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**Christchurch**

Sat: 27°/16° Sun: 26°/14°

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ISSN 1172-4153 | Volume 2 | Issue 22 |

23 January 2009

# How safe is flying?

**Air NZ crash may be linked to other mishaps**

By Ian Wishart

A string of in-flight failures on Airbus jetliners are prompting speculation about the safety of the planes.

This afternoon, Airbus announced new safety check procedures for its A320 craft as a result of preliminary investigations into the Air New Zealand crash in the Mediterranean. That warning comes only 24 hours after revelations that the A320 that ditched miraculously in New York's Hudson river last Friday had suffered an in-flight failure just two days earlier.

In Air New Zealand's case, initial data from the black box recorders has confirmed the jetliner suffered a massive power surge just as it was coming in to land after a test flight, pushing its nose sharply upwards. Because the plane was so close to the ground the pilots had no opportunity to correct the problem before the plane's engines stalled and it plunged into the sea.

In the New York incident, an aircraft that aviation experts say is the same one that crash-landed in the Hudson River experienced engine problems in mid-flight just two days before, according to passengers.

They recalled hearing a series of thunderous bangs about 15 minutes after US Airways Flight 1549 from LaGuardia Airport to Charlotte, N.C., took off on January 13.

"It sounded like luggage was dropped on a metal floor, but times a thousand," said Steve Jeffrey, a passenger on the flight.



## Crossfire

**Motorist killed during shootout**

**AUCKLAND, JAN 23** — An innocent driver was shot and killed in Auckland today and another wounded after a huge police chase, set off by a simple bag snatch in the west of the city.

In a confusing climax on the lanes of the north western motorway near Western Springs and Auckland Zoo,

events ended as police vehicles surrounded a stopped white van and a light truck.

The offender, armed with a sawn-off .22 rifle and captured at the scene, had apparently tried to commandeer one or both vehicles at gunpoint.

The violence ended in a shootout.

[Continue reading](#)

On Jan. 13, flight attendants told passengers the plane would return to LaGuardia, but moments later, the pilot announced the problem had been resolved, said Jeffrey.

According to Jeffrey and other passengers, the pilot said the Airbus A320's right engine had experienced a "compressor stall" — an infrequent but resolvable problem that occurs when airflow into a jet engine is disrupted somehow, aviation experts said.

Just after Christmas, a Qantas Airbus A330 suffered a system malfunction that then shut down the plane's autopilot controls. Initial media reports linked it to a "nearby" US military facility that sends Very Low Frequency radio signals to submarines, but aviation investigators noted the base was hundreds of nautical miles from the plane when the incident happened.

Experienced pilots frequenting an aviation forum

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The Middle East beckons

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"Why did I live?"

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# Mortgage rates plunge again

**WELLINGTON, JAN 23** — The outlook for prospective house buyers keeps getting better, as does the size of the relief for owners renewing mortgages.

Today, Kiwibank and BNZ became the latest banks to cut rates in response to falling wholesale funding costs.

The BNZ's one and two-year standard/flybuys rate drops 100 basis points to 5.99 percent and the new BNZ classic six-month rate is 5.95 percent. BNZ said 6 percent has historically been an important threshold for customers.

Kiwibank took its one-year fixed rate to 5.99 percent, the lowest one-year rate Kiwibank has offered since August 2003. The six-month rate is now 6.49 percent.

All other fixed terms were 6.99 percent, with the two-year rate edging down 0.01 percent, and the three to five-year rates dropping 0.11 percent, Kiwibank said.

Kiwibank chief executive Sam Knowles said the home loan market was very competitive.

On Wednesday, the December Home Loan Afford-

ability report from financial information website [www.interest.co.nz](http://www.interest.co.nz) showed homes are the most affordable they have been in four years, but are still unaffordable for many and credit rationing by banks isn't helping.

The improvement in affordability was driven largely by lower interest rates in the wake of the Reserve Bank's 150 basis point cut in the Official Cash Rate (OCR) to 5 percent in early December. It is widely expected to cut the OCR to 4 percent next Thursday.

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## off BEAT

### \$70,000 RING RESCUED FROM TOILET

PHOENIX, Jan. 23 (UPI) — A Phoenix plumber said he was able to locate an NZ\$136,000 diamond ring that was accidentally flushed down a restaurant toilet.

Mike Roberts, general manager of "Mr. Rooter", said city workers called his business after spending several hours trying to find the ring in the Black Bear Diner's sewer line, KPHO-TV, Phoenix, reported today.

"Everybody said, 'No, it's gone'," Roberts said. "We figured we'd give it a shot. We'd either save the day or be completely disappointed."

The plumber said he fished a fibre optic cable down the toilet and eventually located the ring stuck 300 feet down the sewer line.

"Eight, nine, 10 hours later, they managed to dig a hole in my floor and get it out of the pipe," said Cheryl Jones of the Black Bear Diner. "A huge solitaire diamond and tons of smaller diamonds encrusted in it. It was very beautiful."

The couple paid Roberts \$5,000 for the plumbing and excavating, in addition to a down payment to the restaurant for the cost of repairing the torn-up floor.

