enter the market, and as new social uses for iPods/MP3 players become popular," he added.

tech 328.txt Britons fed up with net service A survey conducted by PC Pro Magazine has revealed that many Britons are unhappy with their internet service. They are fed up with slow speeds, high prices and the level of customer service they receive. 17% of readers have switched suppliers and a further 16% are considering changing in the near future. It is particularly bad news for BT, the UK's biggest internet supplier, with almost three times as many people trying to leave as joining. A third of the 2,000 broadband users interviewed were fed up with their current providers but this could be just the tip of the iceberg thinks Tim Danton, editor of PC Pro Magazine. We expect these figures to leap in 2005. Every month the prices drop", and more and more people are trying to switch," he said. The survey found that BT and Tiscali have been actively dissuading customers from leaving by offering them a lower price when they phone up to cancel their subscription. Some readers were offered a price drop just 25p more expensive than that offered by an alternative operator, making it hardly worth while swapping. Other found themselves tied into 12-month contracts. Broadband has become hugely competitive and providers are desperate to hold on to customers. 12% of those surveyed found themselves unable to swap at all. We discovered a huge variety of problems", but one of the biggest issues is the current supplier withholding the information that people need to give to their new supplier," said Tim Danton, editor of PC Pro. This breaks the code of practice", but because that code is voluntary there's nothing we or Ofcom can do to help, he said. There is a vast choice of internet service providers in the UK now and an often bewildering array of broadband packages. With prices set to

drop even further in coming months Mr Danton advises everyone to shop around carefully. If you just stick with your current connection then there's every chance you're being ripped off," he warned.

tech 329.txt Intel unveils laser breakthrough Intel has said it has found a way to put a silicon-based laser on a chip, raising hopes of much faster networks. Scientists at Intel have overcome a fundamental problem that before now has prevented silicon being used to generate and amplify laser light. The breakthrough should make it easier to interconnect data networks with the chips that process the information. The Intel researchers said products exploiting the breakthrough should appear by the end of the decade. "We've overcome a fundamental limit", said Dr Mario Paniccia, director of Intel's photonic technology lab. Writing in the journal Nature, Dr Paniccia - and colleagues H aisheng Rong, Richard Jones, Ansheng Liu, Oded Cohen, Dani Hak and Alexander Fang - show how they have made a continuous laser from the same material used to make computer processors. Currently, says Dr Paniccia, telecommunications equipment that amplifies the laser light that travels down fibre optic cables is very expensive because of the exotic materials, such as gallium arsenide, used to make it. Telecommunications firms and chip makers would prefer to use silicon for these light-moving elements because it is cheap and many of the problems of using it in high-volume manufacturing have been solved. "We're trying to take our silicon competency in manufacturing and apply it to new areas", said Dr Paniccia. While work has been done to make some of the components that can move light around, before now silicon has not successfully been used to generate or amplify the laser light pulses used to send data over long distances. This is despite the fact that silicon is a much better amplifier of light pulses than the form of the material used in fibre optic cables. This improved amplification is due to the crystalline structure of the silicon used to make computer chips. Dr Paniccia said that the structure of silicon meant that when laser light passed through it, some colliding photons rip electrons off the atoms within the material. It creates a cloud of electrons sitting in the silicon and that absorbs all the light", he said. But the Intel researchers have found a way to suck away these errant electrons and turn silicon into a material that can both generate and amplify laser light. Even better, the laser light produced in this way can, with the help of easy-to-make filters, be tuned across a very wide range of frequencies. Semi-conductor lasers made before now have only produced light in a narrow frequency ranges. The result could be the close integration of the fibre optic cables that carry data as light with the computer chips that process it. Dr Paniccia said the work was the one of several steps needed if silicon was to be used to make components that could carry and process light in the form of data pulses. "It's a technical validation that it can work", he said.

tech 330.txt EU software patent law faces axe The European Parliament has thrown out a bill that would have allowed software to be patented. Politicians unanimously rejected the bill and now it must go through another round of consultation if it is to have a chance of becoming law. During consultation the software patents bill could be substantially re-drafted or even scrapped. The bill was backed by some hi-tech firms, saying they needed protections it offered to make research worthwhile. Hugo Lueders, European director for public policy at CompTIA, an umbrella organization for technology companies, said only when intellectual property was adequately protected would European inventors prosper. He said the benefits of the bill had been obscured by special interest groups which muddied debate over the rights and wrongs of software patents. Other proponents of the bill said it was a good compromise that avoided the excesses of the American system which allows the patenting of business practices as well as software. But opponents of the bill said that it could stifle innovation.

nnovation, be abused by firms keen to protect existing monopolies and could hamper the growth of the open source movement. The proposed law had a troubled passage through the European parliament. Its progress was delayed twice when Polish MEPs rejected plans to adopt it. Also earlier this month the influential European Legal Affairs Committee (JURI) said the law should be re-drafted after it failed to win the support of MEPs. To become law both the European Parliament and a qualified majority of EU states have to approve of the draft wording of the bill. The latest rejection means that now the bill on computer inventions must go back to the EU for re-consideration.

tech 331.txt IBM puts cash behind Linux push IBM is spending \$100m (£52m) over the next three years beefing up its commitment to Linux software. The cash injection will be used to help its customers use Linux on every type of device from handheld computers and phones right up to powerful servers. IBM said the money will fund a variety of technical, research and marketing initiatives to boost Linux use. IBM said it had taken the step in response to greater customer demand for the open source software. In 2004 IBM said it had seen double digit growth in the number of customers using Linux to help staff work together more closely. The money will be used to help this push towards greater collaboration and will add Linux-based elements to IBM's Workplace software. Workplace is a suite of programs and tools that allow workers to get at core business applications no matter what device they use to connect to corporate networks. One of the main focuses of the initiative will be to make it easier to use Linux-based desktop computers and mobile devices with Workplace. Even before IBM announced this latest spending boost it was one of the biggest advocates of the open source way of working. In 2001 it put \$300m into a three-year Linux program and has produced Linux versions of many of its programs. Linux and the open source software movement are based on the premise that developers should be free to tinker with the core components of software programs. They reason that more open scrutiny of software produces better programs and fuels innovation.

tech 332.txt Apple iPod family expands market Apple has expanded its iPod family with the release of its next generation of the digital music players. Its latest challenges to the growing digital music gadget market include an iPod mini model which can hold 6GB compared to a previous 4GB. The company, which hopes to keep its dominant place in the digital music market, also said the gold coloured version of the mini would be dropped. A 30GB version has also been added to the iPod Photo family. The latest models have a longer battery life and their prices have been cut by an average of £40. The original iPod took an early lead in the digital music player market thanks to its large storage capacity and simple design. During 2004 about 25 million portable players were sold, 10 million of which were Apple iPods. But analysts agree that the success is also down to its integration with the iTunes online store, which has given the company a 70% share of the legal download music market. Mike McGuire, a research director at analyst Gartner, told the BBC News website that Apple had done a good job in sealing off the market from competition "so far. " "They have created a very seamless package which I think is the idea of the product - the design", function and the software are very impressive," he said. He added that the threat from others was always present, however. Creative", other Microsoft-partnered devices, Real, Sony and so on, are ratcheting up the marketing message and advertising," he said. Creative was very upbeat about how many of its Creative Zen players it had shipped by the end of last year, he said. Its second-generation models, like the Creative Zen Micro Photo, is due out in the summer. It will have 5GB of memory on board. Digital music players are now the gadget of choice among young Americans, according to recent research by the Pew Internet and American Life Project. One in 10 US adults - 22 million people - no

w owns a digital music player of some sort. Sales of legally downloaded songs also rose more than tenfold in 2004, according to the record industry, with 200 million tracks bought online in the US and Europe in 12 months. The IFPI industry body said that the popularity of portable music players was behind the growth. Analysts say that the ease of use and growth of music services available on the net will continue to drive the trend towards portable music players. People are also starting to use them in novel ways. Some are combining automatic syncing functions many of them have with other net functions to automatically distribute DIY radio shows, called podcasts. But 2005 will also see more competition from mobile phone operators who are keen to offer streaming services on much more powerful and sophisticated handsets. According to Mr McGuire, research suggests that people like the idea of building up huge libraries of music, which they can do with high-capacity storage devices, like iPods and Creative Zens. Mobiles do not yet have this capacity though, and there are issues about the ease of portability of mobile music. Mr McGuire said Apple was ensuring it kept a foot in the mobile music door with its recent deal with Motorola to produce a version of iTunes for Motorola phones.

tech 333.txt US woman sues over ink cartridges A US woman is suing Hewlett Packard (HP), saying its printer ink cartridges are secretly programmed to expire on a certain date. The unnamed woman from Georgia says that a chip inside the cartridge tells the printer that it needs re-filling even when it does not. The lawsuit seeks to represent anyone in the US who has purchased an HP inkjet printer since February 2001. HP, the world's biggest printer firm, declined to comment on the lawsuit. HP ink cartridges use a chip technology to sense when they are low on ink and advise the user to make a change. But the suit claims the chips also shut down the cartridges at a predetermined date regardless of whether they are empty. The smart chip is dually engineered to prematurely register ink depletion and to render a cartridge unusable through the use of a built-in expiration date that is not revealed to the consumer", "the suit said. The lawsuit is asking for restitution, damages and other compensation. The cost of printer cartridges has been a contentious issue in Europe for the last 18 months. The price of inkjet printers has come down to as little as £34 but it could cost up to £1,700 in running costs over an 18-month period due to cartridge, a study by Computeractive Magazine revealed last year. The inkjet printer market has been the subject of an investigation by the UK's Office of Fair Trading (OFT), which concluded in a 2002 report that retailers and manufacturers needed to make pricing more transparent for consumers.

tech 334.txt Security warning over 'FBI virus' The US Federal Bureau of Investigation is warning that a computer virus is being spread via e-mails that purport to be from the FBI. The e-mails show that they have come from an fbi.gov address and tell recipients that they have accessed illegal websites. The messages warn that their internet use has been monitored by the FBI's Internet Fraud Complaint Center. An attachment in the e-mail contains the virus, the FBI said. The message asks recipients to click on the attachment and answer some questions about their internet use. But rather than being a questionnaire, the attachment contains a virus that infects the recipient's computer, according to the agency. It is not clear what the virus does once it has infected a computer. Users are warned never to open attachment from unsolicited e-mails or from people they do not know. Recipients of this or similar solicitations should know that the FBI does not engage in the practice of sending unsolicited e-mails to the public in this manner", "the FBI said in a statement. The bureau is investigating the phoney e-mails. The agency earlier this month shut down fbi.gov accounts, used to communicate with the public, because of a security breach. A spokeswoman said the two incidents appear to be unrelated.

tech 335.txt Mobile networks seek turbo boost Third-generation mobile (3G) networks need to get faster if they are to deliver fast internet surfing on the move and exciting new services. That was one of the messages from the mobile industry at the 3GSM World Congress in Cannes last week. Fast 3G networks are here but the focus has shifted to their evolution into a higher bandwidth service, says the Global Mobile Suppliers Association. At 3GSM, Siemens showed off a system that transmits faster mobile data. The German company said data could be transmitted at one gigabit a second - up to 20 times faster than current 3G networks. The system is not available commercially yet, but Motorola, the US mobile handset and infrastructure maker, held a clinic for mobile operators on HSDPA (High Speed Downlink Packet Access), a high-speed, high bandwidth technology available now. Early HSDPA systems typically offer around two megabits per second (Mbps) compared with less than 384 kilobits per second (Kbps) on standard 3G networks. High-Speed Downlink Packet Access (HSDPA) - sometimes called Super 3G - will be vital for profitable services like mobile internet browsing and mobile video clips", according to a report published by UK-based research consultancy Analysys. A number of companies are developing the technology. Nokia and Canada-based wireless communication products company Sierra Wireless recently agreed to work together on High Speed Downlink Packet Access. The two companies aim to jointly market the HSDPA solution to global network operator customers. While HSDPA theoretically enables data rates up to a maximum of 14Mbps, practical throughputs will be lower than this in wide-area networks," said Dr Alastair Brydon, author of the Analysys report: Pushing Beyond the Limits of 3G with HSDPA and Other Enhancements. The typical average user rate in a real implementation is likely to be in the region of one megabit per second which, even at this lower rate, will more than double the capacity... when compared to basic WCDMA [3G]," he added. Motorola has conducted five trials of its technology and says speeds of 2.9Mbps have been recorded at the edge of an outdoor 3G cell using a single HSDPA device. But some mobile operators are opting for a technology called Evolution, Data Optimised (EV-DO). US operator Sprint ordered a broadband data upgrade to its 3G network at the end of last year. We are expanding our network and deploying EV-DO technology to meet customer demand for faster wireless speeds", said Oliver Valente, Sprint's vice president for technology development, when the contract was announced. As part of \$3bn in multi-year contracts announced late last year, Sprint will spend around \$1bn on EV-DO technology from Lucent Technologies, Nortel Networks and Motorola that provides average data speeds of 0.3-0.5 megabits a second, and peak download rates of 2.4Mbps. MM02, the UK-based operator with services in the UK, Ireland and Germany, has opted for technology based on HSDPA. Using technology from Lucent, it will offer data speeds of 3.6Mbps from next summer on its Isle of Man 3G network, and will eventually support speeds of up to 14.4Mbps. US operator Cingular Wireless is also adopting HSDPA, using technology from Lucent alongside equipment from Siemens and Ericsson. Siemens' plans for a one gigabit network may be more than a user needs today, but Christoph Caselitz, president of the mobile networks division at the firm says that: By the time the next generation of mobile communication debuts in 2015", the need for transmission capacities for voice, data, image and multimedia is conservatively anticipated to rise by a factor of 10." Siemens - in collaboration with the Fraunhofer German-Sino Lab for Mobile Communications and the Institute for Applied Radio System Technology - has souped up mobile communications by using three transmitting and four receiving antennae", instead of the usual one. This enables a data transmission, such as sending a big file or video, to be broken up into different flows of data that can be sent simultaneously over one radio frequency band. The speeds offered by 3G mobile seemed fast at the time mobile operators were paying huge sums for

3G licences. But today, instead of connecting to the internet by slow, dial-up phone connection, many people are used to broadband networks that offer speeds of 0.5 megabits a second - much faster than 3G. This means users are likely to find 3G disappointing unless the networks are souped up. If they aren't," those lucrative ""power users""", such as computer geeks and busy business people will avoid them for all but the most urgent tasks, reducing the potential revenues available to mobile operators. But one gigabit a second systems will not be available immediately. Siemens says that though the system works in the laboratory, it still has to assess the mobility of multiple-antennae devices and conduct field trials. A commercial system could be as far away as 2012, though Siemens did not rule out an earlier date.

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"tech 336.txt Mac Mini heralds mini revolution The Mac Mini was launched amid much fanfare by Apple and great excitement by Apple watchers last month. But does the latest Macintosh justify the hype? Let us get a few things dealt with at the outset - yes", the Mac Mini is really, really small, and yes, it is another piece of inspired Apple design. There is more to be said on the computer's size and design but it is worth highlighting that the Mac Mini is just a computer. Inside that small box there is a G4 processor, a CD/DVD player, a hard drive, some other technical bits and bobs and an operating system. A DVD burner, wireless and bluetooth technologies can be bought at extra cost. And if you do not have a monitor, keyboard or mouse then you will need to purchase those also. It is not the fastest computer for the money but for under £400 you are getting something more interesting than mere technical specifications - Apple software. The Mac Mini comes bundled with Mac OS X, the operating system, as well as iLife 05, a suite of software which includes iTunes, web browser Safari, iPhoto, Garage Band and iDVD. I doubt many PC lovers would seriously argue that Windows XP comes with a better suite of programs than Mac OS X. Of course, users of open source operating system Linux draw up their own menu of programs. For people who want to do interesting things with their music," photos and home movies then a Mac Mini is an ideal first computer or companion to a main computer. ""It's a good little machine with a reasonable amount of power and just perfect for the average computer user who wants to leave the tyranny of Windows and viruses"," said Mark Sparrow, technical and reviews editor at Mac Format magazine. He added: In essence", it's a laptop in a biscuit tin," minus the screen and the keyboard. ""The software bundle that comes with the mini makes your average budget PC look a bit sick." The relatively low price of the machine has also encouraged the more technically-savvy to experiment with their Macs. One user has already created a ""dock"" to enable him to plug in and out his Mac Mini in his car. The small size of the machine makes it a practical solution for in-car entertainment - playing movies and music - as well as navigation. Another user has mounted his Mac Mini to the back of his large plasma screen and then controls the computer via a wireless keyboard and mouse. When it was first announced some pundits thought the Mini was designed as a sort of stealth media centre - ie the machine would be used to serve TV programmes", music, films and photos - partly due to its small, living room friendly design. But there are obvious reasons why this is not the case - at least not in the here and now The hard drive - at 80GB for the larger model - is too small to be realistically used as media centre. While commercial Personal Video Recorders are on the market with smaller than 80GB hard drives it is worth remembering that they only store TV content. A media centre computer has to store music, files and photos and as such 80GB just seems too small. Most PCs running Windows Media Center have at least 120GB hard disks. Coupled with the lack of a TV tuner card, a digital

l audio out and any kind of media centre software bundled with the machine then the Mac Mini should be judged on what it is, not what it is not. But that has not stopped more enterprising users from adapting the Mac Mini to media centre uses. So - is the Mac Mini just another computer or a revolution in computing? Graham Barlow, editor of Mac Format," understandably has a rather partisan viewpoint. ""It's just a Mac", but we should be very excited - it's revolutionary in its size (smaller than PCs), looks (looks better than PCs)," and the fact that it's the first Mac designed to really go for the low-cost PC market." The design of the Mac Mini is further evidence of a future when PCs are more than just bland", bulky boxes. There are a number of companies who already produce miniature PCs based on mini-ITX motherboards. But at the moment these PCs tend to be either for the home-build enthusiast or expensive pre-built options based around Microsoft's Media Center software. But for the value the Mac Mini offers, bringing some of the best software packages within reach of more consumers than ever before, Apple is to be congratulated. Let us say then that if the Mac Mini is not a fully fledged revolution - it is a mini revolution.

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"tech 337.txt Can Yahoo dominate next decade? Yahoo has reached the grand old age of 10 and", in internet years, that is a long time. For many, Yahoo remains synonymous with the internet - a veteran that managed to ride the dot-com wave and the subsequent crash and maintain itself as one of the web's top brands. But for others there is another, newer net icon threatening to overshadow Yahoo in the post dot-com world - Google. The veteran and the upstart have plenty in common - Yahoo was the first internet firm to offer initial public shares and Google was arguably the most watched IPO (Initial Public Offering) of the post-dot-com era. Both began life as search engines although in 2000, when Yahoo chose Google to power its search facility while it concentrated on its web portal business, it was very much Yahoo that commanded press attention. In recent years, the column inches have stacked up in Google's favour as the search engine also diversifies with the launch of services such as Gmail, its shopping channel Froogle and Google News. For Jupiter analyst Olivier Beauvillain," Yahoo's initial decision to put its investment on search on hold was an error. ""Yahoo was busy building a portal and while it was good to diversify they made a big mistake in outsourcing search to Google", he said They thought Google would just be a technology provider but it has become a portal in its own right and a direct competitor," he added. He believes Yahoo failed to see how crucial search would become to internet users, something it has rediscovered in recent years. It is interesting that in these last few years", it has refocused on search following the success of Google," he said. But for Allen Weiner, a research director at analyst firm Gartner and someone who has followed Yahoo's progress since the early years, the future of search is not going to be purely about the technology powering it. Search technology is valuable but the next generation of search is going to be about premium content and the interface that users have to that content", he said. He believes the rivalry between Google and Yahoo is overblown and instead thinks the real battle is going to be between Yahoo and MSN. It is a battle that Yahoo is currently winning, he believes. Microsoft has amazing assets including software capability and a global name but it has yet to show me it can create a rival product to Yahoo", he said. He is convinced Yahoo remains the single most important brand on the world wide web. I believe Yahoo is the seminal brand on the web. If you are looking for a text book definition of web portal then Yahoo is it," he said. It has achieved this dominance, Mr Weiner believes, by a canny combination of acquisitions such as that of Inktomi and Overture, and by avoiding direct involvement in either content

creation or internet access. That is not to say that Yahoo hasn't had its dark days. When the dot-com bubble burst, it lost one-third of its revenue in a single year, bore a succession of losses and saw its market value fall from a peak of \$120bn to \$4.6bn at one point. Crucial to its survival was the decision to replace chief executive Tim Koogle with Terry Semel in May 2001, thinks Mr Weiner. His business savvy, coupled with the technical genius of founder Jerry Yang has proved a winning combination, he says. So as the internet giant emerges from its first decade as a survivor, how will it fare as it enters its teenage years? The game is theirs to lose and MSN is the only one that stands in the way of Yahoo's domination", predicted Mr Weiner. Nick Hazel, Yahoo's head of consumer services in the UK, thinks the fact that Yahoo has grown up with the first wave of the internet generation will stand it in good stead. Search will be a key focus as will making Yahoo Messenger available on mobiles, forging new broadband partnerships such as that with BT in the UK and continuing to provide a range of services beyond the desktop, he says. Mr Weiner thinks Yahoo's vision of becoming the ultimate gateway to the web will move increasing towards movies and television as more and more people get broadband access. It will spread its portal wings to expand into rich media", he predicts.

tech 338.txt Looks and music to drive mobiles Mobile phones are still enjoying a boom time in sales, according to research from technology analysts Gartner. More than 674 million mobiles were sold last year globally, said the report, the highest total sold to date. The figure was 30% more than in 2003 and surpassed even the most optimistic predictions, Gartner said. Good design and the look of a mobile, as well as new services such as music downloads, could go some way to pushing up sales in 2005, said analysts. Although people were still looking for better replacement phones, there was evidence, according to Gartner, that some markets were seeing a slow-down in replacement sales. All the markets grew apart from Japan which shows that replacement sales are continuing in western Europe", mobile analyst Carolina Milanesi told the BBC News website. Japan is where north America and western European markets can be in a couple of years' time. "They already have TV", music, ringtones, cameras, and all that we can think of on mobiles," so people have stopped buying replacement phones." But there could be a slight slowdown in sales in European and US markets too", according to Gartner, as people wait to see what comes next in mobile technology. This means mobile companies have to think carefully about what they are offering in new models so that people see a compelling reason to upgrade, said Gartner. Third generation mobiles (3G) with the ability to handle large amounts of data transfer, like video, could drive people into upgrading their phones," but Ms Milanesi said it was difficult to say how quickly that would happen. "At the end of the day", people have cameras and colour screens on mobiles and for the majority of people out there who don't really care about technology the speed of data to a phone is not critical." Nor would the rush to produce two or three megapixel camera phones be a reason for mobile owners to upgrade on its own. The majority of camera phone models are not at the stage where they can compete with digital cameras which also have flashes and zooms. More likely to drive sales in 2005 would be the attention to design and aesthetics", as well as music services. The Motorola Razr V3 phone was typical of the attention to design that would be more commonplace in 2005," she added. This was not a ""women's thing""", she said, but a desire from men and women to have a gadget that is a form of self-expression too. It was not just about how the phone functioned," but about what it said about its owner. "Western Europe has always been a market which is quite attentive to design", said Ms Milanesi. People are after something that is nice-looking, and together with that," there is the entertainment side. "This year music will have a part to play in this." Th

e market for full-track music downloads was worth just \$20 million (£10.5 million) in 2004", but is set to be worth \$1.8 billion (£94 million) by 2009, according to Juniper Research. Sony Ericsson just released its Walkman branded mobile phone, the W800, which combines a digital music player with up to 30 hours' battery life, and a two megapixel camera. In July last year, Motorola and Apple announced a version of iTunes online music downloading service would be released which would be compatible with Motorola mobile phones. Apple said the new iTunes music player would become Motorola's standard music application for its music phones. But the challenge will be balancing storage capacity with battery life if mobile music hopes to compete with digital music players like the iPod. Ms Milanesi said more models would likely be released in the coming year with hard drives. But they would be more likely to compete with the smaller capacity music players that have around four gigabyte storage capacity, which would not put too much strain on battery life.