### COURT RULES 'Q' UNACCEPTABLE AS BOY'S NAME

OSTERSUND, Sweden, Jan. 22 (UPI) — The letter Q may identify James Bond and Star Trek characters, but it may not be used as a boy's name, a Swedish administrative appeals court ruled.

The parents of a boy in northwestern Sweden's Jamtland province, where the actress Ann-Margret was born, had argued they'd been calling their son Q since he was born.

The unidentified couple said that their son responds to the name and that no matter what official records say, everyone knows him as Q, the *Lanstidningen* newspaper reported.

The parents said that since this is what they consider his name, what he considers himself and what he is known as, he should be allowed to keep Q as his name.

However, the *Kammarrätten* appeals court, like the *Lansrätten* administrative court before it, rejected the argument.

The lower court had ruled the name failed to satisfy basic linguistic requirements.

The higher court said Q is a letter of the alphabet not typically used as a first name, so it should not be allowed.

It cited relevant case law that holds that letters are not considered appropriate for names if the letters aren't already considered a name.

### BATHROOM BIRTH LEAVES COUPLE IN SHOCK

SAN JOSE, Calif., Jan. 23 (UPI) — LaShay and Miguel Lozano say they were shocked when their new daughter came into the world while her mother was stepping out of the shower in San Jose, Calif.

LaShay Lozano said while exiting from her home's shower this week, she suddenly began to give birth and she immediately called to her husband for assistance, the San Jose (Calif.) *Mercury News* said Wednesday.

"I felt her head coming out and I held it," LaShay said of Monday's birth. "I said 'Catch her!' and she slid out into his hands."

Miguel said being placed in a role traditionally reserved for trained doctors was a shocking experience to be sure.

"I got so freaked out. I thought 'What do I do,' he said. I told her, 'Keep pushing, babe.' I felt so helpless," the relieved father added. "It was really scary."

Despite the unique birthing details faced by the couple, who already had a 2-year-old daughter, they successfully welcomed a new daughter, Maya, to the world, the *Mercury News* reported.

### SPACE ALIEN INITIATIVE ON HOLD

DENVER, Jan. 23 (UPI) — A Denver man said he has temporarily shelved his plans for a ballot initiative to create a commission to deal with extraterrestrial beings visiting Earth.

Jeff Peckman, who proposed the creation of an Extraterrestrial Affairs Commission in Denver, said he will be in wait-and-see mode for the next few months while he observes the administration of President Barack Obama, the Rocky Mountain News reported today.

"It's on hold for now because of the confidence that I feel and a lot of people feel in the Obama administration in moving toward more disclosure of the UFO/extraterrestrial information," Peckman said. "But I would say I'm only 51 percent confident, so I'm not abandoning the ballot initiative."

FROM FRONT PAGE



Superintendent George Fraser, Auckland City District commander holds a media conference regarding the shooting of a motorist on the North Western Motorway, Auckland, Friday, January 23, 2009. NZPA / David Rowland

Auckland City District commander Superintendent George Fraser told reporters at a press conference tonight that, "Shots were fired by police in response to the armed incident unfolding on the flat deck of the truck.

"The man in custody did fire shots, and shots were fired by police in response. We're not dealing with one isolated incident of shots being fired. The shots being fired were of a continuous nature throughout," Mr Fraser said.

The truck driver suffered non-serious injuries

and was taken to hospital for treatment.

No police officers were hurt.

Mr Fraser said in a statement issued at the press conference that, "while we are aware that several shots were fired throughout the hour of so from shortly after 1pm, we do not know who fired the fatal shot".

He said the victim was killed after being confronted by an armed man who was at the time being pursued by police. Mr Fraser said the light truck driver was injured after also being confronted by the (armed) man.

The superintendent told reporters the chase ended

shortly after the offending vehicle slewed to a stop across the median barrier near Western Springs.

The driver jumped out and tried to commandeer another getaway vehicle.

"This involved a number of vehicles, one in which the deceased was located, and a second, a flat deck truck, on which the offender was apprehended."

The incident began following a bag snatch in Waitakere City shortly after 1pm, Mr Fraser said.

The offender, in a stolen car, was spotted by a police patrol in Glen Eden at 1.08pm and the chase began.

An officer who attempted to stop the car found himself facing the barrel of a gun. Between 1pm and 2pm the targeted vehicle was chased by police throughout the Waitakere area.

The chase escalated as the offender fired from the vehicle as he roared through New Lynn, Avondale, Kingsland, Ponsonby and Grey Lynn before pulling onto the motorway.

"Shots were fired and the vehicles obviously became a serious risk to police, public and any other person in the vicinity," Mr Fraser said.

A "moving barricade" of police vehicles attempted to form a buffer between the armed man and other motorists.

"The offending vehicle came to a stop, mounted and went across the median barrier and the offender attempted to obtain access to a further vehicle.

"This involved a number of vehicles, one in which the deceased was located. And the second vehicle, a flat deck truck, on which the offender was apprehended.

"This is an absolute tragedy for the family of the dead man and, for that matter, the numerous members of public and police who were drawn into it," Mr Fraser said.

Police were trying to identify the dead man and advise his next of kin. The body was removed from the scene for a post mortem.

Mr Fraser said Inspector Peter Devoy would oversee the criminal investigation into the shootings and the events leading up to them. Police appealed for witnesses to come forward.

The chase and shootings have also been referred to the Independent Police Conduct Authority.

The pursuit and chase, and then the closure for a time of the motorway caused chaos as Aucklanders tried to leave for the Anniversary holiday weekend.

— NZPA

[Back to the front page](#)

## Stocks down, could be worse

WELLINGTON, JAN 23 — Telecom continued to outperform the market today on good volume but there were not many other bright spots as markets around the world fell.

The benchmark NZSX-50 index closed down 29.325 points, or 1.072 percent, at 2705.086. This was a better performance than the Australian market, which was down more than 3 percent.

Telecom was again the standout, rising 2c to 253 with more than 16 million shares traded.

ABN Amro Craigs senior dealer Bryon Burke said about 10 million of that went through before the market opened.

"Telecom has out performed the local market and the rest of the world and certainly Telstra," he said.

Local shareholders may be underweight in Telecom, he said.

Otherwise the market was lacking features as there was again little news to trade off.

"The market has been pretty much in line with overseas markets today. The tone has been negative," he said.

Retail investors did not need to chase yield on the equity market and some were waiting for certainty of earnings and dividends in the upcoming reporting season, he said.

Among other leading stocks Fletcher Building gave up 20s to 555, reversing most of its 11c gain yesterday during which the company announced it had sold \$100 million of capital notes and the sale was still open. Contact Energy eased 10c early to 666.

Other stocks to fall included Sky City, down 8c to 305, and SkyTV down 5c to 390. Port of Tauranga

was down 13c to 590.

Fisher & Paykel Healthcare fell 2c to 314 and NZX fell 5c to 485.

Among the dual-listed banking stocks, Westpac dropped 55c to 1870 and ANZ was down 139c to 1495.

A lot of stocks were unchanged, including Air NZ, Cavalier, Nuplex, Sanford, TrustPower, Ryman and The Warehouse.

United States stocks slid on Thursday, after Microsoft said it would cut up to 5 percent of its estimated work force over the next 18 months and disappointing earnings shook investors.

Economic data showed further deterioration in

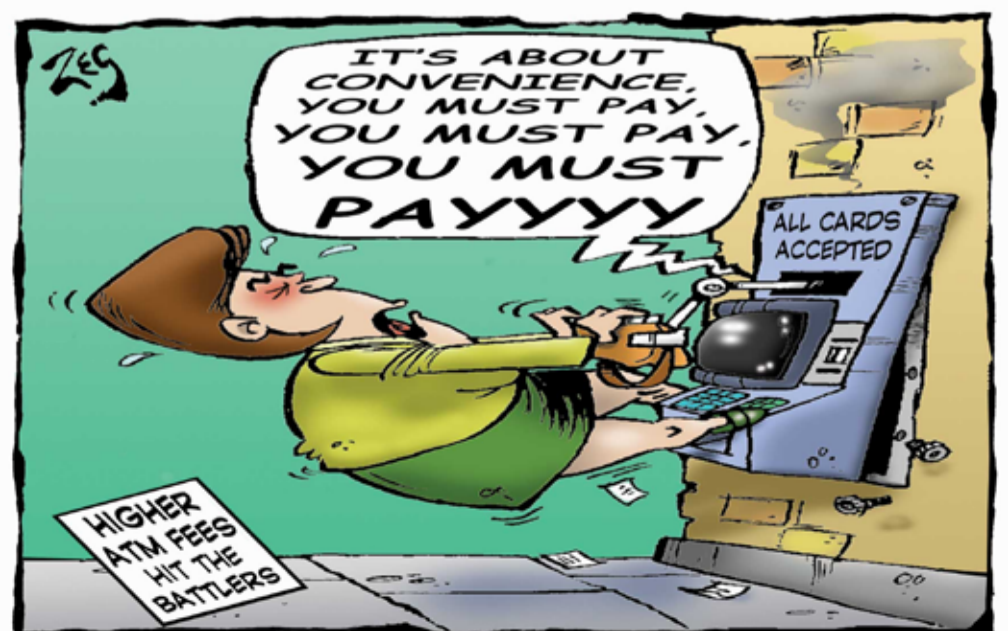
the labour and housing markets.

"There's just no good news out there. Microsoft pulled the rug out from under us," said Joe Saluzzi, co-manager of trading at Themis Trading in Chatham, New Jersey.

"Wall Street hates surprises — don't surprise us like that."

The Dow Jones industrial average fell 105.30 points, or 1.28 percent, to 8122.80. The Standard & Poor's 500 Index dropped 12.74 points, or 1.52 percent, to 827.50. The Nasdaq Composite Index slumped 41.58 points, or 2.76 percent, to 1465.49.

— NZPA



FROM FRONT PAGE



The caskets bearing the bodies of four of the seven killed in the Airbus A320 crash off the coast of Perpignan, France, in an Air New Zealand hangar where a private service for families was held. NZPA / Air New Zealand

on the internet also expressed skepticism about the naval base theory.

"The only sensible pull together of the facts I've read so far was an item on Plane Talking which makes you wonder why the media falls for the naval base theory.