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"tech 339.txt Hotspot users gain free net calls People using wireless net hotspots will soon be able to make free phone calls as well as surf the net. Wireless provider Broadreach and net telephony firm Skype are rolling out a service at 350 hotspots around the UK this week. Users will need a Skype account - downloadable for free - and they will then be able to make net calls via wi-fi without paying for net access. Skype allows people to make free PC-based calls to other Skype users. Users of the system can also make calls to landlines and mobiles for a fee. The system is gaining in popularity and now has 28 million users around the world. Its paid service - dubbed Skype Out - has so far attracted 940",000 users. It plans to add more paid services with forthcoming launches of video conferencing, voice mail and Skype In, a service which would allow users to receive phone calls from landlines and mobiles. London-based software developer Connectel has unveiled software that will expand the SMS functions of Skype, allowing users to send text messages to mobile phones from the service. Broadreach Networks has around two million users and hotspots in places such as Virgin Megastores," the Travelodge chain of hotels and all London's major rail terminals. The company is due to launch wi-fi on Virgin Trains later in the year. ""Skype's success at spreading the word about internet telephony is well-known and we are delighted to be offering free access to Skype users in our hotspots", commented Broadreach chief executive Magnus McEwen-King.

tech 340.txt Domain system opens door to scams A system to make it easier to create website addresses using alphabets like Cyrillic could open a back door for scammers, a trade body has warned. The Internationalised Domain Names system has been a work in progress for years and has recently been approved by the Internet Engineering Task Force. But the UK Internet Forum (UKIF) is concerned that the system will let scammers create fake sites more easily. The problem lies in the computer codes used to represent language. Registering names that look like that of legitimate companies but lead users to fake sites designed to steal passwords and credit card details could become a whole lot easier for determined scammers, says Stephen Dyer, director of UKIF. Domain names are the real language"" addresses of websites", rather than their internet protocol address, which is a series of numbers. They are used so people can more easily navigate the web. So-called ASCII codes are used to represent European languages but for other languages a hybrid of a system called Unicode is used. So, for example, website PayPal could now be coded using a mixture of the Latin alphabet and the Russian alphabet. The resulting domain as displayed to the users would look identical to the real site as a Russian 'a' look just like an

English 'a'. But the computer code would be different, and the site it would lead users to could be a fake. This is more than just a theory. A fake Paypal.com has already been registered with net domain giant Verisign by someone who has followed the debate around the Internationalised Domain Name (IDN) system, said Mr Dyer. As the idea was to prove a point rather than be malicious the fake domain has now been handed back to Paypal but it sets a worrying precedent," Mr Dyer said. ""Although the IDN problem is well known in technical circles", the commercial world is totally unaware how easily their websites can be faked, said Mr Dyer. It is important to alert users that there is a new and invisible and almost undetectable way of diverting them to what looks like a perfectly genuine site," he added. There are solutions. For instance, browsers could spot domains that use mixed characters and display them in different colours as a warning to users. Mr Dyer acknowledged that it would be a huge undertaking to update all the world's browsers. Another solution, to introduce IDN-disabled browsers could be a case of throwing out the baby with the bath water", he said. CENTR, the Council of European National Top Level Domain Registries, agrees. A rush to introduce IDN-disabled browsers into the marketplace is an overly-zealous step that will harm public confidence in IDNs - a technology that is desperately needed in the non-English speaking world", the organisation said in a statement.

tech 341.txt Sony PSP tipped as a 'must-have' Sony's Play station Portable is the top UK gadget for 2005, according to a round-up of ultimate gizmos compiled by Stuff Magazine. It beats the iPod into second place in the Top Ten Essentials list which predicts what gadget-lovers are likely to covet this year. Owning all 10 gadgets will set the gadget lover back £7,455. That is £1,000 cheaper than last year's list due to falling manufacturing costs making gadgets more affordable. Portable gadgets dominate the list, including Sharp's 902 3G mobile phone, the Pentax Optio SV digital camera and Samsung's Yepp YH-999 video jukebox. What this year's Essentials shows is that gadgets are now cheaper", sexier and more indispensable than ever. We've got to the point where we can't live our lives without certain technology," said Adam Vaughan, editor of Stuff Essentials. The proliferation of gadgets in our homes is inexorably altering the role of the high street in our lives thinks Mr Vaughan. Take digital cameras", who would now pay to develop an entire film of photos? Or legitimate downloads," who would travel miles to a record shop when they could download the song in minutes for 70p?"" he asks. Next year will see a new set of technologies capturing the imaginations of gadget lovers", Stuff predicts. The Xbox 2, high-definition TV and MP3 mobiles will be among the list of must-haves that will dominate 2006, it says. The spring launch of the PSP in the UK is eagerly awaited by gaming fans.

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"tech 342.txt 'No re-draft' for EU patent law A proposed European law on software patents will not be re-drafted by the European Commission (EC) despite requests by MEPs. The law is proving controversial and has been in limbo for a year. Some major tech firms say it is needed to protect inventions", while others fear it will hurt smaller tech firms. The EC says the Council of Ministers will adopt a draft version that was agreed upon last May but said it would review ""all aspects of the directive"". The directive is intended to offer patent protection to inventions that use software to achieve their effect", in other words," ""computer implemented invention""". In a letter", EC President Jos&#233; Manuel Barroso told the President of the European Parliament, Josep Borrell," that the Commission ""did not intend to refer a new proposal to the Parliament and the Council (of ministers)"" as it had supported the agreement reached by ministers in May 2004. If the European Council agrees on the

draft directive it will then return for a second reading at the European Parliament. But that will not guarantee that the directive will become law - instead it will probably mean further delays and controversy over the directive. Most EU legislation now needs the approval of both parliament and the Council of Ministers before it becomes law. French Green MEP Alain Lipietz warned two weeks ago that if the Commission ignored the Parliament's request it would be an ""insult"" to the assembly. He said that the parliament would then reject the Council's version of the legislation as part of the final or conciliation stage of the decision procedure. In the US," the patenting of computer programs and internet business methods is permitted. This means that the US-based Amazon.com holds a patent for its ""one-click shopping"" service", for example. Critics are concerned that the directive could lead to a similar model happening in Europe. This, they fear, could hurt small software developers because they do not have the legal and financial might of larger companies if they had to fight patent legal action in court. Supporters say current laws are inefficient and it would serve to even up a playing field without bringing EU laws in line with the US.

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"tech 343.txt Ultra fast wi-fi nears completion Ultra high speed wi-fi connections moved closer to reality on Thursday when Intel said it would list standards for the technology later this year. Intel is developing ultra-wideband technology (UWB) which would allow fast data transfer but with low power needs. UWB is tipped to be used for wireless transfer of video in the home or office and for use in wireless USB devices which need low power consumption. A rival UWB standard is being developed by Motorola and chip firm Freescale. At the mobile phone conference 3GSM in Cannes last month Samsung demonstrated a phone using UWB technology from Freescale. At a press conference on Thursday Intel announced that two UWB groups", WiMedia Alliance and Multi-band OFDM alliance had merged to support the technology. UWB makes it possible to stream huge amounts of data through the air over short distances. One of the more likely uses of UWB is to make it possible to send DVD quality video images wirelessly to TV screens or to let people beam music to media players around their home. The technology has the potential to transmit hundreds of megabits of data per second. ""Consumer electronics companies want UWB to replace cables and simplify set-up", Jeff Ravencraft, technology strategist at Intel and chairman of the Wireless USB Promoter Group, told technology site ZDNet. Thirty percent of consumer electronics returns are because the consumer couldn't set up the equipment." The first products using UWB technology from Intel are due to hit the market later this year. Initially they will be products using wireless USB 2.0 connections. UWB could also be used to create so-called Personal Area Networks that let a person's gadgets quickly and easily swap data amongst themselves. The technology works over a range up to 10 metres and uses billions of short radio pulses every second to carry data. Intel says the benefit of UWB is that it does not interfere with other wi-fi technologies already in use such as wi-fi", wi max and mobile phone networks.

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"tech 344.txt Virgin Radio offers 3G broadcast UK broadcaster Virgin Radio says it will become the first station in the world to offer radio via 3G mobiles. The radio station", in partnership with technology firm Sydus, will broadcast on selected 2G and high-speed 3G networks. Later this year listeners will be able to download software from the Virgin website which enables the service. James Cridland, head of new media at Virgin Radio," said: ""It

places radio at the heart of the 3G revolution." "Virgin Radio will be the first station made available followed by two digital stations", "Virgin Radio Classic Rock and Virgin Radio Groove. Mr Cridland said: ""This application will enable anyone", "anywhere to listen to Virgin Radio simply with the phone in their pocket. ""This allows us to tap into a huge new audience and keep radio relevant for a new generation of listeners." "Saumil Nanavati", president of Sydus, said, " ""This radio player is what the 3G network was built for", "giving consumers high-quality and high-data products through a handset in their pocket." "Virgin says an hour's listening to the station via mobile would involve about 7.2MB of data", which could prove expensive for people using pay as you download GPRS or 3G services. Some networks, such as Orange, charge up to £1 for every one megabyte of data downloaded. Virgin says radio via 2G or 3G mobiles is therefore going to appeal to people with unlimited download deals. There are 30 compatible handsets available from major manufacturers including Nokia and Samsung while Virgin said more than 14.9 million consumers across the globe can use the service currently.

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"tech 345.txt More movies head to Sony's PSP Movies Open Water and Saw are among those to be made available for Sony's PSP games console. Film studio Lions Gate entertainment has announced an initial list of 12 movies that will be on the UMD format used by the handheld. ""The typical buyer of the machine [is] the core demographic to whom our films generally appeal", "said Steve Beeks, president of Lions Gate. Already available in Japan, the PSP is released in the US on 24 March. Spider-Man 2 on UMD will be given to the first million customers in the US. The Punisher and House of the Dead along with older titles such as Total Recall and Rambo: First Blood, will be in the UMD format, with disks costing between \$20 (£10.40) to \$30 (£15.60) for new titles and \$10 (£5.20) to \$20 for older films. When we first saw the machine and started talking to Sony", we immediately decided it was going to be a winner, both from the gaming perspective and from the perspective of people watching movies on the go," Mr Beeks said. The disks, which are smaller than DVDs, only work in Sony's PSP and can hold up to 1.8GB of data. We actually believe people who buy the UMD would not have bought it on DVD", he said. There are people who will want UMD because of the portability. Maybe they're already taking the games with them out of the house," and they're bigger gamers than they are movie watchers." "Four movies have already been announced for PSP. They are: XXX", Hellboy, Resident Evil: Apocalypse and Once Upon a Time in Mexico.

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"tech 346.txt Warnings on woeful wi-fi security Companies are getting worse at keeping their wireless data networks secure. A survey of wi-fi networks in London", Frankfurt, New York and San Francisco by RSA Security found more than a third had basic security features turned off. By contrast last year's survey found that 15% of firms had failed to take basic steps to improve security. RSA warned that wi-fi's growing popularity made it much more likely that insecure networks would be found and exploited. Wireless or wi-fi networks have become hugely popular over the last few years in offices because they are easy to set up and make going online much more convenient. This popularity shows no sign of slowing reveals the annual RSA Security and NetScurity survey which found an annual 66% growth rate in the number of wireless nets being installed in London and Frankfurt. Although most firms do take steps to turn on the security functions built in to the wi-fi standard and protect themselves from attack, the survey found that a significant proportion were taking unnecessary r

isks. On average 33% of the wireless networks found by RSA and NetSurity researchers in London, Frankfurt, New York and San Francisco had not used basic security systems. Many firms were simply turning on their wireless net access points and use default settings that anyone familiar with wi-fi could easily find out. RSA said that 26% of wi-fi networks found London used default settings compared to 30% in Frankfurt," 31% in New York and 28% in San Francisco. Many users of wi-fi nets did not even turn on the encryption that scrambles data traffic between users and the access point helping them go online. This is despite a series of stories warning firms about the dangers of ""drive-by hacking"" in which computer criminals walk or drive around city centres using easy to use tools to spot wi-fi nets. ""These figures are another stark warning to unsecured businesses to get their act together,"" said Phil Cracknell, chief technology officer at NetSurity. As more public wi-fi hotspots appear and people become more familiar with using them, it was getting more likely that insecure would be found, warned Mr Cracknell. Accidental or intentional connection to a corporate network can bring with it a series of security issues including loss of confidential data and installation of malicious code", he said.

tech 347.txt Cebit opens to mobile music tune Cebit, the world's largest hi-tech fair, has opened its doors in Hanover for a look at the latest technologies for homes and businesses. There are more than 6,000 exhibitors registered and about 500,000 visitors are expected to pass through the doors. Third generation mobiles, the digital home and broadband are key themes at the show. Camera phones will get better resolutions as vendors set out to prove that bigger is definitely better. Samsung is set to steal some initial limelight with the launch of a 7-megapixel phone on the opening day. The SCH-V770 has some of the features of high-end digital single lens reflex cameras such as manual focus and the ability to attach a telephoto or wide-angle lens. Camera phones are likely to prove an interesting battle ground at the show, said Ben Wood, principal analyst at research firm Gartner. It is firmly established that cameras are an integral part of phones and now the technology arms race is on in terms of megapixels. There will be a certain amount of 'look how big mine is'", he said. There will also be increasing focus on music-enabled mobiles. At 3GSM in Cannes everyone went music mad and music is going to be a big theme for all the vendors at Cebit," said Mr Wood. Sony Ericsson will use the fair to show off the W800 - its recently unveiled Walkman branded phone - and there is speculation that Motorola may unveil its ROKR handset, widely tipped as the first to carry Apple's iTunes music software. Apple and Motorola announced they were getting together at the end of last year as a result of a long-standing friendship between Motorola's chief executive Ed Zander and Steve Jobs. Some analysts think Motorola may save the launch for CTIA, a wireless show in America the following week, which could be a telling sign about how operators are coming to view the German tech fair. One of the interesting things is that CeBIT is clearly a show in decline", said Mr Wood. A lot of the big players, such as Nokia, are pulling back saying it is hard to justify a big presence at all of the shows. It could be the last big year for Cebit," he said. Other themes include TV-enabled mobiles which are bound to create a buzz in the halls as Vodafone unveils a prototype handset that can show live digital television. There has been a glut of recent headlines about mobile TV - French operators are teaming up, O2 is trialling a system in Oxford, UK, and Nokia begins trialling a system in Finland with the Finnish Broadcasting Company, YLE TV and commercial TV channels. Cebit could become the battleground for the two competing methods for getting TV on to mobiles, and is also likely to provide a stage for a technology slated to compete with 3G. HSDPA (High Speed Downlink Packet Access) has been described as 3G on steroids"" and could offer consumers much faster download times. For instance", a

song which currently takes one and a half minutes to download to a phone could be done in 10 seconds. Korean giants LG Electronics and Samsung will show off HSDPA handsets at the show and the technology is set to be rolled out in the US, Europe and Korea next year. Broadband will continue to be a key theme at the show with internet telephony proving this year's killer application. Germany's largest online service provider, T-Online, is tipped to reveal software for low-cost net telephony which would see it competing with its parent company Deutsche Telekom. Cebit is used by many to unveil cutting edge products and in the mobile sphere this is likely to mean a lot of bright, colourful handsets as fashion continues to compete with technology when it comes to the device everyone has in their pockets. Rainbow-coloured phones, influenced by handsets from Japan, are just one example of how Asian companies will stamp their mark on this year's show," at which they will have their biggest ever presence. Cebit organisers have created a digital home in Hall 25 of the 27 hangar-like buildings that will house the show. ""The digital home will be a hyped theme at the show. The house will be totally wired and full of things that can be used for home entertainment", said Cebit organiser Gabriele Dorries.

tech 348.txt Game makers get Xbox 2 sneak peek Microsoft has given game makers a glimpse of the new Xbox 2 console. Some details of the Xbox's performance and what gaming will be like with the device were given at the annual Game Developers Conference in the US. Xbox frontman J. Allard said the console looked set to be capable of one trillion calculations per second. Also all titles for the new Xbox will have the same interface to make it easy to play online and buy extras for characters or other add-ons for games. Microsoft is saving the official unveiling of the Xbox 2, codenamed Xenon, for the E3 show in May and the device could be on shop shelves by November. However, during his keynote speech at GDC Mr Allard, who heads development of game-making tools for the console, gave a glimpse into how some of its core software will work. He said gaming was entering a high-definition"" era that demanded detailed and convincing graphics that could adequately compete with the HDTV people were starting to watch as well as the HD DVDs that will soon start to appear. Industry watchers took this to mean that the Xbox 2 will push for HDTV quality graphics as standard as well as multi-channel audio to give gamers an authentic experience. Mr Allard said Microsoft had to work hard to ensure that it was easy for game makers to produce titles for the Xbox 2 and for players to get playing. To this end Microsoft was building in to Xbox hardware systems to support headset chat", buddy list controls and custom soundtracks so developers were free to concentrate on the games. The Xbox would also support well-known industry specific actions, such as DirectX," to make it simple for game studios to make titles for the console. For gamers this emphasis on ease of use would mean every Xbox title uses the same interface to set up online play and get at music stored on the hardware. This interface will hold details of a player's statistics and skill level on a ""gamer card"" as well as give access to a store where people can spend small amounts of cash to buy extras for their avatars or add-ons", such as new maps or vehicles, for games they possess. This ability to personalise games and in-game characters would be key in the future, said Mr Allard. Only with such consistency would the Xbox be able to support the 10-20 million subscribers that it was aiming for, said Mr Allard. During his speech Mr Allard took several swipes at the Playstation and said processors for consoles had to be made with developers, not just engineers," in mind. ""Our approach is Bruce Lee", not brute force," he said.

tech 349.txt Broadband set to revolutionise TV BT is starting its push into television with plans to offer TV over broadband. As a telecoms company, BT is moving to a content distribution strategy, Andrew Burke, ch

ief of BT's new Entertainment unit told the IPTV World Forum. We want to be an entertainment facilitator", he said on the opening day of the London conference. The BBC is also trialling a service to play programmes over the net and has not ruled out offering it to non-licence fee payers overseas. The corporation's Interactive Media Player (iMP) is its first foray into broadband TV - known as IPTV (Internet Protocol TV). "We see several opportunities for delivering the type of content that normally broadcasters find it difficult to get to viewers," said BT's Andrew Burke. With more people on broadband, and connection speeds increasing, telcos around the world are looking for new ways to make money from it. Increased competition between net service providers, encouraged by Ofcom, has eroded BT's position in the market. It is looking for a good return on its investment in the technology which has made broadband over ADSL a reality. It also sees delivering TV over broadband as a way of getting high-definition (HD) content to people sooner than they will be able to get it through conventional, regular broadcasts. The BBC's iMP has just finished successful technical trials and is set for much larger consumer trials later in 2005. Before it officially launches, the BBC must show the government how it offers value for money. Delivering programmes over broadband offers clear public value, says the BBC, because it gives people more control, and more choice. IPTV is a similar idea to VoIP services, like Skype. Both use broadband net connections to carry information, like video and voice, in packets of data instead of conventional means. Since it uses internet technology, IPTV could mean more choice of programmes, more, more interactivity, tailored programming, and more localised content outside of conventional satellite, digital cable, and terrestrial broadcasts. It is all part of the larger changing TV technology landscape and, like personal digital video recorders (PVRs), gives people much more control over TV. Broadcasters see IPTV and PVRs as both as a threat and an opportunity. The BBC recognises that TV over broadband is a reality and aims to innovate with it, said Rahul Chakkara, controller of BBCi's 24/7 interactive TV services. The iMP is based on peer-to-peer technology, and lets people download programmes the BBC owns the rights to for up to seven days after broadcast. IPTV enables us to take back that programme to our audience at different times", said Mr Chakkara. So we can tell our audience that that programme they paid for [via the licence fee], "they can access it any time they want." "It helps", said Mr Burke, "that people are more au fait with terms like ""digital""", ""interactive""", now that digital TV reaches more than 56% of UK homes. According to Benoit Joly from broadband telecoms firm Thales, 30% of Europe cannot get satellite TV or digital TV. They could get IPTV though. Analysts say that IPTV will account for 10% of the digital TV market in Europe alone by the end of the decade. What needs to happen now, agree analysts, is for connection speeds to be bumped up to handle the service; 20M bps connections would be ideal. BT does not see itself as a broadcaster of IPTV services," rather as an ""enabler""", said Mr Burke. Its strategy is a ""hybrid"" approach", he explained, where over-the-air conventional broadcasts are supplemented with content over broadband. Initially appealing to niche markets, like sports fans, it will widen out. But IPTV could be used for home-monitoring," ""pet cams""", localised news services, and local authority TV, too says BT. It even suggests that it could target those households in the UK that do not own a computer, 40% of the country. Broadband to them would not be about data and the net - that could come later for them - but about cheap phone calls and more choice of TV programmes. Home Choice already offers 10,000 hours of shows and channels, delivered over broadband to homes in London. With a broadband net subscription, you can also get your TV and phone service. Through content deals and partnerships, it offers satellite as well as terrestrial channels, and bespoke channels based on what viewers pick and choose from its catalogues. It aims

to expand nationally, but is seeing a lot of success with what it offers its 15,000 subscribers now, and aims to double uptake as well as reach by the summer. Although still at a very early stage, IPTV is another application for broadband and that underlines its growing prominence as a backbone network - another utility like electricity.

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"tech 350.txt Chip maker backs net phone calls Rich Templeton", the head of giant chip maker Texas Instruments, has given his backing to the growing sector of Voice over Internet Telephony (Voip). Voip allows PC users, and in some cases those with just a broadband connection, to make telephone calls via the net. Mr Templeton said Voip would be the next major application to drive broadband connections into homes. Internet service provider Wanadoo has announced it is launching its own broadband telephony service in the UK. Subscribers to Wanadoo's broadband service will be able to use the service to make free evening and weekend calls to any UK landline, and free calls at any time to other Wanadoo users. The service will cost an extra £4 a month and will come with a free Livebox," the broadband hub which Wanadoo plans will be used in future to provide video-on-demand and home security services. The secondary phone line will mean customers can have an extra home phone number and will also provide wireless internet access around the home. Eventually the service will replace existing landline services as Wanadoo goes head to head with BT. ""Voice-over broadband is a key trend across Europe and is set to have a dramatic impact on the telecommunications industry", " Eric Abensur", " Wanadoo's chief executive told the BBC News website. Mr Templeton said he agreed. ""Voice-over-packet is going to be the second killer application after broadband internet access", " he said. The world's largest maker of chips for mobile phones believes the technology will grow rapidly from the relatively small user base it has currently. Almost 83 million people have downloaded the software that powers the Skype Voip service, according to the net telephony firm's website. Skype lets people make free calls to other Skype users and also make low-cost calls to ordinary phone numbers. US firm Vonage also offers a Voip service, but one which lets people plug an ordinary phone into a broadband router to make calls. Bill Simmelink, general manager of TI's Voip business, said the technology would only take off when people were making net calls with the ease of making a normal call. It's not about the pipe", if you will, or the silicon per se, it's about the application, he said. We want to communicate freely," effortlessly and economically wherever we are." In a sign that Voip is seeping into the mainstream", giant ISP AOL announced on Tuesday that it had plans to launch a net-based phone service for some of its members within the month. Customers will continue to use their traditional phones," but they will plug them into adapters connected to their broadband source rather than the jack provided by the telephone company. Calls are received and placed just like on the old telephone network. ""We can help mass-market adoption of Voip", " said AOL chief executive Jonathan Miller. We can utilise our national footprint. We can help the entire industry become well known."

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"tech 351.txt Nintendo DS makes its Euro debut Nintendo's DS handheld game console has officially gone on sale in Europe. Many stores around the UK opened at midnight to let keen gamers get their hands on the device. The two-screen clamshell gadget costs £99 (149 euros) and 15 games are available for it at launch", some featuring well-known characters such as Super Mario and Rayman. The DS spearheads Nintendo's attempt to continue its dominance of

the handheld gaming market. Since going on sale in Japan and the US at the end of 2004, Nintendo has sold almost 4m DS consoles. Part of this popularity may be due to the fact that the DS can run any of the catalogue of 700 games produced for Nintendo's GameBoy Advance handheld. Games for the DS are expected to cost between £19 and £29. About 130 games for the DS are in development. As well as having two screens, one of which is controlled by touch," the DS also lets players take on up to 16 other people via wireless. A ""download play"" option means DS owners can take each other on even if only one of them owns a copy of a particular game. Other DS owners can also be sent text messages and drawings. Nintendo is also planning to release a media adapter for the handheld so it can play music and video. Five Virgin megastores and 150 Game shops were expected to open early on Friday morning to let people buy a DS. ""We know that customers want it as soon as it's released - and that means the minute", not the day," said Robert Quinn, Game's UK sales director. But Nintendo will only have sole control of Europe's handheld gaming market for a few weeks because soon Sony is expected to release its PSP console. Although Nintendo is aiming for younger players and the PSP is more for older gamers, it is likely that the two firms will be competing for many of the same customers. Sony's PSP represents a real threat to Nintendo because of the huge number of PlayStation owners around the world and the greater flexibility of the sleek black gadget. The PSP uses small discs for games, can play music and movies without the need for add-ons and also supports short-range wireless play. When it goes on sale the PSP is likely to cost between £130 and £200.

tech 352.txt Slow start to speedy net services Faster broadband in the UK is becoming a reality as more internet providers offer super-fast services. Some lucky Britons can already take advantage of UK Online's 8 megabits per second service, which was launched in November 2004. BT Retail has announced that it will trial the same speed service, with a national rollout by year end. Other service providers are expected to follow suit and a glut of new voice and video services will follow. If the bandwidth is there then ISPs will buy it", said Jill Finger, a research director at analyst firm IDC. Others will be watching BT Retail's trials, which is initially for employees and later in the summer for customers, with interest. For BT Retail, she said, the super-fast service could be a way of differentiating it from other players. It has been losing market share and this could be one way of gaining some of that back", said Ms Finger. Wanadoo is set to trial an 8Mbps service in the summer and also plans to roll out unbundled services - which means it takes over the network from BT - which will provide speeds of up to 15Mbps. There is no timetable for this at the moment. Cable firms ntl and Telewest are also bound to increase bandwidth at some time in the future and, according to an ntl spokesman, are in a better position than BT in the long term. BT's network is limited compared to that of cable. With all the other services coming on stream such as video on demand", the question is will 8Mbps be enough?"" he asked.

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tech 353.txt Anti-tremor mouse stops PC shakes A special adaptor that helps people with hand tremors control a computer mouse more easily has been developed. The device uses similar ""steady cam"" technology found in camcorders to filter out shaking hand movements. People with hand tremors find it hard to use conventional mice for simple computer tasks because of the erratic movements of the cursor on the screen. About three million Britons have some sort of hand tremor condition", said the UK National Tremor Foundation. ""Using a computer mouse is well known for being extremely hard for people with tremors so we're delighted to hear that a technology has been developed to addr

ess this problem", " said Karen Walsh, from the UK National Tremor Foundation. Most commonly associated with tremors is Parkinson's disease, but they can also be caused by other conditions like Essential Tremor (ET). Tremors more often affect older people, but can hit all ages. ET, for example, is genetic and can afflict people throughout their lives. The Assistive Mouse Adapter (AMA) is the brainchild of IBM researcher Jim Levine who developed the prototype after seeing his uncle, who has Parkinson's disease, struggle with mouse control. I knew that there must be way to improve the situation for him and the millions of other tremor sufferers around the world", " including the elderly. ""The number of elderly computer users will increase as the population ages", and at the same time, the need for computer access grows," he said. Computer users plug the device into a PC, and it can be adjusted depending on how severe the tremor is. It is also able to recognise multiple clicking on a mouse button caused by shaky digits. IBM said it would partner up with a small UK-based electronics firm, Mon trose Secam, to produce the devices which will cost about £70. James Cosgrave, one of the company's directors, said it would make a big difference to those with tremors. I'm a pilot and my tremor condition has not limited my ability to fly a plane", " he said. But using a PC has proven almost impossible simply because everything revolves around using the mouse to accurately manipulate the tiny cursor on the screen." " He said a prototype of the gadget had transformed his life. The device could help open up computing to millions more people who have found shaking to be a barrier. Last year", the Office for National Statistics reported that for the first time, more than half of all households in Britain had a home computer. With prices getting cheaper to get online too, computer ownership is increasing. But although 62% of British people have tried the internet, only 15% of Britons aged 65 or over have been online. More than six million UK households now have a broadband net. By the middle of 2005, it is estimated that 50% of all UK net users will be on broadband. There are still millions using the net through dial-up connections too.

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"tech 354.txt The pirates with no profit motive Two men who were part of a huge network of internet software pirates", known as Drink Or Die, have been convicted at the Old Bailey. BBC News investigates how the network worked and what motivated those involved. They called themselves Drink Or Die (DOD). They were a network of computer buffs who derived pleasure from cracking codes protecting copyrighted software such as Windows 95. They would then share it with each other. There is no suggestion any of them profited financially. But the authorities in both Britain and the United States considered it software piracy and took a dim view of networks such as DOD, one of a number of so-called warez organisations operating on the internet. In October 2000 the US Customs Service began an investigation into DOD and other networks, such as Razor 1911, Risciso, Myth and Popz. Fourteen months later US Customs co-ordinated a series of raids across the globe as part of Operation Buccaneer. Seventy search warrants were executed in the US, Britain, Australia, Norway, Sweden and Finland. At least 60 people were arrested worldwide - 45 of them in the US. Among the leaders of the network were Americans John Sankus - known by his internet nickname Eriflleh (Hellfire spelt backwards) - Richard Berry, Kent Kartadinata and Christopher Tresco, who used a server based at the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). The longest jail sentence - 46 months - was handed down to Sankus," a 28-year-old from Philadelphia. US Attorney Paul McNulty said at the time: ""John Sankus and his techno-gang operated in the faceless world of the internet and thought they would never be caught. ""They were wrong. These sentences", and those to follow," should send a message to others entertaining

similar beliefs of invincibility." "But one man still in legal limbo is British-born Australian Hew Raymond Griffiths", who is still fighting against extradition to the US. US Customs claimed Mr Griffiths was one of DOD's leaders but his lawyer, Antony Townsden," told the BBC News website it was a laughable suggestion and added: ""He was living on welfare and had such an old computer that he couldn't even download software. ""The allegation that he was the group's co-leader is illusory. He had the least technical skills of anyone", "he couldn't crack any codes and he has only been called a leader because he was a loudmouth who wrote a lot on their messageboard." "Mr Townsden said if he had committed any crimes he should be prosecuted in Australia", "not the US. He claimed the Australian government's decision to accept the extradition request was typical of their current ""acquiescent"" attitude to the US. Mr Griffiths is expecting to hear this week the outcome of his appeal against the decision to extradite him. Those involved would give themselves internet aliases which would act in the same way as tags used by graffiti artists. They could then brag about their code-cracking abilities without giving away their real identities. Alex Bell", whose trial at the Old Bailey ended on Friday, was known as Mr 2940 - after a computer device - while his co-defendant Steven Dowd's nickname, curiously, was Tim. A spokesman for US Immigration, Customs and Enforcement, Dean Boyd," said DOD did not appear to be motivated by money. Their motivation was the kudos which surrounded being able to crack sophisticated software. He told the BBC News website: ""Primarily they were just interested in how fast they could crack the code. It was all about underground notoriety." "But Mr Boyd pointed out that once the software had been distributed on the internet it fell into the hands of organised criminals who were able to mass produce pirated software at zero cost. ""It cost US industries a lot of money", billions of dollars, he said. Mr Boyd said: It was truly global in scope. We raided a number of universities, including Duke (in North Carolina) and MIT," and found that several of the people involved were employed by major computer corporations. ""They would go home from work in the evenings and get involved in this warez culture." "Warez groups", which began to surface in the early 1990s," operate according to a strict code of honour. For example if one group cracked the software first its rivals would respect that achievement and not seek to claim it themselves. Mr Boyd said the destruction of DOD was a great coup but he added: ""I'm not going to sit here and say we have sorted the problem. There are still hackers and people who do this for fun. ""Internet piracy of computer software remains a gigantic problem." "A spokesman for the Business Software Alliance said: ""DOD members claim they did not profit at all. But they did profit by getting access to very expensive servers." "He said DOD and other warez groups were fostering a ""culture of piracy"" on the internet. He said 29% of computer software in Britain was believed to have been pirated and this cost £1bn in revenue for software companies", "their suppliers and distributors. ""It may seem like a victimless crime but it touches more people than you might care to believe." "

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"tech 355.txt Apple makes blogs reveal sources Apple has won its legal fight to make three bloggers reveal who told them about unreleased products. The bid to unmask the employees leaking information was launched in December 2004 following online articles about Apple's Asteroid product. Now Apple has won the right to see e-mail records from the three bloggers to root out the culprit. A lawyer for the three bloggers said the ruling set a dangerous precedent that could harm all news reporters. Apple's lawsuit accused anonymous people of stealing trade secrets about the Asteroid music product and leaking them to the PowerPage", Apple Insider and Think Secret websites. All three are

Apple fan sites that obsessively watch the iconic firm for information about future products. Apple is notoriously secretive about upcoming products which gives any snippets of information about what it is working on all the more value. The lawsuit to reveal the names of the leakers was filed against the Power Page and Apple Insider sites. The separate legal fight with Think Secret has yet to be resolved. In the ruling handed down this week by Santa Clara County Superior Court Judge James Kleinberg, Apple can now get its hands on e-mail records from the bloggers' net providers. In making his ruling," Judge Kleinberg said that laws covering the divulging of trade secrets outweighed considerations of public interest. California has so-called ""shield"" laws which protect journalists from prosecution if what they are writing about can be shown to be in the public interest. The Judge wrote: ""...it is not surprising that hundreds of thousands of 'hits' on a website about Apple have and will happen. But an interested public is not the same as the public interest"". Judge Kleinberg said the question of whether the bloggers were journalists or not did not apply because laws governing the right to keep trade secrets confidential covered journalists", too. The Electronic Frontier Foundation, which is acting as legal counsel for Power Page and Apple Insider," said the ruling had potentially wide implications. ""Anyone who reports on companies or the trade press should be concerned about this ruling", said EFF lawyer Kurt Opsahl. Mr Opsahl said the EFF was planning to appeal against the ruling because the bloggers were journalists and US federal laws stop net firms handing over copies of e-mail messages if the owner of that account does not give their consent.

tech 356.txt Hitachi unveils 'fastest robot' Japanese electronics firm Hitachi has unveiled its first humanoid robot, called Emiew, to challenge Honda's Asimo and Sony's Qrio robots. Hitachi said the 1.3m (4.2ft) Emiew was the world's quickest-moving robot yet. Two wheel-based Emiews, Pal and Chum, introduced themselves to reporters at a press conference in Japan. The robots will be guests at the World Expo later this month. Sony and Honda have both built sophisticated robots to show off developments in electronics. Explaining why Hitachi's Emiew used wheels instead of feet, Toshihiko Horiuchi, from Hitachi's Mechanical Engineering Research Laboratory, said: We aimed to create a robot that could live and co-exist with people." "We want to make the robots useful for people ... If the robots moved slower than people", users would be frustrated." Emiew - Excellent Mobility and Interactive Existence as Workmate - can move at 3.7m/h. Its ""wheel feet"" resemble the bottom half of a Segway scooter. With sensors on the head", waist, and near the wheels," Pal and Chum demonstrated how they could react to commands. ""I want to be able to walk about in places like Shinjuku and Shibuya [shopping districts] in the future without bumping into people and cars", Pal told reporters. Hitachi said Pal and Chum, which have a vocabulary of about 100 words, could be trained" for practical office and factory use in as little as five to six years. Robotics researchers have long been challenged by developing robots that walk in the gait of a human. At the recent AAAS (American Association for the Advancement of Science) annual meeting in Washington DC", researchers showed off bipedal designs. The three designs, each built by a different research group, use the same principle to achieve a human-like gait. Sony and Honda have both used humanoid robots, which are not commercially available," as a way of showing off computing power and engineering expertise. Honda's Asimo was ""born"" five years ago. Since then", Honda and Sony's Qrio have tried to trump each other with what the robots can do at various technology events. Asimo, has visited the UK, Germany, the Czech Republic, France and Ireland as part of a world tour. Sony's Qrio has been singing, jogging and dancing in formation around the world too and was, until last year, the fastest robot on two legs. But its record was beaten by Asimo. It is capable

of 3km/h, which its makers claim is almost four times as fast as Qrio. Last year, car maker Toyota also stepped into the ring and unveiled its trumpet-playing humanoid robot. By 2007," it is predicted that there will be almost 2.5 million ""entertainment and leisure"" robots in homes", compared to about 137,000 currently, according to the United Nations (UN). By the end of that year, 4.1 million robots will be doing jobs in homes, said the report by the UN Economic Commission for Europe and the International Federation of Robotics. Hitachi is one of the companies with home cleaning robot machines on the market.

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"tech 357.txt Have hackers recruited your PC? More than one million computers on the net have been hijacked to attack websites and pump out spam and viruses. The huge number was revealed by security researchers who have spent months tracking more than 100 networks of remotely-controlled machines. The largest network of so-called zombie networks spied on by the team was made up of 50,000 hijacked home computers. Data was gathered using machines that looked innocent but which logged everything hackers did to them. The detailed look at zombie or 'bot nets of hijacked computers was done by the Honeynet Project - a group of security researchers that gather information using networks of computers that act as ""honey pots"" to attract hackers and gather information about how they work. While 'bot nets have been known about for some time", estimates of how widespread they are from security firms have varied widely. To gather its information the German arm of the Honeynet Project created software tools to log what happened to the machines they put on the web. Getting the machines hijacked was worryingly easy. The longest time a Honeynet machine survived without being found by an automatic attack tool was only a few minutes. The shortest compromise time was only a few seconds. The research found that, once compromised machines tend to report in to chat channels on IRC servers and wait instructions from the malicious hacker behind the tools used to recruit the machine. Many well-known vulnerabilities in the Windows operating system were exploited by 'bot net controllers to find and take over target machines. Especially coveted were home PCs sitting on broadband connections that are never turned off. The months of surveillance revealed that the different 'bot nets - which involve a few hundred to tens of thousands of machines - are used for a variety of purposes. Many are used as relays for spam, to route unwanted adverts to PC users or as launch platforms for viruses. But the research team found that many are put to very different uses. During the monitoring period, the team saw 'bot nets used to launch 226 distributed denial-of-service attacks on 99 separate targets. These attacks bombard websites with data in an attempt to overwhelm the target. Using a 'bot net of machines spread around different networks and nations makes such attacks hard to defend against. One DDoS attack was used by one firm to knock its competitors offline. Other 'bot nets were used to abuse the Google Adsense program that rewards websites for displaying adverts from the search engine. Some networks were used to abuse or manipulate online polls and games. Criminals also seem to be starting to use 'bot nets for mass identity theft," to host websites that look like those of banks so confidential information can be gathered and to peep into online traffic to steal sensitive data. ""Levelling the power of several thousand bots", it is viable to take down almost any website or network instantly, said the researchers. Even in unskilled hands," it should be obvious that 'bot nets are a loaded and powerful weapon.""

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"tech 358.txt What price for 'trusted PC security'? You can now buy ""trusted computers""", but can we really trust the PC vendors, asks

technology analyst Bill Thompson. If you have recently bought an IBM ThinkVantage computer, a Dell Optiplex, or one of a whole range of laptops from Toshiba, HP/Compaq or Samsung then you may have got more for your money than you realise. Inside your shiny new PC is an extra chip called the trusted platform module (TPM) that can be used for a range of hardware-based security features. Eventually the TPM will be built into the main processor itself, and if the trusted computing group has its way then you will find one in every piece of hardware you own, from mobile phones to TV set top boxes to children's toys. But for the moment it is a separate piece of hardware, providing enhanced security features to programs that know how to use them. And as part of a well-designed network system, it can provide a lot more security than we enjoy today. A big advantage of the TPM is that it is hardware-based. At the moment most of us rely on software to keep our information safe and secure. It might be password-protected user accounts, data encryption programs or a firewall, but it all relies on program code running on an inherently insecure processor. Hardware security is less common, even if it is a lot safer. This is partly because it is more expensive to give someone a smartcard than a password, but also because its more work for users, systems administrators and managers. As a result we settle for second best. So when it comes to computer security, trusted systems could be a major step forward. After all, if you have a laptop that will only run programs that have been digitally signed then it will be a lot harder for virus writers to get their malicious code to run. And if all your files are locked automatically then even if you get your computer stolen your personal data will be safeguarded. At the moment support for trusted hardware is not built into major operating systems. Instead you have to use special software, like HP's ProtectTools or Wave Systems' Embassy. This provides file encryption, password management and identity protection, usually for business users who connect to company networks. Full support for the trusted computing specification will not be available from Microsoft until the next release of Windows, "Longhorn". This will include what Microsoft, in a typical act of obscurantism, calls the "Next Generation Secure Computing Base", and it will give user-level programs access to the trusted computing hardware. When that happens we can expect to see a lot of publicity around the new capabilities, and no doubt the Windows security centre will encourage users to turn on their trusted computing capability just as they turn on their firewall. However there is a downside to the increased security from viruses, spyware and data theft that this will provide. Because the trusted computing base is also used to make digital rights management (DRM) systems more secure, this will give content providers a lot more control over what we can do with music, movies and books that we have bought from them. We have seen recently how allowing digital rights management services into our lives can lead to unwelcome consequences. Users of Apple's iTunes used to be able to stream the music they had brought to up to five other iTunes users, a great way of letting your mates discover your music collection. But the latest version of iTunes limits this capability, just as an earlier upgrade reduced the number of times you could burn a selected playlist of purchased songs to a CD. Another took away the ability to play songs downloaded from Real's Harmony service on your iPod. Apple can do this because they wrote the software and they control the rights management. Once it is embedded in trusted hardware it will be even harder for dedicated programmers to find their way around these restrictions and give us back the fair use rights that should be guaranteed under copyright law. Similarly, users of TiVo digital video recorders have found that they cannot record some shows, and other programmes that they have recorded are automatically deleted after a day. This happens because of changes that TiVo have made to their software, and the users cannot control it. One wonders whether hardware-based DRM will work f

or those who believe that locking-down digital content is a bad idea, and that the flexibility of copyright law is something that should be embraced and not taken away. It will not work because of the fundamental flaw at the heart of the system: in order for the purchaser to view the content it has to be unlocked. Once it is unlocked then someone, somewhere, will figure out a way to make a copy of the unlocked version. And once an unlocked version leaks onto the network it will be uncontrollable. The efforts going into DRM would be much better spent building efficient distribution services, finding business models that are based on trusting your customers, and offering high quality downloads at fair prices. What we want is not so much a trusted computing platform as a trusted customer platform. The record companies and the film industry need to recognise that most of us, most of the time, will pay a reasonable amount for good quality material. They will benefit more by building a market in which I can share songs with my friends, record shows I want to watch later, and burn CDs for my kids; a market which respects the spirit of copyright law and does not seek to replace it by restrictive contracts or end user agreements. We need to ensure that trusted computing remains under the control of the users and is not used to take away the freedoms we enjoy today. Bill Thompson is a regular commentator on the BBC World Service programme Go Digital.

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"tech 359.txt Gizmondo gadget hits the shelves The Gizmondo combined media player", phone and gaming gadget goes on sale on Saturday. Priced at £229, the handheld device is debuting in the UK and goes on sale in the US and mainland Europe in the next few weeks. A catalogue of about 20 games is being prepared for the gadget including The Great Escape and Conflict Vietnam. The British-backed gadget faces stiff competition from handheld gaming devices made by Nintendo and Sony. The Gizmondo device packs a lot of functions inside its black cover and is aimed at gamers and those that want more from their game-playing gadgets. It can be used to play games, music tracks and movies. It can take and store digital photos and be used like a mobile phone to send text, multimedia and e-mail messages. The phone service to enable people to send messages is being provided by pre-pay Vodafone accounts bundled in with the device. It also works with GPS (Global Position System) so can also be used as a navigation aid or to support a variety of location-based services. The GPRS and Bluetooth wireless data systems onboard mean that it can be used for multi-player gaming. The gadget will be available from the Gizmondo store on London's Regent Street and from several other retail partners. Although the device rolls together an impressive list of functions, it will face serious competition from three established names in mobile gaming: Nintendo, Nokia and Sony. The main competition is likely to come from Nintendo and Sony. Nintendo's DS handheld went on sale on 11 March and priced at £99 costs far less than the Gizmondo. It also has a ready pool of fans of earlier Nintendo handhelds to draw on. In the first two days it was on sale in Europe the 87,000 DS handhelds were sold - a better debut than the GameCube enjoyed. Sony's PSP was due to make its European debut in March but now this is likely to be delayed by a few months. The PSP is due to go on sale in the US later this month and a bundle including the player, accessories and a copy of Spiderman 2 is expected to cost about \$250 (£129). The PSP can also play music and movies and supports wireless multiplayer gaming. Nokia's N-Gage could also be a competitor on the telecommunications side. This too crams a fully functional phone into a gadget that also plays games.

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"tech 360.txt Confusion over high-definition TV Now that

a critical mass of people have embraced digital TV", DVDs, and digital video recorders, the next revolution for TV is being prepared for our sets. In most corners of TV and technology industries, high-definition (HDTV) is being heralded as the biggest thing to happen to the television since colour. HD essentially makes TV picture quality at least four times better than now. But there is real concern that people are not getting the right information about HD on the High Street. Thousands of flat panel screens - LCDs (liquid crystal displays), plasma screens," and DLP rear-projection TV sets - have already been sold as ""HD""", but are in fact not able to display HD. ""The UK is the largest display market in Europe"," according to John Binks, director of GfK, which monitors global consumer markets. But, he added: Of all the flat panel screens sold"," just 1.3% in the UK are capable of getting high-definition." There are 74 different devices that are being sold as HD but are not HD-ready", according to Alexander Oudendijk, senior vice president of marketing for satellite giant Astra. They may be fantastic quality TVs, but many do not have adaptors in them - called DVI or HDMI (High-Definition Multimedia Interface) connectors - which let the set handle the higher resolution digital images. Part of this is down to lack of understanding and training on the High Street, say industry experts," who gathered at Bafta in London for the 2nd European HDTV Summit last week. ""We have to be careful about consumer confusion. There is a massive education process to go through", said Mr Binks. The industry already recognised that it would be a challenge to get the right information about it across to those of us who will be watching it. Eventually, that will be everyone. The BBC is currently developing plans to produce all its TV output to meet HDTV standards by 2010. Preparations for the analogue switch-off are already underway in some areas, and programmes are being filmed with HD cameras. BSkyB plans to ship its first generation set-top boxes, to receive HDTV broadcasts, in time for Christmas. Like its Sky+ boxes, they will also be personal video recorders (PVRs). The company will start broadcasts of HDTV programmes, offering them as premium channel packages", concentrating, to start with, on sports, big events, and films, in early 2006. But the set-top box which receives HDTV broadcasts has to plug into a display - TV set - that can show the images at the much higher resolution that HD demands," if HDTV is to be ""real"". By 2010", 20% of homes in the UK will have some sort of TV set or display that can show HD in its full glory. But it is all getting rather confusing for people who have only just taken to ""being digital"". As a result", all the key players, those who make flat panel displays, as well as the satellite companies and broadcasters, formed a HD forum in 2004 to make sure they were all talking to each other. Part of the forum has been concerned with issues like industry standards and content protection. But it has also been preoccupied with how to help the paying public know exactly what they are paying for. From next month," all devices that have the right connectors and resolution required will carry a ""HD-Ready"" sticker. This also means they are equipped to cope with both analogue and HDTV signals"," and so comply with the minimum specification set out by the industry. ""The logo is absolutely the way forward", said David Mercer, analysts with Strategy Analytics. But it is still not appearing on many retail products." The industry is upbeat that the sticker will help", but it is only a start. ""We can only do so much with the position we are in today with manufacturers", said Mr Oudendijk. There may well be a number of dissatisfied customers in the next few months." The European Broadcast Union (EBU) is testing different flavours of HD formats to prepare for even better HDTV further down the line. It is similarly concerned that people get the right information on HDTV formats"," as well as which devices will support the formats. ""We believe consumers buying expensive displays need to ensure their investment is worthwhile", said Phil Laven, technical director for the E

BU. The TV display manufacturers want us to watch HD on screens that are at least 42in (106cm), to get the true impact"" of HD", they say, although smaller displays suffice. What may convince people to spend money on HD-ready devices is the falling prices, which continue to tumble across Europe. The prices are dropping an average of 20% every year, according to analysts. LCD prices dropped by 43% in Europe as a whole last year, according to Mr Oudendijk.