"Then I nearly wet myself when someone on a spotter forum pointed out that Boeing operates the communications contract at the base, which reverted to being an Australian naval facility some years back after the US found better ways of communicating with ships and subs.

"My step son who works for Virgin Blue said there were lots of A330s, 777s, some 717s and other assorted jets plus at least two Singapore A380s flying as close or closer than the 630 kilometres that were between the Qantas jet and the base in the 24 hours during which the ADIRU No 1 in this Airbus went AWOL. He also said the quality of work done on the Qantas A330s is supposed to have been really s\*\*t house in general and that the rumours are that big red is pretty pissed off."

And back in August another A330 suffered a severe power-surge mid flight that left crew and passengers injured, some seriously.

But it may not be confined to Airbus, and may be a bigger problem on modern jets. A **just-released US safety investigation report** into a midair incident on a Boeing 717 four years ago bears remarkable similarities to the Air New Zealand and Qantas incidents.

"On May 12, 2005, about 2316 central daylight time, a Boeing 717-200, N910ME, operated by Midwest Airlines, Inc., as flight 490, experienced a series of pitch oscillations while climbing to cruise altitude over Union Star, Missouri. The flight crew declared an emergency, and diverted to Kirksville Regional Airport," the report notes.

"The airplane initially pitched down, to what the first officer recalled was in excess of 20 degrees. The captain remembered hearing the 'autopilot disconnect' aural signal. When the pitch down occurred, the captain was still the pilot flying, but the first officer then began assisting him on the controls. The airplane continued in a steep dive, which the first officer felt was "almost beyond recovery." Both pilots recalled saying, "up, up, up" during the initial descent, and noted that the airplane did not respond to control inputs at first and that the flight controls felt very heavy. The first officer thought that the airplane lost at least 5,000 feet of altitude during the first descent.

"The airplane then pitched up, and the first officer stated that he told the captain to push forward on the control wheel, and assisted him in pushing forward. As the airplane pitched up the airspeed decreased, and slowed to about 190 knots. At that point the autothrottles were not engaged, and the first officer increased the engine power to about 3/4 of the "throttle throw," which equated to about 80 percent N1.

"The captain stated that while he was trying to

recover the airplane, he attempted to maintain a level pitch attitude by placing the pitch of the airplane in a fixed position, and tried to level the wings of the airplane, but altitude control was unobtainable.

"The airplane entered another dive, and the first officer stated to the captain, "I have the airplane," and said that the captain responded, "Okay." The first officer continued manipulating the flight controls with inputs from the captain, and was able to bring the airplane under control with his help.

"During the event, the airplane went through a series of climbs and descents before the flight crew was able to recover. The first officer stated that during the recovery he was trying to keep the airspeed away from the stall speed and away from the overspeed red zone. The captain stated that the airspeed changed instantaneously from low to high, at points becoming greater than 400 knots with an overspeed warning in literally seconds."

A later analysis of the plane's black box data showed just what a nightmare ride the passengers endured:

"The airplane then went through a series of altitude excursions over the next 8 minutes, during which the airspeed values fluctuated between 52 knots and 460 knots. The altitudes during the pitch up and pitch down cycles varied between a minimum altitude of 10,600 feet and 23,300 feet. It should be noted that due to the nature of the event, the computed airspeeds recorded may not actually represent the actual airspeeds. The recorded groundspeed values varied between 290 and 552 knots."

Apart from similarities in the power surges and wild pitching of the aircraft up and down, the culprit in all cases appears to be a failure in the ADIRU – air data inertial reference unit – which collects input from sensors on the hull of the aircraft and feeds that information to flight computers on board.

The Airbus warning issued today in regard to the Air New Zealand incident says that during painting and maintenance it was important to protect all aerodynamic data sensors.

It has also said that tests such as low speed tests "must be performed at safe altitude and be preceded by a recall of basic rules as regards to minimum speeds and recovery actions".

Although merely a precautionary warning, it indicates initial suspicions may be focusing on the ADIRU systems.

This week, European Air Safety issued an **emergency directive** to all airlines with Airbus A330 and A340 aircraft, confirming that the two Qantas incidents were caused by faulty ADIRU systems and providing pilots with instructions on how to cope if there's another midair crisis.

The news will come as cold comfort to air travelers, who'd prefer to see the faults eradicated before planes take off, not left for pilots to deal with in mid air.

— Additional reporting McClatchy Newspapers, NZPA

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# Govt refuses to condemn Sanlu executions

**WELLINGTON, JAN 23** – The Government and giant dairy company Fonterra have been called on to speak out strongly against death sentences on two men for their role in contaminating milk which killed six babies in China.

But Prime Minister John Key said today the Chinese Government had a right "to take a very serious attitude".

Green Party MP Keith Locke said his party welcomed the conviction of "some of those responsible for the contaminated milk", but opposed the death penalties.

And Amnesty International criticised the decision to execute two of the men responsible for the Sanlu tainted milk tragedy, and raised concerns about New Zealand's implication in the scandal.

Sanlu was 43 percent owned by Fonterra, which has now written off a \$200 million investment.

"The death penalty will not put right the immense suffering caused by these men," said Amnesty New Zealand chief executive Patrick Holmes.