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"tech 361.txt Digital UK driven by net and TV The UK's ad option of digital TV and broadband has helped make it the fourth most digitally savvy nation in Europe", according a report by Jupiter Research. But the UK still lags in terms of broadband speeds compared to others. The most digitally sophisticated Europeans, in terms of use of digital goods such as mobiles, TV, net and cameras, are the Scandinavians. About 14 million households in the UK, 60%, have digital TV, according to the communications regulator Ofcom. The least digital of the European nations was Greece, in 17th position, according to the Digital Life Index. Scandinavian countries Sweden, Denmark and Norway came out top in the report," but there were some differences in technology trends. ""The European Digital Life Index demonstrates that digital lifestyles are common today", but across Europe there is no single digital lifestyle," said Nate Elliot, Jupiter analyst. Consumers adopt different digital products and services in different countries." " Although there are differences between different European nations", the gap between them is closing, the report concluded. The trend for gadgets and technologies, such as digital video recorders (DVR), broadband, and video-on-demand will continue across Europe, he added. More than six million UK households now have broadband net. By the middle of 2005, it is estimated that 50% of all UK net users will be on broadband. Cable company NTL is trialling faster ADSL (Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line) broadband technology using ADSL2+ which can give speeds of 18Mbps compared to current speeds which are usually around 1Mbps or 2Mbps. BT is set to trial the technology later in the year. Super-fast broadband will be necessary to the delivery of services such as high-definition TV (HDTV) and video-on-demand, already very popular in France and other European countries. A separate survey by GMIPoll last week found that, globally, people's appetite for technology and gadgets continues unabated. The poll of 20,000 people in 20 countries found that 59% wanted more technology. The computer was the ""must-have"" gadget for most people (75%). The TV took second place (67%), while the mobile was ranked in third position with 54%. Digital cameras were the most popular choice of gadget for 2005, said the survey, with nearly 40% choosing this over wireless, home printing and DVR technologies. However, only 25% of Britons said a digital camera would be their top gadget purchase of the year. Almost a quarter, 22%, said they would be buying some sort of wireless device. Forty-four percent said they would be buying something ""other"". This might include digital music players", or gaming devices. The Nintendo DS, Sony's PSP and Gizmondo all hit the shops in 2005, and the first of the next generation of games consoles, Xbox 2, is set to launch later this year. Jupiter Research's index is calculated using 40 different variables across net users, digital TV adoption, wireless and mobile, online activity, and digital devices.

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"tech 362.txt Bad e-mail habits sustains spam The 'bad behaviour' of e-mail users is helping to sustain the spam industry", a new study has found. According to a survey conducted by security firm Mirapoint and market research company the Radicati Group, nearly a third of e-mail users have cli

cked on links in spam messages. One in ten users have bought products advertised in junk mail. Clicking on a link in a spam message can expose people to viruses and alert spammers to live e-mail accounts. The fact that one in ten e-mail users are buying things advertised in spam continues to make it an attractive business, especially given that sending out huge amounts of spam costs very little," the report concludes. ""This preliminary data is surprising and somewhat shocking to us", said Marcel Nienhuis, market analyst at the Radicati Group. It explains why e-mail security threats including spam", viruses and phishing scams continue to proliferate," he said, accusing users of bad e-mail behaviour". Spammers are increasingly hooking into whatever happens to be flavour of the month", according to security firm Clearswift. It has recently seen a rise in the number of spam messages offering phoney Sony PSP giveaways. And, in perhaps a nod to the popularity of the American drama series Desperate Housewives, it has also seen a dramatic rise in junk mails purporting to give details of women looking for casual sex. But rather than finding a companion, users who click on such mail will find themselves redirected to porn sites," where they run the risk of downloading spyware on to their PC. Clearswift has seen a 180% rise in sex-related spam over the course of the last month. ""Without casting aspersions", those likely to respond to these kind of adverts will be invariably hoping that 'one thing leads to another' but aside from the fact that these mails are bogus, clicking on any link within a spam mail can lead to a whole host of unwanted problems," said Alyn Hockey, Clearswift's director of research. Sexually explicit terms make up 14% of security firm Sophos' top 50 word that spammers most commonly try to disguise in order to beat anti-spam filters. Spammers will deliberately misspell a word or use digits instead of letters in an attempt to bypass anti-spam software, said Graham Cluley, senior technology consultant for security firm Sophos. The list of words most commonly hidden by the spammers from anti-spam software reveals that most spam is about the old favourites: money", drugs and sex, said Mr Cluley. But anti-spam filters can only be part of the solution to the menace of junk e-mail. People must resist their basic instincts to buy from spam mails. Spammers are criminals, plain and simple. If no-one responded to junk e-mail and didn't buy products sold in this way, then spam would be as extinct as the dinosaurs," he said.

tech 363.txt Sony PSP handheld console hits US The latest handheld gaming gadget, Sony's PlayStation Portable, goes on sale in the US on Thursday. The entertainment device, which also stores images, music and video, is intended to compete with Nintendo's DS, released earlier this month in the UK. Gamers have been queuing outside shops across the US to get their hands on the gadget, which costs \$250 (about £132). The first million sold will come with the Spider-Man 2 film on UMD, Sony's own disc format for the device. The PSP can be linked up with others for multiplayer gaming, via a wireless connection. Sony has touted the machine as the Walkman of the 21st Century and has sold more than 800,000 units in Japan since its launch there last year. But it faces stiff competition from the Nintendo DS, which sold more than the GameCube in its first few days on release in Europe. It too allows for multiplayer gaming over the air. Nintendo dominates the handheld market, with more than a 90% share of the market in the US alone. The Gizmondo combined media player, phone and gaming gadget also went on sale in the UK last week. It hopes to take a share of the handheld gaming market too. The story of the PSP is it's not a gaming device as much as it is a portable entertainment device", said Michael Pachter, analyst at Wedbush Morgan Securities. He told the Reuters news agency that he expected Sony to sell about 10 million PSPs in enough time to rival Apple's iPod. There is no date for the PSP's release in Europe yet. Sony has promised to have a million units ready for its US launch, but there are fears demand may not be met.

It also said it expected to ship three million PSPs worldwide by the end of its fiscal year ending 31 March. The machine's European launch was put back a few months"" last week in order to make sure enough of the devices were ready for its US launch", as well as satisfying the Japanese market. The PSP has almost as much processing power in it as the PlayStation 2 console. Hundreds of gamers gathered at US shops, some waiting for more than 36 hours, to be the first to get their hands on the gadget. A spokesman for one US shop said it expected the device to sell out on its first day. The 24 games for the mini console include Ape Academy, Formula One, Wipeout Pure and Fired Up. Movie studios, including Lions Gate Entertainment and Disney, have also announced forthcoming film titles that will be made available on the UMD format.

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"tech 364.txt 'Podcasters' look to net money Nasa is doing it", 14-year-old boys in bedrooms are doing it, couples are doing it, gadget lovers - male and female - are definitely doing it. It is podcasting - DIY radio in the form of downloadable MP3 audio files. They can done by anyone who has a microphone, simple software, the net," and something to say. Some liken them to talking ""audioblogs"" because many complement text-based weblogs - diary-like sites where people share their thoughts. They are essentially amateur radio shows on the net", on demand," and the ""movement"" is at very early stages. ""It's about real people saying real things and communicating",," says Adam Curry, former MTV VJ and the Pied Piper of podcasting. He was one of a community of people who created iPodder, a small computer program, known as an aggregator"". It collects and automatically sends MP3 files to any digital music-playing device that can play WMP formats. Those with digital music players can select which podcasts they like",," and subscribe - for free - to that show's ""feed"". When a new podcast is available",," it is automatically sent to the device when connected to a computer. ""It is totally going to kill the business model of radio", thinks Curry. I just did a tour of Madison Avenue where all the big brands and advertising agencies of the world are," he says. And they are scared to death of the next generation - like my daughter who is 14 - who don't listen to radio. ""They are on MSN", they've got their iPod, their MP3 player," they've got their Xbox - they are not listening to radio. ""So how are they going to reach these audiences? ""It is the distribution that is changing and the barriers are being brought down so everyone can be part of it.""" It is a fledgling movement", but it is gaining momentum now that people have started thinking about how to make a business from it. Ian Fogg, Jupiter Research analyst, thinks there could be potential for business, but it could take an interesting turn if big companies, like Apple and Microsoft," get involved. ""It is a nascent area but quite exciting. It is yet another area that demonstrates the move to a digital lifestyle and digital home is not over",," he says. Podcasting is one of those interesting areas that bridges what you do at home and what you do out and about - a classic hybrid. It is another aspect of the ""time-shifting"" of content - the latest industry buzzword for being able to listen to what you want", when, and wherever you want. Audiences are in the 10s, 100s, and 1,000s rather than millions. More than 4,300 podcasts are currently listed. Curry's Daily Source Code - which he committed to doing daily to inspire the community - has 10s of thousands of listeners. But Dave Winer is doubtful. He designed the format called RSS (Really Simple Syndication), which gives web users an easy way to keep updated automatically on sites they like. Podcasts rely on his technology because it is the way they are distributed. He is also writer of the longest-running weblog on the net, Scripting News. He thinks its power lies in its democratising potential," not in its ""over-hyped"" business promise. ""We're the sources", the pe

ople doing stuff," and podcasting is a way to tell people who care what we're doing. ""No matter how you look at it", commercialising this medium isn't going to make very much money, he says. Podcasting is going to be a medium of niches, with 'audiences' measured in the single digits," like e-mail or blogs. ""Maybe in a few years", maybe six or seven digits. But it will have to sustain interest beyond the hype balloon." Curry and associate Ron Bloom's new venture", called PodShow, is to help ordinary people produce, post, distribute and market their podcasts. Because of the way podcasts work, based on RSS," the latest podcasts which people can select mean that they are ready-made targets. ""When you look at podcasting - wow this is a pretty interesting audience. The audience is pre-selected. They have decided to subscribe to your program", explains Curry. Advertising, in his eyes, can be tailored to podcasts, to make it more imaginative and unobtrusive. How I believe this will work", is to create a network that, in aggregation," will have enough numbers to support a return on investment for the advertisers and for the podcasters. ""I have 50",60,70,000 listeners. I could make a couple of bucks off that, but not much. If you are talking a million podcasters, and then you can kind of divide that amongst ourselves," then that is kind of interesting." Essentially", he says, if you are doing a bass fishing podcast," someone who is selling bait and tackle will probably want to advertise on your show. He is clear the ads will not be the traditional ""in-your-face"" type familiar to commercial radio now. ""We are really going to see these microcosms and commerce will be all over the place." It is happening already. Coffee-loving Curry has sold \$4",000 worth of coffee machines through a referral link to Amazon from his site. Others use in-show promotions, like The Dawn and Drew Show. One, Eric Rice, has won sponsorship from Warner Bros. He can now legally play the music of a band Warner Bros wants to push. Some commentators on the net say it has a similar feel to the dotcom days. Others say it is just another element of setting media free from big companies and letting people be creative. One thing is for sure; they are not about to disappear in a hurry. The creative forces behind radio are elated, says Curry. For now," he tunes out the negative comments within the podcasting community. ""I should be knighted for this", he adds, with a wry chuckle, People are going to be so happy to sit at home", make their podcast," and make a little money.""

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"tech 365.txt Local net TV takes off in Austria An Austrian village is testing technology that could represent the future of television. The people of Engerwitzdorf are filming", editing and producing their own regional news channel. The channel covers local politics, sports," events and anything that residents want to film and are prepared to upload for others to watch on PCs. The pilot has been so successful that Telekom Austria is now considering setting up other projects elsewhere. ""It's growing unbelievably fast", said Rudolf Fischer, head of Telekom Austria's fixed line division. The trial of Buntes Fernsehen (Multi-Coloured TV) was started in late 2004 and creates a net-based TV station run by the 8,000 residents of Engerwitzdorf. The hardware and software to turn video footage into edited programmes has been provided by Telekom Austria but this equipment, following training, has been turned over to the villagers. Any video programme created by the villagers is uploaded to a Buntes Fernsehen portal that lets people browse and download what they want to watch. Most people watch the TV on their home PC and a broadband connection is needed to get broadcast quality programmes. In the first four months of the project villagers have created 60 films and put together regular reports on local news items. They have adopted it very quickly", said Mr Fischer. They like the possibility to create their own content and see what's going on in the area." "It's

kind of the democratisation of local TV", he said, because none of the bigger broadcasters would ever do anything like this for that region." "The Buntes Fernsehen project has been such a success that Telekom Austria is now considering setting up other schemes in similarly rural areas. Mr Fischer said it was taking the roll-out to other areas slowly because of the work involved in setting up the scheme", getting backers from local government and educating people how to make programmes. The Engerwitzdorf scheme is an outgrowth of Telekom Austria's online TV channel Aon which lets people watch programmes on their PC. Aon streams a couple of live channels, plus sports, news and music programmes on to the net and has a pay-for-download section that lets people watch what they want when they want to watch it. In October a larger TV-on-demand project is due to launch in Vienna that will let people download many programmes from the net.

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"tech 366.txt Rolling out next generation's net The body that oversees how the net works", grows and evolves says it has coped well with its growth in the last 10 years," but it is just the start. " "In a sense", we have hardly started in reaching the whole population," the new chair of the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), Brian Carpenter, says. The IETF ensures the smooth running and organisation of the net's architecture. With broadband take-up growing, services like voice and TV will open up interesting challenges for the net. I think VoIP (Voice-over Internet Protocol", allowing phone calls to be made over the Net) is very important - it challenges all the old cost models of telecoms, says Dr Carpenter. Second, it challenges more deeply the business model that you have to be a service provider with a lot of infrastructure. With VoIP," you need very little infrastructure." " A distinguished IBM engineer", Dr Carpenter spent 20 years at Cern, the European Laboratory for Particle Physics. As the new chair of the IETF, his next big challenge is overseeing IPv6, the next generation standard for information transfer and routing across the web. At Cern, Dr Carpenter helped pioneer advanced net applications during the development of the world wide web, so he is well-placed to take on such a task. The net's growth and evolution depend on standards and protocols, and ensuring the architecture works and talks to other standards is a crucial job of the IETF. The top priority is to ensure that the standards that make the net work, are open and free for anyone to use and work with. The net is built on a protocol called TCP/IP, which means transmission control protocol, and internet protocol. When computers communicate with the net, a unique IP address is used to send and receive information. The IETF is a large international community of network designers, operators, vendors," and researchers working on the evolution of the net's architecture and the way this information is sent and received. They make sure it all knits together leaving no gaps. " "We've seen some interesting effects over last few years", explains Dr Carpenter. The net was growing at a fantastic rate at the end of the 90s. Then there was a bit of a glitch in 2000. " "We are now seeing a very clear phase of consolidation and renewed growth." " That renewed growth is also being buoyed by emerging economies", like China, which are showing fast uptake of broadband net and other technologies. The number of broadband subscribers via DSL (Digital Subscriber Line) doubled in a year to 13 million," according to figures released at the end of 2004. " "The challenges we face are about continuing to produce standards to allow for that growth rate", explained Dr Carpenter. Given it [the net] was designed for the whole community, it has done well to reach millions. If you want to reach the whole population," you have to make sure it can scale up." " IPv6", the standard that will replace the existing IPv4, will allow for billions more addresses on the net," and it is gradually being worked into network infrastructure across the world. " "Th

e actual number of addresses with IPv4 is limited to four billion IP addresses. ""That clearly is not enough when you have 10 billion people to serve", so there is technical solution," the new version of IP - IPv6. ""It has much larger address space possibilities with no practical limits", said Dr Carpenter. Standards are vital to something as complex as the net, and making sure standards are open and can work with across networks is a big task. The difference this next generation standard, IPv6, will make to the average net user is almost invisible. Our first goal is that it [IPv6] should make no difference - people should not notice a difference. ""It is like when the London telephone numbers got longer. A lot of the process will be invisible. ""People are usually given an IP address without knowing it." Technically deployment has started and the standards for are just about settled", said Dr Carpenter. The one problem with the net that may never disappear completely is security. To Dr Carpenter, "the solution comes out of technological and human behaviour. People have to be educated about ""sensible behaviour"" he says", such as ignoring e-mails that claim you have won something. ""I don't think it is going to get worse. People will remain concerned about security and they probably should do - just as you would be concerned walking along a dark street. ""We have to do work to make sure there are better security internet standards. It is a never-ending battle in a sense." But", he adds: ""Even if security has improved", you still worry a bit. Unfortunately," it is just part of life. We have a duty to do what we can.""

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"tech 367.txt Long life promised for laptop PCs Scientist s are working on ways to ensure laptops can stay powered for an entire working day. Building batteries from new chemical mixes could boost power significantly", say industry experts. The changes include everything from the way chips for laptops are made," to tricks that reduce the power consumption of displays. Ever since laptops appeared the amount of time they last between recharges has been a frustration for users. A survey carried out in 2000 by Forrester Research found that the shortness of battery life was the most complained about feature of laptops. ""The focus back then was more on performance and features", said Mike Trainor, chief mobile technology evangelist for chip giant Intel. For most of the 90s battery life was stuck on two to 2.5 hours." But now", he said, laptops can last much longer. It was not just a case of improving battery life by squeezing more out of the lithium ion power packs," he explained. Other changes are needed to get to the holy grail of a laptop running for about eight hours before needing a recharge. ""Lithium ion is never going to get there by itself", he said. The industry has done a great job of wringing all possible energy storage out of that technology that they can." Some new battery chemistries promise to cram more power into the same space", said Mr Trainor," though work still needed to be done to get them successfully from the lab to manufacturing. He was sceptical that fuel cells would develop quick enough to take over from solid batteries even though they have the potential to produce several times more energy than lithium ion power packs. ""In fuel cells you need to have pumps and separators and evaporation chambers", he said. It's a mini energy plant that needs to be shrunk and shrunk and shrunk." Intel has been working with component makers to test energy consumption on all the parts inside a laptop and find ways to make them less power hungry. This work has led to the creation of the Mobile PC Extended Battery Life (EBL) Working Group that shares information about building notebooks that are more parsimonious with power. Some of the improvements in power use come simply because components on chips are shrinking", said Mr Trainor. Intel has also changed the way it creates transistors on silicon to reduce the power they need. On a larger scale, said Mr Trainor, improvements

in the way that voltage regulators are made can reduce the amount of power lost as heat and make a notebook more energy efficient. Also, said Mr Trainor," research is being done on ways to cut energy consumption on displays - currently the biggest power guzzler on a laptop. Many laptop makers have committed to creating 14 and 15 inch screens that draw only three watts of power. This is far below the power consumption levels of screens in current notebooks. ""If we can get close to eight hours that's a place that people see as extraordinarily valuable that's what the industry has to deliver", Mr Trainor said.

tech 368.txt Net fingerprints combat attacks Eighty large net service firms have switched on software to spot and stop net attacks automatically. The system creates digital fingerprints of ongoing incidents that are sent to every network affected. Firms involved in the smart sensing system believe it will help trace attacks back to their source. Data gathered will be passed to police to help build up intelligence about who is behind worm outbreaks and denial of service attacks. Firms signing up for the sensing system include MCI, BT, Deutsche Telekom, Energis, NTT, Bell Canada and many others. The creation of the fingerprinting system has been brokered by US firm Arbor Networks and signatures of attacks will be passed to anyone suffering under the weight of an attack. Increasingly computer criminals are using swarms of remotely controlled computers to carry out denial of service attacks on websites, launch worms and relay spam around the net. We have seen attacks involving five and ten gigabytes of traffic", said Rob Pollard, sales director for Arbor Networks which is behind the fingerprinting system. Attacks of that size cause collateral damage as they cross the internet before they get to their destination", he said. Once an attack is spotted and its signature defined the information will be passed back down the chain of networks affected to help every unwitting player tackle the problem. Mr Pollard said Arbor was not charging for the service and it would pass on fingerprint data to every network affected. What we want to do is help net service firms communicate with each other and then push the attacks further and further back around the world to their source, said Mr Pollard. Arbor Network's technology works by building up a detailed history of traffic on a network. It spots which computers or groups of users regularly talk to each other and what types of traffic passes between machines or workgroups. Any anomaly to this usual pattern is spotted and flagged to network administrators who can take action if the traffic is due to a net-based attack of some kind. This type of close analysis has become very useful as net attacks are increasingly launched using several hundred or thousand different machines. Anyone looking at the traffic on a machine by machine basis would be unlikely to spot that they were all part of a concerted attack. Attacks are getting more diffuse and more sophisticated," said Malcolm Seagrave, security expert at Energis. In the last 12 months it started getting noticeable that criminals were taking to it and we've seen massive growth." He said that although informal systems exist to pass on information about attacks", often commercial confidentiality got in the way of sharing enough information to properly combat attacks.

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"tech 369.txt Microsoft plans 'safer ID' system Microsoft is planning to make Windows and Internet Explorer more secure by including software to give people more control over personal information. ""Info cards"" will help people manage personal details on their PCs to make online services safer", said Microsoft. Microsoft's two previous programs, Passport and Hailstorm, aimed to protect users but were criticised. ID fraud is one of the UK's fastest-growing crimes, with criminals netting an estimated £1.3bn last year. A quarter of UK adults has either had their ID stolen, via hi-tech or other means, or

knows someone who has, a recent report by Which? magazine found. Microsoft is developing a new version of Internet Explorer browser and its operating system, Windows, which has been code-named Longhorn. Michael Stephenson, director in Microsoft's Windows Server division," would not confirm however whether the new info cards ID system will be built into the current Windows XP version or Longhorn. ""We're trying to make the end-user experience as simple as possible", Mr Stephenson said. The system would differ from its previous attempts to make online transactions more secure, said Microsoft. While Passport and Hailstorm stored user information centrally on the net, the latest system will store data on a user's PC. It's going to put control of digital IDs into the hands of an end-user", the end-user will be in full control," said Mr Stephenson. Hailstorm was criticised by privacy campaigners for putting too much sensitive information into the hands of a single company. Passport provides a single log-in for more than one website and stores basic personal information. But its popularity suffered after security scares. Up to 200 million Passport accounts were left vulnerable to online theft and malicious hackers after a flaw in the system was exploited in 2003. Online auction site, eBay, stopped supporting it in January 2005. Although the flaw was fixed, Microsoft has come under regular criticism for the number of security loopholes in Internet Explorer. Last year, it released a major security update for Windows, Service Pack 2, to combat some of the security concerns. Longhorn is due to be released commercially in late 2006, but an updated version of Internet Explorer is due for release later this year.

tech 370.txt Court mulls file-sharing future Judges at the US Supreme Court have been hearing evidence for and against file-sharing networks. The court will decide whether producers of file-sharing software can ultimately be held responsible for copyright infringement. They questioned if opening the way for the entertainment industry to sue file-sharers could deter innovation. They also said that file-trading firms had some responsibility for inducing people to piracy. The lawsuit, brought by 28 of the world's largest entertainment firms, has raged for several years. Legal experts agree that if the Supreme Court finds in favour of the music and movie industry they would be able to sue file-trading firms into bankruptcy. But if the judge rules that Grokster and Morpheus - the file-sharers at the centre of the case - are merely providers of technology that can have legitimate as well as illegitimate uses, then the music and movie industry would be forced to abandon its pursuit of file-sharing providers. Instead, they would have to pursue individuals who use peer-to-peer networks to get their hands on free music and movies. The hi-tech and entertainment industries have been divided on the issue. Intel filed a document with the Supreme Court earlier this month in defence of Grokster and others, despite misgivings about some aspects of the file-sharing community. It summed up the attitude of many tech firms in its submission which states that its products are essentially tools", that like any other tools," capable of being used by consumers and businesses for unlawful purposes"". Asking firms to second-guess the uses that its technologies would be put to", and to build in ways of preventing illegitimate use, would stifle innovation, it said. The Electronic Frontier Foundation, a civil rights watchdog, is also defending StreamCast Networks, the company behind the Morpheus file-sharing software. The case raises a question of critical importance at the border between copyright and innovation, it said. It cites, as do many, the landmark ruling in 1984 which found that Sony should not be held responsible for the fact that its Betamax video recorder could be used for piracy. Defenders remain optimistic that the judges will rule in favour of the peer-to-peer networks, upholding the precedent set by the Sony Betamax case. A small band of supporters were outside the court as the lawyers entered," wearing ""Save Betamax"" t-shirts. ""The Betamax principles stand as the Magna C

arta for the technology industry and are responsible for the explosion in innovation that has occurred in the US over the past 20 years", " said Gary Shapiro, chief executive of the Consumer Electronics Association. Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer said that inventions from printing to Apple's iPod could be used to illegally duplicate copyrighted materials but had, on balance, been beneficial to society. He said that while file-trading software can be used to illegally trade movies and music, conceptually the technology had some really excellent uses". Based on Tuesday's hearing it seems unlikely that the Betamax ruling will be overturned but file-sharing firms might still be held responsible for encouraging or inducing piracy. Grokster's lawyer argued that the company should be judged by its current behaviour rather than what it did when it first set up. But this argument was dismissed as ""ridiculous"" by Justice David Souter. CEA boss Mr Shapiro thinks the case is the most important that the Supreme Court will hear this year. ""It's about preserving America's proud history of technological innovation and protecting the ability of consumers to access and utilise technology", " he said. The case has already been heard by two lower courts and both found in favour of the peer-to-peer networks. They ruled that despite being used to distribute millions of illegal songs, file-sharing could also be used to cheaply distribute software, government documents and promotional copies of music.

tech 371.txt France starts digital terrestrial France has become the last big European country to launch a digital terrestrial TV (DTT) service. Initially, more than a third of the population will be able to receive 14 free-to-air channels. Despite the long wait for a French DTT roll-out, the new platform's backers hope to emulate the success of its UK free-to-air counterpart, Freeview. Recent figures from the UK's regulator Ofcom showed Freeview was more popular than the Sky digital satellite service. In the three months to September 2004, almost five times as many people signed up to the UK's free-to-air DTT service compared with Sky. Almost 60% of UK households have gone digital on at least one television set through cable, satellite or Freeview. The French DTT platform is known as TNT, which stands for TV numerique terrestre or digital terrestrial television. But it is being branded as Television Numerique pour Tous, or digital television for all"". TNT is a joint venture between public broadcaster France Televisions and a handful of cable and satellite operators. Digital terrestrial TV will launch as a free-to-air platform to start with", " adding pay-TV channels later. Thirty-five contenders have bid for an additional eight frequencies on top of the 14 already allocated. ""A couple of years ago", DTT had a bad image," said Olivier Gerolami, chief operating officer of TNT. But everyone's impressed with DTT in the UK", Italy and Germany," and they realise it is a very good idea. ""France is the poorest market in Europe in terms of free-to-air national channels", so it has the potential to be one of the biggest DTT markets," Mr Gerolami added in remarks quoted by the US entertainment industry paper Variety. TNT aims to reach 35% of France's population at launch, from 17 transmission sites. The transmission area will initially include Paris, Lille, Lyon and Toulouse. Eventually there will be 115 sites reaching over 80% of homes. Digital terrestrial set-top boxes are available from as little as 70 euros (£50). A recent survey by Mediametrie found that 70% of people interviewed were aware of DTT, and 25% were planning to buy a digital receiver. Consumer electronics companies such as Nokia, Sagem, Sony and Thomson are gearing up for production. The Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel (CSA), the French broadcasting regulator, said: Following the recent success of Freeview in the UK", " some manufacturers are optimistic about sales prospects"". Media analysts believe that initially the majority of viewers will buy inexpensive set-top boxes that are unable to support interactive services. The CSA said the current aim of reachin

g 85% of the population by 2007 was achievable", but the future of the remaining TV viewers required action by the public sector. For the most part, they are people living in mountainous or border areas, which will remain beyond the reach of digital terrestrial TV for years. Up to 15 pay-TV channels will launch on DTT between September 2005 and March 2006. Leading pay-TV operators Canal Plus and TPS have submitted bids to market bouquets of channels. Free-to-air services will be broadcast in MPEG-2 format. But pay-TV operators will be allowed to broadcast in MPEG-4 - a much better compression technology - which will potentially allow for high-definition (HD) subscription services in the future. TNT expects between 700,"000 and one million DTT set-top boxes to be sold in 2005. ""It is difficult to tell how quickly it will take off," said Mr Gerolami, but we're optimistic that it will revolutionise television in France." "Other analysts were less optimistic," predicting consumers would now be less likely to sign up for pay-TV subscriptions. ""We think free DTT could put brakes on the underlying growth of pay-TV in France," said Henri de Bodinat, vice-president of the Arthur D. Little consultancy.

tech 372.txt Text message record smashed again UK mobile owners continue to break records with their text messaging, with latest figures showing that 26 billion texts were sent in total in 2004. The figures collected by the Mobile Data Association (MDA) showed that 2.4 billion were fired off in December alone, the highest monthly total ever. That was 26% more than in December 2003. The records even surpassed the MDA's own predictions, it said. Every day 78 million messages are sent and there are no signs of a slow down. Before December's bumper text record, the previous highest monthly total was in October 2004, when 2.3 billion were sent. Text messaging is set to smash more records in 2005 too, said the MDA, with forecasts suggesting a total of 30 billion for the year. Even though mobiles are becoming increasingly sophisticated with much more multimedia applications, texting is still one of the most useful functions of mobiles. People are using SMS to do much more too. Booking cinema tickets, text voting, and news or sports text alerts are growing popular. Mobile owners have also given the chance to donate to the Disasters Emergency Committee's (DEC) Asian Tsunami fund by texting Donate"" to a simple short code number. Looking further ahead in the year", the MDA's chairman Mike Short, has predicted that more people will go online through their mobiles," estimating 15 billion WAP page impressions. Handsets with GPRS capability - an ""always on"" net connection - will rise to 75%", while 3G mobile ownership growing to five million by the end of 2005. These third generation mobiles offer a high-speed connection which means more data like video can be received on the phone. Globally, mobile phone sales passed 167 million in the third quarter of 2004, according to a recent report from analysts Gartner. That was 26% more than the previous year. It is predicted that there would be two billion handsets in use worldwide by the end of 2005.

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"tech 373.txt Software watching while you work Software that can not only monitor every keystroke and action performed at a PC but also be used as legally binding evidence of wrong-doing has been unveiled. Worries about cyber-crime and sabotage have prompted many employers to consider monitoring employees. The developers behind the system claim it is a breakthrough in the way data is monitored and stored. But privacy advocates are concerned by the invasive nature of such software. The system is a joint venture between security firm 3ami and storage specialists BridgeHead Software. They have joined forces to create a system which can monitor computer activity", store it and retrieve disputed files within minutes. More and more firms are finding themselves

in deep water as a result of data misuse. Sabotage and data theft are most commonly committed from within an organisation according to the National Hi-Tech Crime Unit (NHTCU). A survey conducted on its behalf by NOP found evidence that more than 80% of medium and large companies have been victims of some form of cyber-crime. BridgeHead Software has come up with techniques to prove, to a legal standard, that any stored file on a PC has not been tampered with. Ironically the impetus for developing the system came as a result of the Freedom of Information Act, which requires companies to store all data for a certain amount of time. The storage system has been incorporated into an application developed by security firm 3ami which allows every action on a computer to be logged. Potentially it could help employers to follow the trail of stolen files and pinpoint whether they had been emailed to a third party, copied, printed, deleted or saved to CD, floppy disk, memory stick or flash card. Other activities the system can monitor include the downloading of pornography, the use of racist or bullying language or the copying of applications for personal use. Increasingly organisations that handle sensitive data, such as governments," are using biometric log-ins such as fingerprinting to provide conclusive proof of who was using a particular machine at any given time. Privacy advocates are concerned that monitoring at work is not only damaging to employee's privacy but also to the relationship between employers and their staff. ""That is not the case", said Tim Elsmore, managing director of 3ami. It is not about replacing dialogue but there are issues that you can talk through but you still need proof", he said. People need to recognise that you are using a PC as a representative of a company and that employers have a legal requirement to store data," he added.

tech 374.txt Commodore finds new lease of life The once-famous Commodore computer brand could be resurrected after being bought by a US-based digital music distributor. New owner Yeahronimo Media Ventures has not ruled out the possibility of a new breed of Commodore computers. It also plans to develop a worldwide entertainment concept"" with the brand", although details are not yet known. The groundbreaking Commodore 64 computer elicits fond memories for those who owned one back in the 1980s. In the chronology of home computing, Commodore was one of the pioneers. The Commodore 64, launched in 1982, was one of the first affordable home PCs. It was followed a few years later by the Amiga. The Commodore 64 sold more than any other single computer system, even to this day. The brand languished somewhat in the 1990s. Commodore International filed for bankruptcy in 1994 and was sold to Dutch firm Tulip Computers. In the late 1980s the firm was a great rival to Atari, which produced its own range of home computers and is now a brand of video games, formerly known as Infogrames. Tulip Computers sold several products under the Commodore name, including portable USB storage devices and digital music players. It had planned to relaunch the brand, following an upsurge of nostalgia for 1980s-era games. Commodore 64 enthusiasts have written emulators for Windows PC, Apple Mac and even PDAs so that the original Commodore games can be still run. The sale of Commodore is expected to be complete in three weeks in a deal worth over £17m.

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"tech 375.txt Cabs collect mountain of mobiles Gadgets are cheaper", smaller and more common than ever. But that just means we are more likely to lose them. In London alone over the past six months more than 63,000 mobile phones have been left in the back of black cabs, according to a survey. That works out at about three phones per cab. Over the same period almost 5,000 laptops and 5,800 PDAs such as Palms and Pocket PCs were left in licensed cabs. Even the great and good are not immune to losing their beloved gadgets. Jemima Khan reportedly left her iPod, phone and purse in a cab and asked for them to b

e returned to her friend who turned out to be Hugh Grant. As the popularity of portable gadgets has grown, and we trust more of our lives to them, we seem to be forgetting them in ever larger numbers. The numbers of lost laptops has leapt by 71% in the last three years. This has left Londoners, or those travelling by cab in the capital, as the world's best at losing laptops, according to the research by the Licensed Taxi Drivers Association and Pointsec, a mobile-data backup firm. More than twice as many laptops were left in the back of black cabs in London as in any of the nine other cities (Helsinki, Oslo, Munich, Paris, Stockholm, Copenhagen, Chicago and Sydney) where the research into lost and found gadgets was carried out. By contrast Danes were most adept at losing mobile phones being seven times more likely to leave it behind in a cab than travellers in Germans, Norwegians and Swedes. Top of the range phones can carry enormous amounts of data - enough to hold hundreds of pictures or thousands of contact details. Given that few people back up the data on their PC it is a fair bet that even fewer do so with the phone they carry around. You could be losing a fair chunk of your life in the back of that cab not least because many people collect numbers on their phone that they do not have anywhere else. Equally, phones let you navigate through contacts by name so many people have completely forgotten their friends' numbers and could not reconstruct them if they had to. This growing habit of losing gadgets explains the rise of firms such as Retrofone which lets people buy a cheap old-fashioned phone to replace the tiny, shiny expensive one they have just lost. Briton's growing love of phones has also led to the creation of the Mobile Equipment National Database that lets you register the unique ID number of your phone so it can be returned to you in the event of it being lost or stolen. According to statistics 50% of all muggings and snatch theft offences involve mobiles. Millions of gadgets are now logged in the database and organisations such as Transport For London regularly consult it when trying to re-unite folk with their phones and other gadgets. For the drivers, finding a mobile in the back of their cab is one of the more pleasant things many have found. The survey of what else has been left behind included a harp, a dog, a hamster and a baby.

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"tech 376.txt T-Mobile bets on 'pocket office' T-Mobile has launched its latest ""pocket office"" third-generation (3G) device which also has built-in wi-fi - high-speed wireless net access. Unlike other devices where the user has to check which high-speed network is available to transfer data", the device selects the fastest one itself. The MDA IV, released in the summer, is an upgrade to the company's existing smartphone, the 2.5G/wi-fi MDA III. It reflects the push by mobile firms for devices that are like mini laptops. The device has a display that can be swivelled and angled so it can be used like a small computer, or as a conventional clamshell phone. The Microsoft Mobile phone, with two cameras and a Qwerty keyboard, reflects the design of similar all-in-one models released this year," such as Motorola's MPx. ""One in five European workers are already mobile - meaning they spend significant time travelling and out of the office""," Rene Obermann, T-Mobile's chief executive, told a press conference at the 3GSM trade show in Cannes. He added: What they need is their office when they are out of the office." T-Mobile said it was seeing increasing take up for what it calls ""Office in a Pocket"" devices", with 100,000 MDAs sold in Europe already. In response to demand, T-Mobile also said it would be adding the latest phone-shaped Blackberry to its mobile range. Reflecting the growing need to be connected outside the office, it announced it would introduce a flat-fee £20 (\$38) a month wi-fi tariff for people in the UK using its wi-fi hotspots. It said it would nearly double the number of its hotspots - plac

es where wi-fi access is available - globally from 12,300 to 20,000. It also announced it was installing high-speed wi-fi on certain train services, such as the UK's London to Brighton service, to provide commuters a fast net connection too. The service, which has been developed with Southern trains, Nomad Digital (who provide the technology), begins with a free trial on 16 trains on the route from early March to the end of April. A full service is set to follow in the summer. Wi-fi access points will be connected to a Wimax wireless network - faster than wi-fi - running alongside the train tracks. Brian McBride, managing director of T-Mobile in the UK," said: ""We see a growing trend for business users needing to access e-mail securely on the move. ""We are able to offer this by maintaining a constant data session for the entire journey." He said this was something other similar in-train wi-fi services", such as that offered on GNER trains, did not offer yet. Mr Obermann added that the mobile industry in general was still growing, with many more opportunities for more services which would bear fruit for mobile companies in future. Thousands of mobile industry experts are gathered in Cannes, France, for the 3GSM which runs from 14 to 17 February.

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"tech 377.txt California sets fines for spyware The maker  
s of computer programs that secretly spy on what people do with their home PCs could face hefty fines in California. From 1 January", a new law is being introduced to protect computer users from software known as spyware. The legislation, which was approved by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, is designed to safeguard people from hackers and help protect their personal information. Spyware is considered by computer experts to be one of the biggest nuisance and security threats facing PC users in the coming year. The software buries itself in computers and can collect a wide range of information. At its worst, it has the ability to hijack personal data, like passwords, login details and credit card numbers. The programs are so sophisticated they change frequently and become impossible to eradicate. One form of spyware called adware has the ability to collect information on a computer user's web-surfing. It can result in people being bombarded with pop-up ads that are hard to close. In Washington, Congress has been debating four anti-spyware bills, but California is a step ahead. The state's Consumer Protection Against Spyware Act bans the installation of software that takes control of another computer. It also requires companies and websites to disclose whether their systems will install spyware. Consumers are able to seek up to \$1,000 in damages if they think they have fallen victim to the intrusive software. The new law marks a continuing trend in California towards tougher privacy rights. A recent survey by Earthlink and Webroot found that 90% of PCs are infested with the surreptitious software and that, on average, each one is harbouring 28 separate spyware programs. Currently users wanting protection from spyware have turned to free programs such as Spybot and Ad-Aware.

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"tech 378.txt Mobile TV tipped as one to watch Scandinavians and Koreans", two of the most adventurous groups of mobile users, are betting on mobile TV. Anders Igels, chief executive of Nordic operator TeliaSonera, tipped it as the next big thing in mobile in a speech at the 3GSM World Congress, a mobile trade fair, in Cannes this week. Nokia, the Finnish handset maker, is planning a party in Singapore this spring to launch its TV to mobile activities in the region. Consultancy Strategy Analytics of Boston estimates that mobile broadcast networks will have acquired around 51 million users worldwide by 2009, producing around \$6.6bn (£3.5bn) in revenue. SK Telecom of South Korea, w

hich is launching a TV to mobile service (via satellite) in May plans to charge a flat fee of \$12 a month for its 12 channels of video and 12 channels of audio. It will be able to offer an additional two pay TV channels using conditional access technology. Mr Shin-Bae Kim, chief executive of SK Telecom, also at 3GS M," said: ""We have plans to integrate TV with mobile internet services. "This will enable viewers to access the mobile internet to get more information on adverts they see on TV."" There will be 12 handsets available for the launch of the Korean service. LG Electronics of South Korea was demonstrating one at 3GSM that could display video at 30 frames a second. Footage shown on the handset was clear and watchable. A speech on mobile TV by Angel Gambino of the BBC also drew a large crowd", suggesting that even those mobile operators and equipment vendors which are not particularly active in mobile TV yet are starting to look into it. But all is not simple and straightforward in the mobile TV arena. There is a battle for supremacy between two competing standards: DVB-H for Digital Video Broadcasting for Handsets and DMB for Digital Multimedia Broadcasting. Dr Chan Yeob Yeun, vice president and research fellow in charge of mobile TV at LG Electronics," said: ""DMB offers twice the number of frames a minute as DVB-H and does not drain mobile batteries as quickly." The Japanese", Koreans and Ericsson of Sweden are backing DMB. Samsung of South Korea has a DMB phone too that will be one of those offered to users of the TU Media satellite mobile TV service to be launched in Korea in May. Nokia, by contrast, is backing DVB-H, and is involved in mobile TV trials that use its art-deco style media phone, which has a larger than usual screen for TV or visual radio (a way of accompanying a radio programme with related text and pictures). Mobile operators O2 and Vodafone are among the operators trialling mobile TV. But even if the standards battle is resolved, there is the thorny issue of broadcasting rights. Ms Gambino says the BBC now negotiates mobile rights when it is negotiating content. For those not convinced mobile users will want to watch TV on their handsets, Digital Audio Broadcasting may provide a good compromise and better sound quality than conventional radio. Developments in this area are continuing. At a DAB conference in Cannes, several makers of DAB chips for mobiles announced smaller, lower-cost chips which consume less power. Among the chip companies present were Frontier Silicon and Radioscape. The jury is still out on whether TV and digital radio on mobiles will make much money for anyone. But with many new services going live soon, it won't be long before the industry finds out.

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"tech 379.txt Apple laptop is 'greatest gadget' The Apple Powerbook 100 has been chosen as the greatest gadget of all time",, by US magazine Mobile PC. The 1991 laptop was chosen because it was one of the first ""lightweight"" portable computers and helped define the layout of all future notebook PCs. The magazine has compiled an all-time top 100 list of gadgets",, which includes the Sony Walkman at number three and the 1956 Zenith remote control at two. Gadgets needed moving parts and/or electronics to warrant inclusion. The magazine staff compiled the list and specified that gadgets also needed to be a ""self-contained apparatus that can be used on its own",, not a subset of another device"". ""In general we included only items that were potentially mobile", said the magazine. In the end, we tried to get to the heart of what really makes a gadget a gadget," it concluded. The oldest gadget"" in the top 100 is the abacus", which the magazine dates at 190 A.D., and put in 60th place. Other pre-electronic gadgets in the top 100 include the sextant from 1731 (59th position), the marine chronometer from 1761 (42nd position) and the Kodak Brownie camera from 1900 (28th position). The Tivo personal video recorder is the newest device to make the top 10, which also includes the first flash mp3 player (Diam

ond Multimedia)," as well as the first ""successful"" digital camera (Casio Q V-10) and mobile phone (Motorola Startac). The most popular gadget of the moment", the Apple iPod," is at number 12 in the list while the first Sony transistor radio is at number 13. Sony's third entry in the top 20 is the CDP-101 CD player from 1983. ""Who can forget the crystalline," hiss-free blast of Madonna's Like A Virgin emanating from their first CD player?"" asked the magazine. Karl Elsener's knife", the Swiss Army Knife from 1891, is at number 20 in the list. Gadgets which could be said to feature surprisingly low down in the list include the original telephone (23rd), the Nintendo GameBoy (25th), and the Pulsar quartz digital watch (36th). The list also contains plenty of oddities: the Pez sweet dispenser (98th), 1990s toy Tamagotchi (86th) and the bizarre Ronco inside the shell egg scrambler (84th). Almost everyone has a mobile phone, how many people own a Powerbook? or an iPod? The findings of this magazine are not very convincing. What about the magnetic compass? We still use it 1,000 years after it was invented. I am amazed by the obsession with individual gadgets rather than genre. For example the Sony walkman was the first truly portable way of listening to your own music on the move whereas Minidisc, Flash MP3, portable CD players etc. are really just improvements in technology. My favourite 'true' gadgets are probably my portable MiniDisc player and the little battery powered whizzy thing I use to froth up my coffee! Calm down it's only in their opinion, and any list that includes the Taser in the top 100 gadgets has to be suspect.... Swiss army knife and no question about it. How many of the other items are still relatively unchanged from the original idea and still as useful/popular? You don't need a laptop or even a pocket calculator to work that one out! This list merely illustrates interesting cultural divides between the American authors and the overwhelmingly British responses. Brits see no further than mobile phones and the over thirties Sinclair; whilst the Americans focus on Apple," TV remotes and TiVO (which probably is rather obscure in Europe). What about the Soda Stream. This gadget changed my pre-teen life. Lap tops may enable you to ""think different,"" but you cant use them to ""get busy with the fizzy"" How about Astro Wars", one of the pioneers for computer games, i remember spending many an hour playing this and it still works today! However tried it the other day and it was rubbish, still a great gadget of its time. Why worry about mobile phones. Soon they will be subsumed into the PDA's / laptops etc. What about the Marine Chronometer? Completely revolutionised navigation for boats and was in use for centuries. For it's time, a technological marvel! Sony Net Mini disc! It paved the way for more mp3 player to explode onto the market. I always used my NetMD, and could not go anywhere without it. A laptop computer is not a gadget! It's a working tool! The Sinclair Executive was the world's first pocket calculator. I think this should be there as well. How about the clockwork radio? Or GPS? Or a pocket calculator? All these things are useful to real people, not just PC magazine editors. Are the people who created this list insane? Surely the most important gadget of the modern age is the mobile phone? It has revolutionised communication, which is more than can be said for a niche market laptop. From outside the modern age, the marine chronometer is the single most important gadget, without which modern transportation systems would not have evolved so quickly. Has everyone forgot about the Breville pie maker?? An interesting list. Of the electronic gadgets, thousands of journalists in the early 1980s blessed the original notebook pc - the Tandy 100. The size of A4 paper and light, three weeks on a set of batteries, an excellent keyboard," a modem. A pity Tandy did not make it DOS compatible. What's an Apple Powerbook 100 ? It's out of date - not much of a ""gadget"". Surely it has to be something simple / timeless - the tin opener", Swiss Army Knife, safety razor blade, wristwatch or the thing for taking stones out of horses hooves ? It has to be the mobil

e phone. No other single device has had such an effect on our way of living in such a short space of time. The ball point pen has got to be one of the most used and common gadgets ever. Also many might be grateful for the pocket calculator which was a great improvement over the slide rule. The Casio pocket calculator that played a simple game and made tinny noises was also a hot gadget in 1980. A true gadget, it could be carried around and shown off. All top 10 are electronic toys, so the list is probably a better reflection of the current high-tech obsession than anything else. I say this as the Swiss Army Knife only made No 20. Sinclair QL a machine far ahead of its time. The first home machine with a true multi-tasking OS. Shame the marketing was so bad!!! Apple.. a triumph of fashion over... well everything else. Utter rubbish. Yes, the Apple laptop and Sony Walkman are classic gadgets. But to call the sextant and the marine chronometer 'gadgets' and rank them as less important than a TV remote control reveals a quite shocking lack of historical perspective. The former literally helped change the world by vastly improving navigation at sea. The latter is the seed around which the couch potato culture has developed. No competition.