"The death penalty is the ultimate, cruel and inhumane punishment and New Zealand must take a stand to prevent further abuses of human rights."

He urged the Government to speak out strongly against the executions.

But Mr Key said today "some horrific deaths" of young infants in China had taken place and hundreds of thousands of other infants were made ill by the contaminated milk.

"The way the Chinese approach these things ... in the sense of the death penalty, is something for them to determine (whether it is appropriate).

"New Zealand does not condone the death sentence but we respect their rights to take a very serious attitude to what was an extremely serious scandal."

Opposition Leader Phil Goff said the death sentences for two of the men responsible for contaminating the milk "represents the seriousness with which the Chinese Government regarded that".

New Zealand did not support capital punishment "but I think the Chinese government has shown in no uncertain terms for all those involved in this case – including the party secretary and manager of the plant – that this was an act that was utterly unacceptable that had tragic consequences and those consequences have resulted in the harshest of sanctions". A Chinese court sentenced to death cattle farmer Zhang Yujun, 40, and milk trader Geng Jinping.

Zhang was accused of running an illegal melamine workshop in Shandong province and selling 600 tonnes of the powder to adulterate diluted milk.

Geng sold Sanlu more 900 tonnes of milk tainted by 434kg of protein powder.

A third man, Gao Junjie, was given a death sentence for endangering public safety, but it was suspended for two years, and may be commuted to life in prison.

The chairwoman of Fonterra's Sanlu venture, Tian Wenhua, 66, will also spend the rest of her life behind bars as well as being fined 24.7 million yuan (\$NZ5.6m).

She learned of problems with her company's BeiBei milk powder from consumer complaints around mid-May of last year but the company did not stop producing and selling formula until about September 11.

Fonterra, a 43 percent stakeholder in Sanlu which was told of the contamination on August 2, has not reacted publicly to the sentences.

Wu Qing, the daughter of Tian, earlier said her mother reported the contamination to the local government of Shijiazhuang, at the time the Olympic torch relay arrived there at the end of July.

But the city government did not respond, said Ms Wu, "because it wanted to ensure that, in its own words, the torch came first, nothing else mattered".

— NZPA



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# Key welcomes SSC stance on wages

**WELLINGTON, JAN 23** – Prime Minister John Key has welcomed the State Services Commission indication that executives would not get large pay rises.

Mr Key yesterday revealed he wrote to the independent Remuneration Authority – which determines pay rises for MPs, the judiciary and specified statutory officers and members of local authorities and community boards – asking it to freeze MPs' pay at its next review.

He also asked it to exercise restraint when considering all salary rises in its jurisdiction, due to the tough economic times.

The National Party intended to file a submission with the authority calling for a zero pay increase in parliamentary salaries.

Following the move State Services Commissioner Iain Rennie said the sector's 35 chief executives were being told not to expect bigger salaries.

He said many executives would show restraint when considering pay increases for staff.

The Public Service Association criticised the move saying it undermined good faith bargaining and could see talent leave the sector for other jobs or to go overseas.

Mr Key said he was pleased with Mr Rennie's "strong message".

He said there also needed to be restraint in the private sector.

"If we can get control of these wage rounds that means that pressure can come off inflation as it's increasingly starting to do and (Reserve Bank Gov-

ernor) Alan Bollard should be able to lower interest rates even faster.

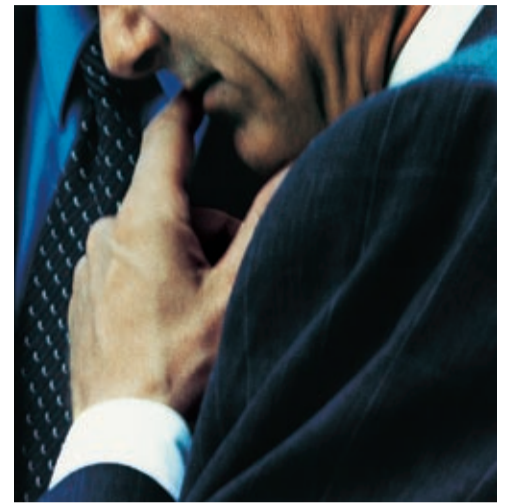
"This is a situation that is serious, so there are trade offs that need to be made. I think, a lower wage round, or in some cases no wage round will mean more New Zealanders will get to save their jobs."

Labour leader Phil Goff agreed restraint was needed. But he yesterday said a law change was necessary to allow the authority to freeze MPs' pay.

At present the authority takes into account public and private sector pay rises, along with those of the judiciary.

However the Government says the authority is able to take into account submissions when it makes its decisions.

– NZPA



# NZ dollar ends week with firmer tone

**WELLINGTON, JAN 23** – The New Zealand dollar ended a volatile week's trading with a firm performance.

By 5pm it was buying US\$2.86c from US\$2.90c yesterday, having ranged during the night between about US\$3.40c and US\$2.20c.

It has been a big week for the currency, which fell from around US\$5.45c to a six-year low at US\$1.65c in the first three days of the week.

The NZ dollar recovered from lows care of a squeeze on short positions but analysts were still calling it down.

The kiwi rose a little against the Australian dollar to A\$0.85c from A\$0.60c at yesterday's local close.

BNZ Capital said the NZ dollar/Australian dollar cross was likely to go lower but not get anywhere near last year's A\$7.00c lows.

"While both economies will find the coming year a challenge, the Australian economy is probably in marginally better shape than New Zealand."

The NZ dollar was little changed against both the Japanese and European currencies from 5pm yesterday, buying 0.4085 euro and 47.05 yen at the local open.

The trade weighted index was 53.33, from 53.15 yesterday.

The US dollar rose against most major currencies after Treasury Secretary designate Timothy Geithner reiterated support for a strong dollar.

However, the US dollar weakened against the yen after a report showed a larger-than-expected increase in the number of US workers filing claims for jobless benefits as a year-long recession continued to chill the labour market.

Gains in the yen were limited by investors on alert for possible Bank of Japan intervention. The yen was near a 13-1/2-year peak against the greenback and hit a seven-year high versus the euro this week.

– NZPA



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# Toll motorway opens this weekend

**WELLINGTON, JAN 23** – Motorists can use the Northern Gateway Toll Road out of Auckland for free this weekend but after that will have to fork out.

The road from near Orewa, north of Auckland, to Puhoi opens on Sunday. It will be free until Tuesday when it will cost \$2 for cars or \$4 for heavy vehicles over 3.5 tonnes.

Transport Minister Steven Joyce said it was an opportunity to try out the road and would minimise disruption as people learned about how to pay the toll.

New Zealand's first fully electronic toll road, it was built to take the pressure off the main access road from Auckland to Northland through Orewa.

Past Orewa the road north is winding and nar-

row and not designed for the huge traffic volumes it has to cope with.

At peak traffic times it is choked with traffic for kilometres and while the new road will remove much of the traffic from Orewa streets, many regular road users believe it will simply move the bottleneck further north to where the new road merges with State Highway 1 at Puhoi.

Mr Joyce said the Government was determined to extend four laning State Highway One as far north as Wellsford.

"The further extension will go a long way to remedying what has been a very troublesome stretch of highway – easing congestion and enhancing safety," he said.

– NZPA

## Editorial

# It ain't as easy as you think

Watching the euphoria on people's faces this week as Barack Obama was anointed President, you could forgive folks their desperate need for hope right now, but not the blindness that comes with desperation.

The election of an African American president is, of course, something for all of us to celebrate. America is finally exorcising some of its demons, and long after time due. However, there is an air of expectation surrounding this particular president that bodes ill for the planet.

One mortal man can't really fix it all. Sure, I know he said during the election campaign that this was the day when the sea levels began to drop, but voters didn't really believe that did they?

Judging from the massive turnout in Washington, and the glazed look in their eyes, one can only wonder.

Obama has his work cut out. America is bankrupt. Insolvent. While bank interest rates are only a couple of percent, it's an empty piece of news because the banks aren't really lending to anyone. The sign on the board says 3%, but the chances of actually getting a loan are slim to zilch.

The esteemed *New York Times* is having to borrow

**FOR ALL THIS RHETORIC ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE, THERE'S NO LONGER ANY MONEY ANYWHERE TO PAY FOR THE CARBON TAXES, EMISSIONS SCHEMES AND ASSORTED NEW AGE RUBBISH THAT FORMS PART OF THE RITUAL OF GREEN POLITICS THESE DAYS**

cash from Mexican moneylenders at 14% just to survive. The end, for that newspaper at least, may not be far away.

What will Americans, and the world do, when they realize they're broke? For all this rhetoric about climate change, there's no longer any money anywhere to pay for the carbon taxes, emissions schemes and

assorted New Age rubbish that forms part of the ritual of Green politics these days.

Financial analysts last year successfully predicted a world economic crash in the last quarter of 08. Those same analysts also picked that the West would try and chuck money at the problem, and then run out of money in February 09, resulting in the collapse of the US dollar. We're not in February yet so I guess it remains to be seen whether that prediction is right.

On the local front, mortgage rates are tumbling again and there's a very good chance Reserve Bank governor Alan Bollard will cut a further full percentage point off the official cash rate this coming week.

Bollard and John Key are right. In many respects, New Zealand is well placed to weather this massive financial storm. World economies may well end up going introverted again, however, and that'll require a massive mindset shift for New Zealand which has always seen exports as the answer to success. That idea works, but only if the rest of the world is buying. If they're not, then exports aren't worth a bean.

Thinking outside the square, if the world economy

tanks New Zealand may have no option but to stop importing and start manufacturing goods for local consumption here. In other words, turn our export facing factories around to produce goods that we would otherwise import into NZ.

That's cars, televisions and appliances, clothes and industrial equipment.

It might be the only way of keeping the economy going.

As we reported last week, The EU is already re-introducing farm subsidies to protect its local industries, and President Obama is no huge fan of free trade at the expense of American jobs.

The world right now is a dangerous place, and if the new government wants something to do it could do worse than appoint consultants to report on the possible economic threats and various solutions.

One thing's certain: whilst governments might like throwing money into the hole in the hope that it makes them look pro-active, the hole is getting bigger and deeper, and the money pile is getting smaller. Something, soon, will have to give.