I'd also put Apple's Newton and the first Palm Pilot there as the front runners for portable computing, and possibly the Toshiba Libretto for the same reason. I only wish that Vulcan Inc's Flipstart wasn't just vapourware otherwise it would be at the top. How did a laptop ever manage to beat off the challenge of the wristwatch or the telephone (mobile or otherwise)? What about radios and TVs? The swiss army knife. By far the most useful gadget. I got mine 12 years ago. Still wearing and using it a lot! It stood the test of time. Psion Organiser series 3, should be up there. Had a usable qwerty keyboard, removable storage, good set of apps and programmable. Case design was good (batteries in the hinge - a first, I think). Great product innovation. The first mobile PC was voted best gadget by readers of...err... mobile PC?! Why do you keep putting these obviously biased lists on your site? It's obviously the mobile phone or remote control, and readers of a less partisan publication would tell you that. The Motorola Startac should be Number One. Why? There will be mobile phones long after notebooks and other gadgets are either gone or integrated in communications devices. The Psion series 3c! The first most practical way to carry all your info around... I too would back the Sinclair Spectrum - without this little beauty I would never have moved into the world of IT and earn the living that I do now. I'd have put the mobile phone high up the list. Probably a Nokia model. Sinclair Spectrum - 16k. It plugged into the tv. Games were rubbish but it gave me a taste for programming and that's what I do for a living now. I wish more modern notebooks -- even Apple's newest offerings -- were more like the PB 100. Particularly disheartening is the demise of the trackball," which has given way to the largely useless ""trackpad"" which every notebook on the market today uses. They're invariably inaccurate", uncomfortable, and cumbersome to use. Congratulations to Apple, a deserved win!

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"tech 380.txt Sun offers processing by the hour Sun Microsystems has launched a pay-as-you-go service which will allow customers requiring huge computing power to rent it by the hour. Sun Grid costs users \$1 (53p) for an hour's worth of processing and storage power on systems maintained by Sun. So-called grid computing is the latest buzz phrase in a company which believes that computing capacity is as important a commodity as hardware and software. Sun likened grid computing to the development of electricity. The system could mature in the same way utilities such as electricity and water have developed"," said Sun's chief operating officer Jonathan Schwartz. ""Why build your own grid when you can use ours for a buck an hour?"" he asked in a webcast launch

ing Sun's quarterly Network Computing event in California. The company will have to persuade data centre managers to adopt a new model but it said it already had interest from customers in the oil", gas and financial services industries. Some of them want to book computing capacity of more than 5,000 processors each, Sun said. Mr Schwartz ran a demonstration of the service, showing how data could be processed in a protein folding experiment. Hundreds of servers were used simultaneously, working on the problem for a few seconds each. Although it only took a few seconds, the experiment cost \$12 (£6.30) because it had used up 12 hours' worth of computing power. The Sun Grid relies on Solaris, the operating system owned by Sun. Initially it will house the grid in existing premises and will use idle servers to test software before shipping it to customers. It has not said how much the system will cost to develop but it already has a rival in IBM, which argues that its capacity on-demand service is cheaper than that offered by Sun.

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"tech 381.txt Kenyan school turns to handhelds At the Mbita Point primary school in western Kenya students click away at a handheld computer with a stylus. They are doing exercises in their school textbooks which have been digitised. It is a pilot project run by EduVision", which is looking at ways to use low cost computer systems to get up-to-date information to students who are currently stuck with ancient textbooks. Matthew Herren from EduVision told the BBC programme Go Digital how the non-governmental organisation uses a combination of satellite radio and handheld computers called E-slates. ""The E-slates connect via a wireless connection to a base station in the school. This in turn is connected to a satellite radio receiver. The data is transmitted alongside audio signals." The base station processes the information from the satellite transmission and turns it into a form that can be read by the handheld E-slates. ""It downloads from the satellite and every day processes the stream", sorts through content for the material destined for the users connected to it. It also stores this on its hard disc." The system is cheaper than installing and maintaining an internet connection and conventional computer network. But Mr Herren says there are both pros and cons to the project. ""It's very simple to set up", just a satellite antenna on the roof of the school, but it's also a one-way connection," so getting feedback or specific requests from end users is difficult." The project is still at the pilot stage and EduVision staff are on the ground to attend to teething problems with the Linux-based system. ""The content is divided into visual information", textual information and questions. Users can scroll through these sections independently of each other." EduVision is planning to include audio and video files as the system develops and add more content. Mr Herren says this would vastly increase the opportunities available to the students. He is currently in negotiations to take advantage of a project being organised by search site Google to digitise some of the world's largest university libraries. ""All books in the public domain", something like 15 million," could be put on the base stations as we manufacture them. Then every rural school in Africa would have access to the same libraries as the students in Oxford and Harvard" Currently the project is operating in an area where there is mains electricity. But Mr Herren says EduVision already has plans to extend it to more remote regions. ""We plan to put a solar panel at the school with the base station", have the E-slates charge during the day when the children are in school," then they can take them home at night and continue working." Maciej Sundra", who designed the user interface for the E-slates," says the project's ultimate goal is levelling access to knowledge around the world. ""Why in this age when most people do most research using the internet are stud

ents still using textbooks? The fact that we are doing this in a rural developing country is very exciting - as they need it most."

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"tech 382.txt Tough rules for ringtone sellers Firms that flout rules on how ringtones and other mobile extras are sold could be cut off from all UK phone networks. The rules allow offenders to be cut off if they do not let consumers know exactly what they get for their money and how to turn off the services. The first month under the new rules has seen at least ten firms suspended while they clean up the way they work. The rules have been brought in to ensure that the problems plaguing net users do not spread to mobile phones. In the last couple of years ringtones", wallpapers, screensavers and lots of other extras for phones have become hugely popular. But fierce competition is making it difficult for firms to get their wares in front of consumers, said Jeremy Flynn," head of third party services at Vodafone. ""If you are not on the operator's portal you are going to have quite heavy marketing costs because it's a problem of how people discover your services", he said. To combat this many ringtone and other mobile content sellers started using a new tactic to squeeze more cash out of customers. This tactic involved signing people up for a subscription to give them, for instance, several ringtones per week or month instead of the single track they thought they were getting. Mr Flynn said that the move to using subscriptions happened over the space of a few weeks at the end of 2004. Websites such as grumbletext.co.uk started getting reports from customers who were racking up large bills for phone content they did not know they had signed up for. What made us uncomfortable was that these services were not being marketed transparently", said Mr Flynn. People did not know they were being offered a subscription service." "We saw potential for substantial consumer harm here", he added. The swift adoption of subscription services led to the creation of a new code of conduct for firms that want to sell content for mobile phones. The drafting of the new rules was led by the Mobile Entertainment Forum and the UK's phone firms. Everyone is required to conform to this code of conduct," said Andrew Bud, regulatory head of the MEF and executive chairman of messaging firm MBlox. It's all about transparency", he said. Consumers have to be told what they have got themselves into and how to get out of it." "The consumer has a right to be protected", he said. Christian Harris, partnership manager of mobile content firm Zed, said the new system was essential if consumers were to trust companies that sell ringtones and other downloads. The groundrules must be applied across the whole industry and if that's done effectively we will see the cowboys driven out", he said. The new rules came in to force on 15 January and the first month under the new regime has seen many firms cautioned for not honouring them. Some have been told to revamp websites so customers know what they get for their money and what they are signing up for, said Mr Flynn. Also, said Mr Flynn, Vodafone has briefly cut off between eight and ten content sellers flouting the rules. We have quite draconian contracts with firms", he said. We do not have to say why. We can just cut them off." Under the rules consumers must be able to switch off the services by using a universal ""stop"" command sent via text message. He said the system had been designed to limit how much a consumer will pay if they inadvertently signed up for a service. ""The mobile is so personal that people really resent the abuse of what is effectively part of their personality", said Mr Flynn.

tech 383.txt Mobile music challenges 'iPod age' Nokia and Microsoft have agreed a deal to work on delivery of music to handsets, while Sony Ericsson has unveiled its phone Walkman and Motorola is working on an iTunes phone. Can mobile phones replace the MP3 player in your pocket? The music down

load market has been growing steadily since record firms embraced digital distribution. Ease of use, relative low price and increased access to broadband has helped drive the phenomenal growth of MP3 players. Full-length music downloads on mobile phones have not taken off so quickly - held back by technical challenges as well as issues over music availability. But the mobile music industry is confident that the days of dedicated MP3 players are numbered. Gilles Babinet, chief executive of mobile music firm Musiwave, said: Music downloads on mobiles have the potential to be the biggest-ever medium for music." "Musiwave provides downloading infrastructure for the mobile phone market and Mr Babinet said the industry was enjoying ""definite momentum." "But there are hurdles to overcome. Mobile phones offer limited storage for music - certainly nothing to rival Apple's 60GB iPod. But the first mobile phones with hard disk players will be on the market soon and the current generation of mobiles using flash technology can store up to one gigabyte of music - enough for 250 songs. ""We are working in the hard disk area and we will be bringing out exciting devices," Jonas Guest, vice president for entertainment at Nokia, told the BBC News website. But will mobiles become mere storage devices? One of the problems we could have is that mobiles are used just for storage and playback while PCs are used for downloading", said Mr Babinet. We don't want people to cast aside their PCs - we want mobile users to hook up into the existing ecosystems," explained Mr Guest. You must enable people to transfer music from a PC to a handset and vice versa." "One of the key elements of the Nokia and Microsoft deal is the agreed ability to transfer songs between a handset and a PC. Microsoft will adopt open standards allowing music to cross boundaries for the first time. Songs can be downloaded on PC or mobile and transferred between the platforms. ""The line between online and wireless is going to blur", predicted Ted Cohen, senior vice president of digital development and distribution at EMI. He said: The market is more regional in its maturity. In Asia it is beyond belief. ""The majority of our digital revenues in Asia comes from mobiles. In North America it is fixed line while there is equilibrium in Europe." "EMI currently offers its entire 200", "000 download catalogue for use by both by PCs and mobile phones. Mr Cohen said: ""It's going to be just as important to connect through 3G or wireless as it is through your PC. ""We want music to be a continuum." "The seamless experience of mobiles and PC downloads is approaching", he predicted. Mr Babinet said the mobile phone had a number of advantages over PCs which would see it become the focus for music downloading in the future. ""Getting music from your PC onto a device is not an easy experience. You have to switch the PC on", load the operating system, load the program, buy the music, download the music," and then transfer the music. ""All of these steps can be done in one step on a mobile phone." "He said the mobile phone's billing system would make it easier for teenagers to embrace downloads", because pre-paid cards were already accepted by the age group. ""Certainly", we have a problem with battery," memory and bandwidth. But it's not about the current status. It's about the potential. ""You will have all of your music on your mobile." "All three men said that the social interaction of mobile music would drive the market. Mr Cohen said: ""I can send you the song and it is either billed to me or I send it to you and if you listen to it and want to keep", it is billed to you. ""It's a social phenomenon." "Mr Babinet said: ""Today you use radio and TV to discover music. Tomorrow you will discover and consume music via one device - the mobile." "

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"tech 384.txt China 'ripe' for media explosion Asia is set to drive global media growth to 2008 and beyond", with China and India filling the two top spots, analysts have predicted. Japan, South Korea and Singapore

will also be strong players, but China's demographics give it the edge, a media conference in London heard. The world's most populous country - population 1.3b n - now has about 200 million middle-class consumers. Forty per cent fall in th e key 16 to 35-year-old demographic. As a result, it is attracting huge foreign investment in media and communications, analysts told the Financial Times New M edia and Broadcasting Conference last week. Interest in China among internation al media groups has surged in recent months after Beijing issued rules allowing foreign investment in joint-venture television, radio and film production compa nies. News Corporation, Viacom and Sony Pictures are among the big names involv ed in joint ventures with Chinese players. More than 700 million Chinese liste n to 1,000 radio stations, while 200 TV stations broadcast 2,900 channels. Chin a Central Television (CCTV), the state broadcaster, claims an audience of more than a billion people. Of the country's 360 million households, 100 million rec eive cable TV programmes. The rest could be a potential audience for satellite broadcasting which China plans to launch in 2006. The State Administration of R adio, Film and Television (SARFT), which regulates broadcasting, plans to move all programmes to digital by 2015. The continuing roll-out of new digital chann els has boosted demand for quality content, creating significant opportunities for both Chinese and foreign content providers. But according to recent report s from China," the authorities have tightened controls over foreign investment in TV production joint ventures. It has limited most foreign companies to only one joint venture and banned the involvement of any found to be ""unfriendl y"""," according to reports. The SARFT said: ""There is a very strong ideologic al component to production of broadcast television programmes."" It added: ""Ch ina must understand the political tendencies and background of overseas partner s and prevent joint ventures or cooperation from bringing harmful foreign think ing or culture into our production sector."" According to the Financial Times' China correspondent", the new rules highlight the political sensitivities that surround foreign involvement in China's media sector. This is despite Beijing's decision to open the state-dominated sector to international investment. As we ll as traditional broadcasting, Chinese and foreign entrepreneurs alike see for tunes waiting to be made in new media, like mobile services and online gaming. Mobile games already account for 15% of revenues from China's 340 million mobil e users. Online gaming sales are predicted to top a billion US dollars next ye ar, according to the UK-based journal Screen Digest. The video market is also s een as a big opportunity, although piracy levels are still very high despite an anti-piracy drive during the past year. In the cinema industry the deployment o f digital screens is being accelerated. This is not just to modernise venues bu t also to curb piracy and regulate distribution. Li Ruigang, president of the c ommercial broadcaster Shanghai Media Group," told the conference that China's n ew media market ""is already experiencing explosive growth"". It was particular ly strong in charged broadband services and mobile value-added services. Leadin g China-watcher", and founder of the CGA consultancy Jeanne-Marie Gescher," agr eed that the time was ripe for foreign media groups to tap China's huge media m arket potential. ""China's media are now driven by investors who do not care ho w people consume media - they just want people to consume more of it""," Mrs Ges cher concluded.

tech 385.txt Beckham virus spotted on the net Virus write rs are trading on interest in David Beckham to distribute their malicious ware s. Messages are circulating widely that purport to have evidence of the Englan d captain in a compromising position. But anyone visiting the website mentioned in the message will not see pictures of Mr Beckham but will have their computer infected by a virus. The pernicious program opens a backdoor on a computer so i t can be controlled remotely by malicious hackers. The appearance of the Beckh

am Windows trojan is just another example in a long line of viruses that trade on interest in celebrities in an attempt to fuel their spread. Tennis player Anna Kournikova, popstars Britney Spears and Avril Lavigne as well as Arnold Schwarzenegger have all been used in the past to try to con people into opening infected files. The huge amount of interest in Mr Beckham and his private life and the large number of messages posted to discussion groups on the net might mean that the malicious program catches a lot of people out. The public's appetite for salacious gossip about the private life of the Beckhams might lead some into an unpleasant computer infection", said Graham Cluley from anti-virus firm Sophos. Simply opening the message will not infect a user's PC. But anyone visiting the website it mentions who then downloads and opens the fake image file stored on that site will be infected. The program that installs itself is called the Hackarmy trojan and it tries to recruit PCs into so-called 'bot networks that are often used to distribute spam mail messages or to launch attacks across the web. Computers running Microsoft Windows 95, 98, 2000, NT and XP are vulnerable to this trojan. Many anti-virus programs have been able to detect this trojan since it first appeared early this year and have regularly been updated to catch new variants.

tech 386.txt Video phones act as dating tools Technologies, from e-mail, to net chatrooms, instant messaging and mobiles, have proved to be a big pull with those looking for love. The lure once was that you could hide behind the technology, but now video phones are in on the act to add vision. Hundreds have submitted a mobile video profile to win a place at the world's first video mobile dating event. The top 100 meet their match on 30 November at London's Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA). The event, organised by the 3G network, 3, could catch on as the trend for unusual dating events, like speed dating, continues. It's the beginning of the end of the blind date as we know it", said Graeme Oxby, 3's marketing director. The response has been so promising that 3 says it is planning to launch a proper commercial dating service soon. Hundreds of hopefuls submitted their profiles, and special booths were set up in a major London department store for two weeks where expert tips were given on how to visually improve their chances. The 100 most popular contestants voted by the public will gather at the ICA in separate rooms and meet"" by phone. Dating services and other more adult match-making services are proving to be a strong stream of revenue worth millions for mobile companies. Whether it does actually provide an interesting match for video phone technologies remains to be seen. Flic Everett", journalist and dating expert for Company magazine and the Daily Express, thinks technology has been liberating for some nervous soul-mate seekers. There are currently about 1.3 million video phones in use in the UK and three times more single people in Britain than there were 30 years ago, With more people buying video mobiles," 3G dating could be the basis for a successful and safe way to meet people. ""One of the problems with video phones is people don't really know what to video. It is a weird technology. We have not quite worked out what it is for. This gives it a focus and a useful one", she told BBC News. I would never have thought online dating would take off the way it did," she said. Lots of people find it easier to be honest writing e-mail or text than face-to-face. Lots people are quite shy and they feel vulnerable." "When you are writing", it comes directly onto the page so they tend to be more honest." But the barrier that comes with SMS chat and online match-making is that the person behind the profile may not be who they really are. Scare stories have put people off as a result", according to Ms Everett. Many physical clues, body language, odd twitches," are obviously missing with SMS and online dating services. Still images do not necessarily provide all those necessary cues. ""It could really take off because you do get the whole package. With a static e-mail

l picture", "you don't know who the person is behind it is." "So checking out a potential date by video phone also gives singletons a different kind of barrier", "an extra layer of protection; a case of WLTS before WLTM. ""If you are trapped in real-life blind date context", "you can't get away and you feel embarrassed. ""With a video meeting", "you really have the barrier of the phone so if you don't like them you don't have to suffer the embarrassment." "There is a more serious side to this new use of technology though. With money being made through more adult-themes content and services which let people meet and chat", the revenue streams for mobile carriers will grow with 3G," thinks Paolo Pescatore mobile industry specialist for analysts IDC. ""Wireless is a medium that is being exploited with a number of features and services. One is chatting and the dating element is key there", "he said. The foundation has been set by SMS and companies are using media like MMS and video to grow the market further." "But carriers need to be wary and ensure that if they do launch such 3G dating services", they ensure mechanism are in place to monitor and be aware who is registers and accesses these services on regular basis, he cautioned. In July, Vodafone introduced a content control system to protect children from such adult content. The move was as a result of a code of practice agreed by the UK's six largest mobile phone operators in January. The system means Vodafone users need to prove they are over 18 before firewalls are lifted on explicit websites or chat rooms dealing with adult themes. The impetus was the growing number of people with handsets that could access the net, and the growth of 3G technologies.

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"tech 387.txt Progress on new internet domains By early 2005 the net could have two new domain names. The .post and .travel net domains have been given preliminary approval by the net's administrative body. The names are just two of a total of 10 proposed domains that are being considered by the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers", Icann. The other proposed names include a domain for pornography, Asia, mobile phones, an anti-spam domain and one for the Catalan language and culture. The .post domain is backed by the Universal Postal Union that wants to use it as the online marker for every type of postal service and to help co-ordinate the e-commerce efforts of national post offices. The .travel domain would be used by hotels, travel firms, airlines, tourism offices and would help such organisations distinguish themselves online. It is backed by a New York-based trade group called The Travel Partnership. Icann said its early decision on the two domains was in response to the detailed technical and commercial information the organisations behind the names had submitted. Despite this initial approval, Icann cautioned that there was no guarantee that the domains would actually go into service. At the same time Icann is considering proposals for another eight domains. One that may not win approval is a proposal to set up a .xxx domain for pornographic websites. A similar proposal has been made many times in the past. But Icann has been reluctant to approve it because of the difficulty of making pornographers sign up and use it. In 2000 Icann approved seven other new domains that have had varying degrees of success. Three of the new so-called top level domains were for specific industries or organisations such as .museum and .aero. Others such as .info and .biz were intended to be more generic. In total there are in excess of 200 domain names and the majority of these are for nations. But domains that end in the .com suffix are by far the most numerous.

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"tech 388.txt Camera phones are 'must-haves' Four times more mobiles with cameras in them will be sold in Europe by the end of 2004 than

last year", says a report from analysts Gartner. Globally, the number sold will reach 159 million," an increase of 104%. The report predicts that nearly 70% of all mobile phones sold will have a built-in camera by 2008. Improving imaging technology in mobiles is making them an increasingly ""must-have"" buy. In Europe", cameras on mobiles can take 1.3 megapixel images. But in Japan and Asia Pacific, where camera phone technology is much more advanced, mobiles have already been released which can take 3.2 megapixel images. Japan still dominates mobile phone technology, and the uptake there is huge. By 2008, according to Gartner, 95% of all mobiles sold there will have cameras on them. Camera phones had some teething problems when they were first launched as people struggled with poor quality images and uses for them, as well as the complexity and expense of sending them via MMS (Multimedia Messaging Services). This has changed in the last 18 months. Handset makers have concentrated on trying to make phones easier to use. Realising that people like to use their camera phones in different ways, they have introduced more design features, like rotating screens and viewfinders, removable memory cards and easier controls to send picture messages. Mobile companies have introduced more ways for people to share photos with other people. These have included giving people easier ways to publish them on websites, or mobile blogs - moblogs. But the report suggests that until image quality increases more, people will not be interested in printing out pictures at kiosks. Image sensor technology inside cameras phones is improving. The Gartner report suggests that by mid-2005, it is likely that the image resolution of most camera phones will be more than two megapixels. Consumer digital cameras images range from two to four megapixels in quality, and up to six megapixels on a high-end camera. But a lot of work is being done to make camera phones more like digital cameras. Some handsets already feature limited zoom capability, and manufacturers are looking into technological improvements that will let people take more photos in poorly-lit conditions, like nightclubs. Other developments include wide-angle modes, basic editing features, and better sensors and processors for recording film clips. Images from camera phones have even made it into the art world. An exhibition next month in aid of the charity Mencap, will feature snaps taken from the camera phones of top artists. The exhibition, Fonetography, will feature images taken by photographers David Bailey, Rankin and Nan Goldin, and artists Sir Peter Blake, Tracey Emin and Jack Vettriano. But some uses for them have worried many organisations. Intel, Samsung, the UK's Foreign Office and Lawrence Livermore National Laboratories in the US, have decided to ban camera phones from their buildings for fear of sensitive information being snapped and leaked. Many schools, fitness centres and local councils have also banned them over fears about privacy and misuse. Italy's information commissioner has also voiced concern and has issued guidelines on where and how the phones can be used. But camera phone fears have not dampened the manufacturers' profits. According to recent figures, Sony Ericsson's profits tripled in the third-quarter because of new camera phones. Over 60% of mobiles sold during the three months through to September featured integrated cameras, it said.

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"tech 389.txt Mobile multimedia slow to catch on There is no doubt that mobile phones sporting cameras and colour screens are hugely popular. Consumers swapping old phones for slinkier", dinkier versions are thought to be responsible for a 26% increase in the number of phones sold during the third quarter of 2004, according to analysts Gartner More than 167 million handsets were sold globally between July and September 2004, a period that," according to Gartner analyst Carolina Milanesi is ""seldom strong"". But although consumers have mobiles that can take and send snaps", sounds and video clips few, so

far, are taking the chance to do so. In fact, the numbers of people not taking and sending pictures, audio and video is growing. Figures gathered by Continental Research shows that 36% of British camera phone users have never sent a multimedia message (MMS), up from 7% in 2003. This is despite the fact that, during the same period, the numbers of camera phones in the UK more than doubled to 7.5 million. Getting mobile phone users to send multimedia messages is really important for operators keen to squeeze more cash out of their customers and offset the cost of subsidising the handsets people are buying. The problem they face, said Shaileendra Jain, head of MMS firm Adamind, "is educating people in how to send the multimedia messages using their funky handsets. ""Also," he said, they have to simplify the interface so its not rocket science in terms of someone understanding it." Research bears out the suspicion that people are not sending multimedia messages because they do not know how to. According to Continental Research", 29% of the people it questioned said they were technophobes that tended to shy away from innovation. Only 11% regarded themselves as technically savvy enough to send a picture or video message. The fact that multimedia services are not interoperable across networks and phones only adds to people's reluctance to start sending them," said Mr Jain. ""They ask themselves: 'If I'm streaming video from one handset to another will it work?'" he said. ""There's a lot of user apprehension about that." There are other deeper technical reasons why multimedia messages are not being pushed as strongly as they might. Andrew Bud", executive chairman of messaging firm Mblox," said mobile phone operators cap the number of messages that can be circulating at any one time for fear of overwhelming the system. ""The rate we can send MMS into the mobile network is fairly constant," he said. The reason for this is that there are finite capacities for data traffic on the second generation networks that currently have the most users. No-one wants to take the risk of swamping these relatively narrow channels so the number of MMS messages is capped, said Mr Bud. This has led to operators finding other technologies, particularly one known as Wap-push, to get multimedia to their customers. But when networks do find a good way to get multimedia to their customers, the results can be dramatic. Israeli technology firm Celltick has found a way to broadcast data across phone networks in a way that does not overwhelm existing bandwidth. One of the first firms to use the Celltick service is Hutch India, the largest mobile firm in the country. The broadcast system gets multimedia to customers via a rolling menu far faster than would be possible with other systems. While not multimedia messaging, such a system gets people used to seeing their phones as a device that can handle all different types of content. As a result 40% of the subscribers to the Hutch Alive, which uses Celltick's broadcast technology, regularly click for more pictures, sounds and images from the operator. Operators really need to start utilising this tool to reach their customers", said Yaron Toren, spokesman for Celltick. Until then, multimedia will be a message that is not getting through.

tech 390.txt Anti-spam laws bite spammer hard The net's self-declared spam king is seeking bankruptcy protection. Scott Richter, the man behind OptInRealBig.com and billions of junk mail messages, said lawsuits had forced the company into Chapter 11. OptInRealBig was fighting several legal battles, most notably against Microsoft, which is pushing for millions of dollars in damages. The company said filing for Chapter 11 would help it try to resolve its legal problems but still keep trading. Listed as the third biggest spammer in the world by junk mail watchdog Spamhaus, OptInRealBig was sued in December 2003 for sending mail messages that violated anti-spam laws. The lawsuit was brought by Microsoft and New York attorney general Eliot Spitzer who alleged that Mr Richter and his accomplices sent billions of spam messages through 514 compromised net addresses in 35 countries. According to Microsoft the messages were

sent via net addresses owned by the Kuwait Ministries of Communication and Finance, several Korean schools, the Seoul Municipal Boramae Hospital, and the Virginia Community College System. Mr Richter settled the attorney general case in July 2004 but the legal fight with Microsoft is continuing. Microsoft is seeking millions in dollars in damages from OptInRealBig under anti-spam laws that impose penalties for every violation. In a statement announcing the desire to seek bankruptcy protection the company said it: could not continue to contend with legal maneuvers (sic) by a number of companies across the country", including Microsoft," and still run a viable business." In its Chapter 11 filing OptInRealBig claimed it had assets of less than \$10m (£5.29m) but debts of more than \$50m which included the \$46m that Microsoft is seeking via its lawsuit. ""The litigation has been a relentless distraction with which to contend", said Steven Richter, legal counsel for OptInRealBig. But", make no mistake," we do expect to prevail." For its part OptInRealBig describes itself as a premier internet marketing company and said the move to seek Chapter 11 was necessary to let it keep trading while sorting out its legal battles.

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"tech 391.txt Peer-to-peer nets 'here to stay' Peer-to-peer (P2P) networks are here to stay", and are on the verge of being exploited by commercial media firms, says a panel of industry experts. Once several high-profile legal cases against file-sharers are resolved this year, firms will be very keen to try and make money from P2P technology. The expert panel probed the future of P2P at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas earlier in January. The first convictions for P2P piracy were handed out in the US in January. William Trowbridge and Michael Chicoine pleaded guilty to charges that they infringed copyright by illegally sharing music, movies and software. Since the first successful file-sharing network Napster was forced to close down, the entertainment industry has been nervous and critical of P2P technology, blaming it for falling sales and piracy. But that is going to change very soon, according to the panel. The music and film industries have started some big legal cases against owners of legitimate P2P networks - which are not illegal in themselves - and of individuals accused of distributing pirated content over networks. But they have slowly realised that P2P is a good way to distribute content, said Travis Alanick, founder and chairman of P2P network Red Swoosh," and soon they are all going to want a slice of it. They are just waiting to come up with ""business models"" that work for them", which includes digital rights management and copy-protection standards. But, until the legal actions are resolved, experimentation with P2P cannot not happen, said Michael Weiss, president of StreamCast Networks. Remembering the furore around VCRs when they first came out," Mr Weiss said: ""Old media always tries to stop new media. ""When they can't stop it", they try to control it. Then they figure out how to make money and they always make a lot of money." Once the courts decided that the VCR in itself was not an illegal technology", the film studios turned it into an extremely lucrative business. In August 2004, the San Francisco-based US Court of Appeals ruled in favour of Grokster and StreamCast, two file-sharing networks. The court said they were essentially in the same position that Sony was in the 1980s VCR battle, and said that the networks themselves could not be deemed as illegal. P2P networks usually do not rely on dedicated servers for the transfer of files. Instead it uses direct connections between computers - or clients. There are now many different types of P2P systems than work in different ways. P2P nets can be used to share any kind of file, like photos, free software, licensed music and any other digital content. The BBC has already decided to embrace the technology. It aims to offer most of its own programmes for download this year and it will use

P2P technology to distribute them. The files would be locked seven days after a programme aired making rights management easier to control. But the technology is still demonised and misunderstood by many. The global entertainment industry says more than 2.6 billion copyrighted music files are downloaded every month, and about half a million films are downloaded a day. Legal music download services, like Apple iTunes, Napster, have rushed into the music marketplace to try and lure file-sharers away from free content. Sales of legally-downloaded songs grew tenfold in 2004, with 200 million tracks bought online in the US and Europe in 12 months, the IFPI reported this week. But such download services are very different from P2P networks, not least because of the financial aspect. There are several money-spinning models that could turn P2P into a golden egg for commercial entertainment companies. Paid-for-pass-along, in which firms receive money each time a file is shared," along with various DRM solutions and advertiser-based options are all being considered. ""We see there are going to be different models for commoditising P2P", said Marc Morgenstern, vice president of anti-piracy firm Overpeer. Consumers are hungry for it and we will discover new models together", agreed Mr Morgenstern. But many net users will continue to ignore the entertainment industry's potential controlling grip on content and P2P technology by continuing to use it for their own creations. Unsigned bands, for example, use P2P networks to distribute their music effectively, which also draws the attention of record companies looking for new artists to sign. Increasingly", what you are seeing on P2P is consumer-created content," said Derek Broes, from Microsoft. They will probably play an increasing role in helping P2P spread", he said. Looking into P2P's future, file sharing is just the beginning for P2P networks, as far as Mr Broes is concerned. Once some of these issues are resolved", you are going to see aggressive movement to protect content, but also in ways that are unimaginable now," he said. File-sharing is the tip of the iceberg."

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"tech 392.txt Broadband fuels online expression Fast web access is encouraging more people to express themselves online", research suggests. A quarter of broadband users in Britain regularly upload content and have personal sites, according to a report by UK think-tank Demos. It said that having an always-on, fast connection is changing the way people use the internet. More than five million households in the UK have broadband and that number is growing fast. The Demos report looked at the impact of broadband on people's net habits. It found that more than half of those with broadband logged on to the web before breakfast. One in five even admitted to getting up in the middle of the night to browse the web. More significantly, argues the report, broadband is encouraging people to take a more active role online. It found that one in five post something on the net everyday," ranging from comments or opinions on sites to uploading photographs. ""Broadband is putting the 'me' in media as it shifts power from institutions and into the hands of the individual", said John Craig, co-author of the Demos report. From self-diagnosis to online education", broadband creates social innovation that moves the debate beyond simple questions of access and speed." The Demos report", entitled Broadband Britain: The End Of Asymmetry?", was commissioned by net provider AOL. ""Broadband is moving the perception of the internet as a piece of technology to an integral part of home life in the UK", said Karen Thomson, Chief Executive of AOL UK, with many people spending time on their computers as automatically as they might switch on the television or radio." According to analysts Nielsen//NetRatings", more than 50% of the 22.8 million UK net users regularly accessing the web from home each month are logging on at high speed They spend twice as long online tha

n people on dial-up connections, viewing an average of 1,444 pages per month. The popularity of fast net access is growing, partly fuelled by fierce competition over prices and services.

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"tech 393.txt Savvy searchers fail to spot ads Internet search engine users are an odd mix of naive and sophisticated", suggests a report into search habits. The report by the US Pew Research Center reveals that 87% of searchers usually find what they were looking for when using a search engine. It also shows that few can spot the difference between paid-for results and organic ones. The report reveals that 84% of net users say they regularly use Google, Ask Jeeves, MSN and Yahoo when online. Almost 50% of those questioned said they would trust search engines much less, if they knew information about who paid for results was being hidden. According to figures gathered by the Pew researchers the average user spends about 43 minutes per month carrying out 34 separate searches and looks at 1.9 webpages for each hunt. A significant chunk of net users, 36%, carry out a search at least weekly and 29% of those asked only look every few weeks. For 44% of those questioned, the information they are looking for is critical to what they are doing and is information they simply have to find. Search engine users also tend to be very loyal and once they have found a site they feel they can trust tend to stick with it. According to Pew Research 44% of searchers use just a single search engine, 48% use two or three and a small number, 7%, consult more than three sites. Tony Macklin, spokesman for Ask Jeeves, said the results reflected its own research which showed that people use different search engines because the way the sites gather information means they can provide different results for the same query. Despite this linking for search sites half of those questioned said they could get the same information via other routes. A small number, 17%, said they wouldn't really miss search engines if they did not exist. The remaining 33% said they could not live without search sites. More than two-thirds of those questioned, 68%, said they thought that the results they were presented with were a fair and unbiased selection of the information on a topic that can be found on the net. Alongside the growing sophistication of net users is a lack of awareness about paid-for results that many search engines provide alongside lists of websites found by indexing the web. Of those asked, " 62% were unaware that someone has paid for some of the results they see when they carry out a search. Only 18% of all searchers say they can tell which results are paid for and which are not. Said the Pew report: ""This finding is ironic", since nearly half of all users say they would stop using search engines if they thought engines were not being clear about how they presented paid results." Commenting Mr Macklin said sponsored results must be clearly marked and though they might help with some queries user testing showed that people need to be able to spot the difference.

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"tech 394.txt TV's future down the phone line Internet TV has been talked about since the start of the web as we know it now. But any early attempts to do it - the UK's Home Choice started in 1992 - were thwarted by the lack of a fast network. Now that broadband networks are bedding down", and it is becoming essential for millions, the big telcos are keen to start shooting video down the line. In the face of competition from cable companies offering net voice calls, they are keen to be the top IPTV dogs. Software giant Microsoft thinks IPTV - Internet Protocol TV - is the future of television," and it sits neatly with its vision of the ""connected entertainment experience""." Telcos have been wanting to do video for a long time", Ed Graczyk, director of mark

eting for Microsoft IPTV, told the BBC News website. The challenge has been the broadband network", "and the state of technology up until not so long ago did not add up to a feasible solution. ""Compression technology was not efficient enough", "the net was not good enough. A lot of stars have aligned in the last 18 months to make it a reality." "Last year", he said, "was all about deal making and partnering up; shaping the ""IPTV ecosystem"". This year", "those deals will start to play out and more services will come online. ""2006 is where it starts ramping up and expanding to other geographies - over time as broadband becomes more prevalent in South America", and other parts of Asia, it will expand," he added. What telcos really want to do is to send the triple-play"" of video", voice, and data down one single line," be it cable or DSL (Digital Subscriber Line). Some are talking about ""quadruple play""", too, with mobile services added into the mix. It is an emerging new breed of competition for satellite and cable broadcasters and operators. According to technology analysts, TDG Research, there will be 20 million subscribers to IPTV services in under six years. Key to the appeal of sending TV programmes down the same line as the web data, whenever a viewer wants it," is that it uses the same technology as the internet. It means there is not just a one-way relationship between the viewer and the ""broadcaster""". This allows for more DVD-like interactivity", limitless storage and broadcast space," bespoke channel ""playlists""", and thousands of hours of programmes or films at a viewer's fingertips. It potentially lets operators target programmes to smaller, niche or localised audiences, sending films to Bollywood fans for instance, as well as individual devices. Operators could also send high-definition programmes straight to the viewer, bypassing the need for a special broadcast receiver. Perhaps most compelling - yet some might say insignificant - is instantaneous channel flicking. Currently, there is a delay when you try to do this on satellite, cable or Freeview. With IPTV," the speed is 15 milliseconds. ""That gets rounds of applause", according to Mr Graczyk. Microsoft is one of the companies that started thinking about IPTV some time ago. We believe this will be the way all TV is delivered in the future - but that is several years away, said Mr Graczyk. As with music," TV has moved to digital formats. ""The things software can do to integrate media into devices means a whole new generation of connected entertainment experiences that cross devices from the TV", to the mobile," to the gaming console and so on." "The company intends its Microsoft's IPTV Edition software", an end-to-end management and delivery platform, to let telcos to do exactly that, seamlessly. It has netted seven major telcos as customers, representing a potential audience of 25 million existing broadband subscribers. Its deal with US telco SBC was the largest TV software deal to date, said Mr Graczyk. IPTV is about more than telcos, though. There are several web-based offerings that aim to put control in the hands of the consumer by exploiting the net's power. Jeremy Allaire, chief of Brightcove," told the BBC News website that it would be a flavour of IPTV that was about harnessing the web as a ""channel""". ""It is not just niches", but about exploiting content not usually viewed, he said. We are focussed on the owners of video content who have rights to digitally distribute content," and who often see unencumbered distribution. ""For them to do it through cable and so on is price-prohibitive", he said. This type of IPTV service might also be a distribution channel for more established publishers who have unique types of content that they cannot offer through cable and satellite operators - history channel archives, for instance. What is a clear sign that IPTV has a future is that Microsoft is not the only player in the field. There are a lot of other middleware"" players providing similar management services as Microsoft", like Myrio and C-Cor. But it will up to the viewer to decide if it really is to be successful.

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tech 395.txt Cebit fever takes over Hanover Thousands of products and tens of thousands of visitors make CeBIT the place to be for technology lovers. ""Welcome to CeBIT 2005"" was the message from the pilot as we landed", the message on flyers at the airport, and the message on just about every billboard in town. CeBIT fever has taken over Hanover. Hotels have been booked out for months; local people are letting out rooms in their homes to the hoards of exhibitors, visitors, and journalists. CeBIT itself is huge, the exhibition site could almost be classified as a town in its own right. There are restaurants, shops, and a bus service between the halls - of which there are 27. There are more than 6,000 companies here, showing their latest products. The list of them that I was given when I came in is the size and weight of a phone book. One of the main themes this year is the digital home," and one of the key buzz words is convergence. The ""entertainment PC"" is being billed as the replacement for DVD players", stereos, telephones and computers - offering a one-box solution, wirelessly connected throughout a house. To show them off," one display has been modelled as a prototype ""digital lifestyle home"" by German magazine Computer Reseller News. ""We wanted to show how this fits into a living room or workplace", to give people a feeling how it would work in their homes," said Claudia Neulling from the magazine. The house has webcams for security in each room, which can be called up on the high definition TV, connected to the PC in the living room. That PC provides home entertainment, movies or music. It can also be linked to the car parked outside, which is kitted out with a processor of its own, along with a DVD player and cordless headphones for the kids in the back. Convergence for me is about how technology", the transfer of data, can do things that make it easier and more convenient for me as a consumer," said Mark Brailey, director of corporate marketing for Intel. The real challenge is to show people it's easier than they think"," and fun." He firmly believes that entertainment PCs are the future", but says they have to get past people's fears of frequent crashes and incompatibilities. That is something Microsoft is trying to do too - its stand has computers running Windows XP Media Centre edition 2005 for people to try out. Mobile phones do not escape the convergence theme. Samsung is showing off its SGH-i300, a handset with a three gigabyte hard drive, that can be used to watch compressed video or as an MP3 player. And if you would rather watch live TV than a downloaded movie NEC is showing a phone, on sale in China," which can show analogue TV on its colour screen. ""I think the most probable application is at somewhere like the train station - if you want to check the status of the soccer game for example"" said Koji Umemoto", manager of mobile terminals marketing for NEC. He admitted that the signal quality is not very good if you are on the move, and they do not have plans to launch it in Europe at the moment. Nokia was happy to demonstrate its 6230i, an upgrade to the very popular 6230. It now has a 1.3 megapixel camera, and a music player that can handle multiple formats, rather than just MP3s. It is also compatible with Nokia's new Visual Radio technology. The handset can receive FM broadcasts, and the user can interact with compatible broadcasts using a GPRS connection, to take part in competitions or get extra information such as the name of the song playing. Most companies are reluctant to show prototypes, preferring to display products that are already on sale, or just about to hit the market. Portable media player firm Creative showed off a new wireless technology," based on magnetic inductance rather than radio - a system some hearing aids use. ""The benefits over conventional Bluetooth are the lack of interference", and longer battery life," said Riccardo de Rinaldini, Creative's European marketing manager. The firm has a prototype headset linked up to a Zen Micro player. The transmitter on the player creates a private, magnetic bubble"" around the user", which is pi

cked up by the headset. The range is only about one metre so it is only suitable for personal use. A single AAA battery is said to last up to 30 hours. Creative expects it to hit the market in its final form later this year. Even clothing is likely to be part of the convergence trend. Adidas has a trainer which, according to Susanne Risse from the company, "can ""sense", understand," and adapt to your running style"". It has a battery", processor, and motor embedded in the sole. Buttons on the side allow you to set the amount of cushioning you would like by adjusting the tension on a cable running through the heel. The processor then monitors the surface you are running on," and adjusts the tension accordingly. It is being billed as ""the world's first intelligent shoe"".

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"tech 396.txt New consoles promise big problems Making games for future consoles will require more graphic artists and more money", an industry conference has been told. Sony," Microsoft and Nintendo will debut their new consoles at the annual E3 games Expo in Los Angeles in May. These so-called ""next generation"" machines will be faster than current consoles", and capable of displaying much higher-quality visuals. For gamers, this should make for better, more immersive games. In a pre-recorded video slot during Microsoft's keynote address at the Game Developers Conference, held last week in San Francisco," famed director James Cameron revealed he is making a game in tandem with his next film - believed to be Battle Angel Alita. The game's visual quality would be ""like a lucid dream",," said Mr Cameron. But numerous speakers warned that creating such graphics will require more artists, and so next generation console games will be much more expensive to develop. The first new console, Microsoft's Xbox 2, is not expected to reach the shops until the end of 2005. Games typically take at least 18 months to create, however, so developers are grappling with the hardware today. According to Robert Walsh, head of Brisbane-based game developer Krome Studios, next generation games will cost between \$10-25m to make, with teams averaging 80 staff in size taking two years to complete a title. Such sums mean it will be difficult for anyone to start a new game studio, said Mr Walsh. If you're a start-up", I doubt that a publisher is going to walk in and give you a cheque for \$10m, however good you are," he said. Mr Walsh suggested that new studios should make games for mobile phones and handheld consoles like the Sony PSP and the Nintendo DS, since they are cheaper and easier to create than console games. One developer bucking the trend towards big art teams is Will Wright, the creator of the best-selling The Sims games. The founder of California's Maxis studio surprised the conference with a world exclusive preview of his next game, Spore. Spore will allow players to experiment with the evolution of digital creatures. Starting with an amoeba-sized organism, the player will guide the physical development of their creature by selecting how its limbs, jaws and other body parts evolve. Eventually the creature will become capable of establishing cities, trading and fighting, and even building space ships. Advanced players will visit the home planets of creatures created by other Spore players. These worlds will be automatically swapped across the Internet. Mr Wright said that enabling players to devise and share their creatures would make them care more about the game. I don't want to put the player in the role of Luke Skywalker or Frodo Baggins - I want them to be George Lucas or Dr Seuss",," explained Mr Wright. Few games have hinted at the scope of Spore, but Mr Wright explained that he has nevertheless kept his development team small by hiring expert programmers. Instead of employing lots of artists to create 3D models of the digital creatures, Spore generates and displays the creatures according to rules devised by the programmers. The thing I am coming away with [from the conference] is that next generation content is going to be really expensive",

and creating it will drive the smaller players out of the market," said Mr Wright. I'd like to offer an alternative to that." " New development tools will be another important aid in making next generation games", and dozens of companies demonstrated their latest products at the conference. Oxford-based Natural Motion launched Endorphin v2.0, which enables artists to direct a 3D 'virtual actor'. The actor is realistically modelled according to the laws of physics. Endorphin simulates how the actor falls down stairs, for instance, or crumples up after a gunshot. Artists can blend together these visual sequences, and include the results in their games. The process is much quicker than having an artist animate each movement by hand, and so lessens the need for larger art teams. Another British company aiming to reduce the workload of artists is Manchester start-up Genemation. Its latest tool, GenCrowd, enables artists to create unique, photo-realistic human faces for games involving lots of people. GenCrowd works by blending together elements of an in-built supply of stock faces of differing ages and ethnicities. The software can create up to 2,000 new heads an hour. One area not yet dominated by graphical blockbusters is mobile phone games. Even the latest phones are not as powerful as the consoles of a decade ago, so smaller teams of half a dozen people can still create complete games for the devices. The Game Developers Conference included a special two-day summit dedicated to creating mobile games. A niche attraction for a few dozen conference attendees when it began five years ago, GDC's Mobile summit this year drew several hundred delegates. Mobile games are a fast-growing sector because newer phones have better graphics and sound, and are thus more suitable for playing games. Furthermore, the adoption of mobile phones continues to spread across the world. It's predicted that by 2006 two billion people will own a mobile phone. The growing importance of mobile gaming was reflected by a keynote given by John Batter, general manager at EA Mobile. EA Mobile is a division of Electronic Arts," the biggest games publisher. Until recently Electronic Arts had been dismissive of games for phones. ""The last time you checked", EA wasn't in this business," Mr Batter admitted. But he said EA now planned on dominating the market by releasing mobile versions of its most popular franchises. EA plans to release up to 20 mobile games over the next 12 months. The first will be a version of its Need for Speed racing game, created by EA Mobile's 30-person development team. Mr Batter predicted that by 2006, mobile phones would be capable of running games of comparable quality to those on Sony's upcoming PSP handheld console. Owain Bennallack is the editor of Develop magazine.

tech 397.txt BT program to beat dialler scams BT is introducing two initiatives to help beat rogue dialler scams, which can cost dial-up net users thousands. From May, dial-up net users will be able to download free software to stop computers using numbers not on a user's pre-approved list". I inadvertently downloaded by surfers", rogue diallers are programs which hijack modems and dial up a premium rate number when users log on. Thousands of UK dial-up users are believed to have been hit by the scam. Some people have faced phone bills of up to £2,000. BT's Modem Protection program will check numbers that are dialled by a computer and will block them if they have not been pre-approved, such as national and net service provider numbers. Icstis, the UK's premium rate services watchdog," said it had been looking for companies to take the lead in initiatives. ""The initiatives are very welcome", a spokesperson from Icstis told the BBC News website. We are very pleased to see they are putting in to place new measures to protect consumers." " The second initiative BT announced is an early warning system which will alert BT customers if there is unusual activity on their phone bills. If a bill rises substantially above its usual daily average", or if a call is made to a suspect number, a text or voice alert will be sent to the user's landline phone. As part of the clamp-down on rogue di

allers, companies must now satisfy stringent conditions, including clear terms and conditions, information about how to delete diallers and responsibility for customer refunds. Any firm running a dialler without permission can now be closed down by Icstis. The watchdog brought in the action last October following a decision to license all companies which wanted to operate legitimate premium rate dialler services. There are legitimate companies who offer services such as adult content, sports results and music downloads by charging a premium rate rather than by credit card BT said it had ploughed an enormous amount of effort into protecting people from the problem. It has already barred more than 1,000 premium rate numbers and has tried to raise public awareness about the scams.