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## Comment

## Geopolitical poker

By Arnaud De Borchgrave

**WASHINGTON** — A new start with the Muslim world, as pledged by President Obama in his inaugural speech, has a sine qua non: a Palestinian settlement, a quest that has eluded the last five U.S. presidents. Following Israel's invasion of Gaza and its 22-day campaign of airstrikes, tank and artillery bombardment that left 1,300 Palestinians killed for the loss of only 13 Israeli soldiers, a Palestinian state remains a diplomatic chimera.

Peace Now activists to the contrary, the perennial Israeli-Palestinian crisis is one Obama can afford to leave in the hands of the diplomatic pros who have built careers on the Mideast peace process. Following the Feb. 10 elections, Israel's next prime minister is likely to be Binyamin Netanyahu, the 59-year-old Likud leader who will spare no effort to prevent the emergence of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza.

For Palestinians, even the most moderate ones, a Palestinian state must have as its capital Arab East Jerusalem, anathema to an overwhelming majority of Israelis. Obama, therefore, should resist being drawn into what will remain a quagmire as far as anyone can see into the future.

For Muslims, the appointment of former Sen. George J. Mitchell, D-Maine, as a sort of deputy secretary of state for the Middle East (to include the more urgent crisis of Iran's nuclear ambitions) was a good omen. Mitchell, whose father was an Irish janitor and mother a Lebanese immigrant who worked in a textile mill, earned tremendous bipartisan respect as the Democratic Senate majority leader (1989-1995). For six consecutive years he was voted the most respected member of the Senate by a partisan group of senior congressional aides.

Mitchell, 75, was also the diplomatic magician who was asked in 1996 to chair the negotiations that led to the historic accord that ended decades of bloody conflict over Northern Ireland. He was showered with honours, ranging from the Presidential Medal of Freedom to the U.N. Peace Prize.

After leaving the Senate in 1995, Mitchell served



freeze (not dismantle) their settlements in the West Bank, which they didn't, and for the Palestinians to crack down on terrorism in the West Bank, which they did.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton will be flanked by another regional deputy for Pakistan, India and Afghanistan, now the most urgent crisis. Richard C. Holbrooke also has an impressive record as a diplomatic troubleshooter in widely scattered parts of the planet. This reporter met him in Vietnam in 1964 when he was part of a trio of diplomatic whiz kids in their mid-20s, along with John Negroponte and Frank Wisner, all Vietnamese speakers who went on to climb the highest rungs of diplomacy.

Holbrooke, nominated seven times for the Nobel Peace Prize, made headlines as the Bulldozer of the Balkans when he brokered a peace agreement among the warring factions in Bosnia that led to the 1995 Dayton Peace Accords. He has served as assistant secretary of state for Asia and again for

Europe; ambassador to Germany and to the United Nations, and lost out thrice as secretary of state (to Warren Christopher, Madeleine Albright and Hillary Clinton, whose presidential campaign he served as principal foreign policy adviser).

Holbrooke's mandate in South Asia is bound to overlap with Mitchell's portfolio in Iran. Iran's mullahs wield more covert influence behind the scenes in Iraq than America's overt presence with 140,000 troops and its largest embassy in the world (which cost \$1.3 billion for 21 buildings on 104 acres that were once Saddam Hussein's palace complex, with 1,200 U.S. diplomats and staff from 14 federal agencies plus 3,000 support and security personnel).

Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki recently returned from his fourth visit to Tehran, this time to be received one-on-one by supreme religious leader Ali Khomeini. Maliki denounced major crimes against the Palestinian people in Gaza. He has also praised Iran's constructive role in fighting terrorism in Iraq.

Maliki escaped Saddam's Iraq in 1979 — the year of the Iranian Revolution — and spent eight of his exile years in Tehran, the rest of the time in Damascus, always working for the Islamic Dawa party. It is hard to see how the United States can leave Iraq militarily 18 months hence without some kind of a geopolitical settlement with Iran, which shares a 1,000-mile border with Iraq.

Iran, conversely, is bound to use Iraq as leverage for what the mullahs want — tacit U.S. recognition of Iran's role as guardian of the Gulf, the same role the United States gave Iran under the Nixon Doctrine in the early 1970s. Obama will soon find himself in high-stakes geopolitical poker. Former U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Chas Freeman says, Iran's leverage is extraordinarily high. And he adds, If things in Iraq are going OK, and the Iranians have the power to disrupt things and do, then Obama's goose is cooked.

Obama has no intention of allowing his goose to be cooked by ayatollahs in Tehran or flat-earth Taliban mullahs in Afghanistan. But Iran, which also borders Pakistan and Afghanistan, can be helpful against Taliban insurgents, as indeed it was in October 2001 during the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan. So there are many moving parts in a regional crisis that stretches from the Arab-Israeli deadlock on the Mediterranean to the Afghan-Chinese border, with Iran's ticking nuclear plans in the middle. A holistic politico-military approach would be the better part of geopolitical valour. Failure to think this one through six moves ahead could lead us into a military confrontation with Iran.