"We now want to ensure there are even stronger safeguards for our customers", who we would urge to make use of these new options to protect themselves," said Gavin Patterson, group managing director for consumer the arm of BT. Both schemes have been undergoing trials in Ireland, and will be made available to 20 million BT customers from May.

tech 398.txt Spam e-mails tempt net shoppers Computer users across the world continue to ignore security warnings about spam e-mails and are being lured into buying goods, a report suggests. More than a quarter have bought software through spam e-mails and 24% have bought clothes or jewellery. As well as profiting from selling goods or services and driving advertising traffic, organised crime rings can use spam to glean personal information. The Business Software Alliance (BSA) warned that people should stay alert". "Many online consumers don't consider the true motives of spammers", said Mike Newton, a spokesperson for the BSA which commissioned the survey. By selling software that appears to be legitimate in genuine looking packaging or through sophisticated websites", spammers are hiding spyware without consumers' knowledge. "Once the software is installed on PCs and networks", information that is given over the internet can be obtained and abused." The results also showed that the proportion of people reading - or admitting to reading - and taking advantage of adult entertainment spam e-mails is low", at one in 10. The research, which covered 6,000 people in six countries and their attitudes towards junk e-mails, revealed that Brazilians were the most likely to read spam. A third of them read unsolicited junk e-mail and 66% buy goods or services after receiving spam. The French were the second most likely to buy something (48%), with 44% of Britons taking advantage of products and services. This was despite 38% of people in all countries being worried about their net security because of the amount of spam they get. More than a third of respondents said they were concerned that spam e-mails contained viruses or programs that attempted to collect personal information. "Both industry and the media have helped to raise awareness of the issues that surround illegitimate e-mail", helping to reduce the potential financial damage and nuisance from phishing attacks and spoof websites," said William Plante, director of corporate security and fraud protection at security firm Symantec. At the same time", consumers need to continue exercising caution and protect themselves from harm with a mixture of spam filters," spyware detection software and sound judgement."

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"tech 399.txt Be careful how you code A new European directive could put software writers at risk of legal action", warns former programmer and technology analyst Bill Thompson. If it gets its way, the Dutch government will conclude its presidency of the European Union by pushing through a controversial measure that has been rejected by the European Parliament, lacks majority support from national governments and will leave millions of European citizens in legal limbo and facing the possibility of court cases against them. I

f the new law was about border controls, defence or even the new constitution, then our TV screens would be full of experts agonising over the impact on our daily lives. Sadly for those who will be directly affected, the controversy concerns the patenting of computer programs, a topic that may excite the bloggers, campaigning groups and technical press but does not obsess Middle Britain. After all, how much fuss can you generate about the Directive on the Patentability of Computer-Implemented Inventions, and the way it amends Article 52 of the 1973 European Patent Convention? Yet if the new directive is nodded through at the next meeting of one of the EU's ministerial councils, as seems likely, it will allow programs to be patented in Europe just as they are in the US. Many observers of the computing scene, including myself, think the results will be disastrous for small companies, innovative programmers and the free and open source software movement. It will let large companies patent all sorts of ideas and give legal force to those who want to limit their competitors' use of really obvious ideas. In the US you cannot build a system that stores customer credit card details so that they can pay without having to re-enter them unless Amazon lets you," because they hold the patent on ""one-click"" online purchase. It is a small invention", but Amazon made it to the patent office first and now owns it. We are relatively free from this sort of thing over here, but perhaps not for long. The new proposals go back to 2002, although argument about patentability of software and computer-implemented inventions has been going on since at least the mid-1980s. They have come to a head now after a year in which proposals were made, endorsed by the Council of Ministers, radically modified by the European Parliament and then re-presented in their original form. Some national governments seem to be aware of the problems. Poland has rejected the proposal and Germany's main political parties have opposed it, but there is not enough opposition to guarantee their rejection. Early in December the British government held a consultation meeting with those who had commented on the proposals. Science Minister Lord Sainsbury went along to listen and outline the UK position, but according to those present," it was embarrassing to see how little the minister and his officials actually understood the issues concerned. The draft Directive is being put through the council as what is called an ""A"" item and can only be approved or rejected. No discussion or amendment is allowed. So why should we be worried? First", there is the abuse of the democratic process involved in disregarding the views of the parliament and abandoning all of their carefully argued amendments. This goes to the heart of the European project, and even those who do not care about software or patents should be worried. If coders are treated like this today, who is to say that it will not be you tomorrow? More directly, once software patents are granted then any programmer will have to worry that the code they are writing is infringing someone else's patent. This is not about stealing software, as code is already protected by copyright. Patents are not copyright, but something much stronger. A patent gives the owner the right to stop anyone else using their invention, even if the other person invented it separately. I have never, to my shame, managed to read Lord Byron's Childe Harold's Pilgrimage. If it was pointed out that one of my articles contained a substantial chunk of the poem then I could defend myself in court by claiming that I had simply made it up and it was coincidence. The same does not hold for a patent. If I sit down this afternoon and write a brilliant graphics compression routine and it happens to be the same as the LZW algorithm used in GIF files, then I am in trouble under patent law, at least in the US. Coincidence is no defense. The proposed directive is supported by many of the major software companies, but this is hardly surprising since most of them are US-based and they have already had to cope with a legal environment that allows patents. They have legal departments and, more crucially, patents of their own which they can trade off

r cross-license with other patent holders. Even this system breaks down, of course, as Microsoft found out last year when they initially lost a case brought by Eolas which claimed that Internet Explorer (and other browsers) infringed an Eolas patent. That one was eventually thrown out, but only after months of uncertainty and millions of dollars. But small companies, and the free and open software movement do not have any patents to trade. Much of the really useful software we use every day, programs like the Apache web server, the GNU/Linux operating system and the fearsomely popular Firefox browser, is developed outside company structures by people who do not have legal departments to check for patent infringements. The damage to software will not happen overnight, of course. If the directive goes through it has to be written into national laws and then there will be a steady stream of legal actions against small companies and open source products. Eventually someone will decide to attack Linux directly, probably with some secret funding from one or two large players. The new directive will limit innovation by forcing programmers to spend time checking for patent infringements or simply avoiding working in potentially competitive areas. And it will damage Europe's computer industry. We can only hope that the Council of Ministers has the integrity and strength to reject this bad law. Bill Thompson is a regular commentator on the BBC World Service programme Go Digital.

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"tech 400.txt US cyber security chief resigns The man making sure US computer networks are safe and secure has resigned after only a year in his post. Amit Yoran was director of the National Cyber Security Division within the US Department of Homeland Security created following the 9/11 attacks. The division was tasked with improving US defences against malicious hackers, viruses and other net-based threats. Reports suggest he left because his division was not given enough clout within the larger organisation. Mr Yoran took up his post in September 2003 and his first task was to get the Cyber Security Division up and running. The organisation had a staff of about 60 people and a budget of about \$80m (£44.54m). The division was charged with thinking up and carrying out action to make US networks more impervious to attack and disruption by the viruses, worms and hack attacks that have become commonplace. In the last 12 months Mr Yoran oversaw the creation of a cyber alert system that sends out warnings about big hitting viruses and net attacks as they occur. The warnings also contained information about how firms and organisations could protect themselves against these attacks. The Cyber Security Division also audited US government networks to discover exactly what was sitting on which network. The next step was to be the creation of a scanning system to identify vulnerabilities that made federal networks and machines susceptible to attack by malicious hackers and virus writers. Mr Yoran's division was also doing work to identify the networks and machines that had been broken into by cyber criminals. Despite this success Mr Yoran left his post abruptly at the end of last week," reportedly only giving one day's notice to bosses at the Department of Homeland Security. ""Amit Yoran has been a valuable contributor on cyber security issues over the past year", and we appreciate his efforts in starting the department's cyber security program," said a Department of Homeland Security spokeswoman. Some reports have suggested that Mr Yoran felt frustrated by the lack of prominence given to work to protect against net-based threats in the wider homeland organisation. An attempt by US politicians to pass a law to promote Mr Yoran and raise the profile of his department's work is now mired in Congress.

tech 401.txt Losing yourself in online gaming Online role playing games are time-consuming, but enthralling flights from reality. But are some people taking their fantasy lives too seriously? When video game World of

Warcraft hit the shops in Europe last week fans wrote in to the BBC website to express their delight - and to offer a warning. An addiction to a game like this is far more costly in time than any substance could impair - keep track of time", "wrote Travis Anderson, in Texas. Some of the comments were humorous: This game is so good I'm not going to get it", there's no way I could limit the hours I'd spend playing it," wrote Charles MacIntyre, from England. But some struck a more worrying tone about the Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game (MMORPG): 'You need to get out more' could be the motto of any MMORPG. Shame they are getting more popular", as you know this problem is just going to mushroom," wrote Stuart Stanton-Davies, in Huddersfield. Scare-mongering articles about addictive video games"" have existed since the days the first game of Pong stopped everyone from working at the Atari offices. Gaming is like any other pastime - it can quickly become an unhealthy obsession", whether it is spending too much time in the gym, in front of the television, or reading poetry. Unfortunately, gaming and addiction is a far too easy association to make. However, stories about gamers spending 10 to 15 hours a day in front of some video games are becoming more frequent. And the impact that is having on their families is quite distressing for some. Massively multiplayer online role playing games - MMORPGs - allow thousands of gamers to share a common experience of sharing fantasy or science fiction worlds. The scope of these games - like Warcraft, EverQuest, Ultima among others - is epic," and exploration and adventure is almost infinite. Part of the ""problem"" is grinding - by which gamers have to perform long-winded", mindless tasks, to bring up their levels and gain access to more adventure. Such open-endedness brings with it a desire to keep playing; not for no reason is EverQuest (EQ) nicknamed EverCrack. E Hayot, writing in the culture blogzine Print Culture," said recently: ""I used to play the online role-playing game EverQuest a lot. ""By 'a lot'", I mean probably 15 to 20 hours a week on average, and on weeks where I didn't have to work," as many as 30 or 40 hours." He says that in the world of online gaming such behaviour ""wasn't that unusual; lots of people I knew in the game played EQ that much""." You lie; you don't go into work because you ""had stuff to do at home""; you cancel or refuse invitations to dinner", you spend much less time watching TV (a good thing, presumably)," he wrote, explaining how EverQuest took over his time. He quit the game, he says, because he realised life was more fun than EverQuest. Let us be clear - such obsession is rare. But the huge growth in online gaming means a growth in the numbers of people who take their passion for a hobby too far. Almost 400,000 people bought a copy of World of Warcraft in the first two days on sale earlier this month. Only a fraction will descend into obsessives. The thoughts of families and friends of gamers who have been affected by EverQuest can be found on one blog EverQuest Daily Grind. Jane, who runs the website, compiles a chronicle of heart-rending stories. I am actually convinced at this point that there are more than 'some' people who spend more times in MMOPRGs than in reality", she said. One unnamed correspondent - all are anonymous - wrote: On the rare nights when my husband does come to bed at the same time as I do," I find that I am so used to sleeping by myself that it is difficult to get to sleep with another body laying next to me. ""I can't talk to him while he is playing. There is absolutely no point as he doesn't hear me or is so distracted that I get a 'ummm... ya' a few minutes after I ask him a question."""Gaming widows"" has become a comedic term for women who have been shut out by male gamers. But for some it is not in the least funny. Another correspondent wrote: ""I believe that he is addicted to the online gaming", and that is the cause of his depression and restlessness." And some of them are even sadder: ""Today our son was five days old. ""The sad truth is my husband spent 11 hours today playing his Warcraft game. He did not interact with our sweet tiny baby because there were i

mportant quests waiting online." Video game fans often complain that their hobby is misunderstood or marginalised. But as gaming becomes ever more mainstream", and games ever more immersive, there will be no hiding place for social problems. I wish 30-40 hours a week was unusual but I think it probably isn't. An 11 hour stretch isn't that surprising - I've known people to play 15+ hours at a stretch. I know of people who are spending their week's holiday from work playing Warcraft. I know of people who would play Ever[Crack] in shifts...waking at 3am to take over from their friends and resume waiting for an item they 'needed' to appear. I understand that the key sign of an addiction is if you alter your life around it rather than fit it into your life. By all standards many of us are addicts. So is the solution to force ourselves to stop playing..or do we just need to make real life a bit more interesting? Sadly with all the talk of people becoming obsessed with gaming, I find myself longing to have the time to join them. I have been in a long term relationship for over 4 years - since that began, games have become more and more complex. And more and more so I find I have less and less time to play them, with marriage and work being the main drag on my time. I think the line between playing a game a lot and a gaming addiction is really quite distinct. I play games a lot, definately over 20 hours a week, but I don't go missing work or other commitments in order to play games. I have, about a year ago, deleted every game on my computer. RPGs are the worst - the real world fades and all your worries sorround a new magic staff or mighty sword. Unlike books, or perhaps even TV, you gain absolutely nothing. When you stop playing you're at the same point as when you started; all the achievements of your 10 hour session are irretrievably locked in the game and, since you've gained nothing in the real world, you may as well pile on more achievement in the fake one. Despite having little monetary value," the ""rewards"" and encouragement offered by these MMORPGs is enough to hook games for hours daily. If only business could learn to leverage that very simply human need for easily measurable progress and recognition. Perhaps the unhealthily obsessed simply need more recognition for their achievements in reality? My advice to gaming widows is ""if you can't beat 'em"," join 'em"". That is", try playing it yourself. If he wants to play as well, well at least you'll be together somewhere... I was an addict and it cost me my relationship. I still play now, but without the guilt , hehe, How long have i played in one sitting? From morning till the early hours of the next day, the birds were singing out side and i had to hobble to the bath room cos my bladder was so full i was in pain, i would hardly eat, perhaps some toast, smoke endlessly and drink. Now, thankfully the fascination has worn off and I have a girlfriend but still no job. For the most part online gaming give me an adiction to illusory achievement, and as there is no end in sight you keep going for the mirage of the ultimate. Obsessive behaviour is, of course, always cause for concern," but it always bothers me when articles about gaming talk in terms of ""reality"". Obviously", somebody who spends thirty hours a week playing EverQuest has a problem. This problem, however," has nothing to do with a dysfunctional sense of reality. An obsessive EQ player does not consider the game to be ""real"" any more than - for example - an obsessive automotive tinkerer considers their car to be human. If MMORPGs have a unique danger", in terms of encouraging obsessive behaviour, it is not that they create an absorbing virtual world, but rather that they can be easily accessed 24/7. The problem here does not lie with the nature of gaming, but with the nature of modern 24 hour culture. The problem with these so called MMORPGS is that you can never really complete them, there's always another quest to do. A few of my friends have only had about 10 hours sleep since it was released friday... Championship Manager consumed my life for years. One particular session started at about 2pm on a Sunday," paused for a brief sleep at 5am on the Monday and af

ter visit to University for classes restarted at about midday for another 10 hour session. The people who tend to hark on about the problems of ""hardcore gaming"" seem to be those who have rarely allowed themselves to become immersed in a game. I would expect their perspective to change if they were to do that. I used to be an EverQuest addict while I was in college. It came to the point where the gaming world felt more real than the real one. I failed a lot of my courses and was able to barely graduate. I was lucky that I came to my senses when I did", others were less fortunate and dropped out of college. Now that I am holding a job, I avoid online RPGS like the plague. When I was made redundant I told my partner I had a new job for three months whilst every day I played EverQuest from 7:30am till 5:pm. When She came home I pretended I had just got in as well, hence justifying playing it all evening. I have since quit playing MMORPG and have a good job. When I got to the point where I was eating my dinner in front of the PC I realised things were getting silly so I'm trying not to spend so much time on there. It's not easy. I feel as if I've got a real addiction going on here. For me the problem is that I love to complete a goal. Once it is completed that is it, I am finished, time to move on. I become obsessed to complete the goal," so from that standpoint it is an addiction. In a game where you will never complete an ""ultimate"" goal"," well it would be like falling into a black pit. It is easier to escape into a controlled fantasy world than face reality at times - in other words the goal offered in the PC game are ""easier"" and more fun than the real world. Pretty scary implications if you think about it. I can't buy World of Warcraft as it would destroy my marriage", I just know it!! I played Star Wars Galaxies for about a year and can attest to the addictiveness of these games. They are all engineered in such a way that early on in the game you progress quickly, but this progress becomes exponentially slower, requiring more and more time to reach the next level. I'm sad to say that at the peak of my addiction I was spending entire weekends in front of my monitor, slowly building up my character, stopping only for food and toilet breaks. Thankfully I made a clean break, and actually managed to sell my Jedi account for £800 - which is my only sanity check in an otherwise completely unproductive time vacuum. Seven years ago, I began playing Ultima Online. This game dominated 2 years of my life. They were 2 wonderful years and I still have vivid memories of the experiences and friends I had. Online gaming can be a world of escapism where you can be yourself without fear of the thoughts of others. Something that cannot always be achieved in the day to day running of a normal life. Whilst I would warn against people giving too much of their life to these games, I believe they are a better way to spend your time than say watching TV. Gaming is addictive and should be made a recognised addiction. When I was single I used to play upto eight hours a night after work every night for about a year, building up my stats, completing evermore quests and battling ogres. But somehow I found time to get out, even met someone and got married! Has my life changed? Hell no! I still cast spells and battle till the early hours of the morning. On with the fun! Online gaming should be enjoyed just as much as you would enjoy watching television, or going to the cinema or the pub with your mates. Many people use recreational drugs on an occasional basis and are able to lead successful lives with families, relationships and good careers. A minority allow drugs to take over and destroy their lives and become addicted. According to this article the same is true of MMORPGs. The message to the government is clear, either legalise drugs, or outlaw online gaming!! Sounds like there are some sad stories here - and I can believe them all. I play a lot of Warcraft myself, and know full well how addictive it is. I am resolute that it will not take over my life. It certainly gets in the way though. I think that some people simply do not know how to draw this line, or lack the willpower to stop themselves stepping o

ver it. I think I'm obsessed with gaming in general, I spend far too much time playing games like Everquest 2 and Football Manager rather than going out and interacting with real people and when I do try to, I'm always thinking in the back if my mind that I'd rather be in front of the computer winning the league with Cambridge United. I am obsessed with online role playing games. It's not so much quests but it has the adrenaline of a real life situation - goals to achieve etc. I spend about five hours per day online playing it and I rarely get more than four to five hours sleep before getting up for work the next morning... As many of the players spend their time in MMORPGs rather than in front of the TV I fail to see how it will affect players social lives negatively. Furthermore these types of games contain a huge social aspect, whereas other games and some other pursuits (such as being a couch potato) the players could be indulging in are solitary by nature. These games are like most things -- too much of anything is a bad thing, but as long as you can walk away from the computer to do other things too, they can be great fun. Living in Korea at the moment, they have lots PC Bangs (Internet Cafes). Nearly most of South Koreans are addicted to online games, and one Korean died because of the lack of food and water he had through playing online games. I play xbox live every day. I find myself lying and rescheduling everything around my gaming fix. The longest I played was a 24 hour straight session. I know I play for too long but it's an obsession that I can't control. Can you recommend a counsellor - this is not a wind up... but something I'm increasingly concerned with... Me and my mate play online for an hour or two a day, we're both aware of how much time can disappear by sitting in front of a TV, trying to 'frag' some individual. It's getting the balance between getting home and releasing the stress of a day by an hour or so gaming, and enjoying 'real' life... I bought the US version of World of Warcraft when it came out. The longest period I played was 23 hrs straight. I gave up the game after a month because it was so addictive, but have subsequently just bought the European version (couldn't help myself). In future, I'm going to regulate my time far more strictly. Great game! Having played MMORPG games for some years I agree that these type of games can be life sucking. But my concern is for the younger generation of gamers that play for hours on end in an adult environment. Most MMORPG games you need a credit card to play but I don't think parents know just what they are letting their children into. Unless there is undeniable medical proof that staring at a computer screens for hours at a time can damage a person's health," you can expect this not to decline but to get worse. These people are pathetic. They need to get off their machines and notice that our world is being swiftly overcome by issues and troubles that make the trifling worries of and ""online universe"" absolutely meaningless. 24hours", when I was a kid at school and I was on half term, Ultima Online was the game, ahhh the m was the days ! LOL .....

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## Markdown Cell 8: Conceptual Question - AI and Text Ambiguity

◇ \*\*Conceptual Question:\*\* Why do AI models struggle to understand sarcasm and context in text processing?

\*\*Answer:\*\*

AI struggles with sarcasm because it usually takes words at face value and doesn't easily catch the hidden or opposite meaning humans may intend. Sarcasm is caught through context, tone, and shared knowledge between people, which AI lacks compared to humans. Since it's a form of figurative language, AI finds it hard to interpret. Also AI doesn't have the same common sense or years of general world knowledge people use to recognize sarcasm, and if its training data doesn't include enough examples of sarcastic speech, it becomes even less accurate at detecting it.

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## Markdown Cell 9: Discussion Questions

## ◇ Discussion Questions

\*\*1. How does AI process structured, image, and text data differently?\*\*

To process data, AI uses statistics and machine learning to find patterns in structured data like numbers and categories, computer vision techniques like CNNs to analyze and classify images, and natural language processing methods such as tokenization and transformers to understand the meaning and context of text.

\*\*2. What real-world AI applications combine multiple types of data (structured, image, text)?\*\*

AI applications mix different kinds of data as needed. Autonomous machines use sensors, cameras, and maps to navigate; diagnosis combines patient records, images, and doctor's notes; purchase recommendations draw from purchase history, product images, and descriptions, etc

\*\*3. Imagine you're building an AI personal assistant. What type of data would it need?\*\*

AI works with loads of different data. It can analyze bank transactions to detect fraud, use travel itineraries to manage trips, study customer reviews to understand opinions, and process audio like podcasts or meetings to create summaries. It also uses GPS data from delivery trucks to optimize routes streaming history to suggest shows or music, and search queries to

provide better results. It even can scan scientific articles to extract insights and even interpret medical images like X-rays or MRIs to help doctors with diagnoses.

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## **Markdown Cell 10: Conclusion**

**## ♦ Takeaway: AI Needs the Right Data**

This notebook demonstrated that AI systems rely heavily on data to function effectively. Different data types require specialized processing techniques. Understanding these fundamentals is crucial for anyone working with or building AI systems. The ability to process and interpret diverse data is essential for creating AI that can truly understand and interact with the world.

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**Remember to replace placeholders like [Your Name] with your actual information.**

**Save the notebook as: L02\_Your\_Name\_ITAI\_2377.ipynb**

**Submit the .ipynb notebook as a PDF on Canvas.**

I hope this comprehensive breakdown is helpful! Let me know if you have any other questions.