**SECRETARY OF STATE HILLARY CLINTON WILL BE FLANKED BY ANOTHER REGIONAL DEPUTY FOR PAKISTAN, INDIA AND AFGHANISTAN, NOW THE MOST URGENT CRISIS. RICHARD C. HOLBROOKE ALSO HAS AN IMPRESSIVE RECORD AS A DIPLOMATIC TROUBLESHOOTER IN WIDELY SCATTERED PARTS OF THE PLANET**

as chairman of the International Crisis Group, a non-profit dedicated to the prevention of crises in international affairs. His Middle Eastern expertise came and grew quickly when President Clinton and Israeli and Palestinian leaders asked him to chair an international fact-finding committee on violence in the region. Mitchell's report asked the Israelis to

## Walker's World

# A hawkish, realistic Obama

By Martin Walker

**WASHINGTON** – There were two lines most likely to endure in the public memory from President Barack Obama's inaugural address. The first was his call for a new era of responsibility – which is something of a cliché, but the context in which he placed it gave it an important new force.

The second, which has been a cliché for the past seven years since Sept. 11 but came forth clear and new from a president who launched his political career in opposing the Iraq War, was that "Our nation is at war, against a far-reaching network of violence and hatred".

Despite its truth, this statement was hardly expected. It could have been said by President George W. Bush or Vice President Dick Cheney. Yet it runs against the current mood of the Democratic Party, which prefers to believe the term war on terrorism is a profound misstatement and that terrorism is better seen as a crime, as a pathology and as a diplomatic challenge.

So by declaring in the opening moments of his office that America is at war, Obama has changed the terms of the domestic policy debate over Afghanistan and Iraq. There is no doubt that he will deploy every available weapon – diplomatic, humanitarian and the tools of social development – in its pursuit. But war is inherently a military matter, and in hailing the American military he reminded many of his own voters how their freedoms had been won and defended.

"We remember with humble gratitude those brave Americans who, at this very hour, patrol far-off deserts and distant mountains. They have something to tell us today, just as the fallen heroes who lie in Arlington whisper through the ages," he said.

The phrases that will be pored over in embassies and presidential palaces around the world, as friends and foes seek clues to the core policies and the guiding principles of the new American president, were plain, simple and not very compromising.

"To the Muslim world, we seek a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect," he said, which suggests a great deal but promises nothing.

"To those leaders around the globe who seek to sow conflict, or blame their society's ills on the West

– know that your people will judge you on what you can build, not what you destroy," he said, a subtle rebuke to the more apologetic of his own supporters but also a quiet appeal over the heads of unfriendly foreign leaders to their own public opinion, however silenced or repressed.

"To those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent, know that you are on the wrong side of history; but that we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist," he went on, in as plain a statement of realism in foreign policy as any president has made.

We may not like or respect you, Obama suggested, but we are prepared to do business on formal terms and to deal with you without illusions. This was the pragmatic approach to dealings with the Soviet Union that lasted throughout the Cold War, and it will be interesting how far this cool but fastidious acceptance of reality will govern his dealings with China, Russia, Iran and North Korea.

Nor was there any whiff of appeasement in his remarks to a watching world, words that had his predecessor George Bush rising to his feet, and Dick Cheney rising painfully from his wheelchair, to join the applause.

"We will not apologize for our way of life, nor will we waver in its defence," he said. "And for those who seek to advance their aims by inducing terror and slaughtering innocents, we say to you now that our spirit is stronger and cannot be broken; you cannot outlast us, and we will defeat you."

It was a stinging rebuke to those who had assumed that America had gone soft in voting for Obama, or that its painful years in Iraq and Afghanistan had sapped the nation's will and its readiness to fight for its principles.

For all the differences over strategy between the new president and the old – and Obama made it clear that he did not support any weakening of constitutional rights or any trade-off between America's safety and its ideals – the strategy of resolute war against terrorists is common to them both. This perhaps explains the otherwise unlikely accord that has developed between Bush and Obama, the apparently genuine affection in their farewells after Obama made the rare gesture of personally escort-



ing the outgoing president to his helicopter.

But there were other parts of the speech that resonated beyond the usual bond that links all men together who have held that lonely and awesome office, links that went back to Franklin Roosevelt's first inaugural speech in 1933, when he declared: "The money changers have fled from their high seats in the temple of our civilization. We may now restore that temple to the ancient truths... honesty, on honour, on the sacredness of obligations, on faithful protection, on unselfish performance."

Obama too spoke to the ancient truths in the closing section of his own inaugural address, harking back to George Washington's embattled army in the worst winter of the War of Independence and his appeal to virtue and hope.

"Those values upon which our success depends – hard work and honesty, courage and fair play, tolerance and curiosity, loyalty and patriotism – these things are old. These things are true. They have been the quiet force of progress throughout our history.

What is demanded then is a return to these truths. What is required of us now is a new era of responsibility," Obama said.

In his own way, Obama also echoed that famous phrase of FDR that we have nothing to fear but fear itself. Obama acknowledged that there was a mood of fear in the country. He called it a sapping of confidence across our land – a nagging fear that America's decline is inevitable, and that the next generation must lower its sights.

He did not deny it or seek to minimize it. Indeed, he accepted that this mood was a fact and had to be confronted with the quiet but stunningly effective determination that has been his hallmark throughout his presidential campaign, throughout the transition and now in the first glare of his presidency.

"Today I say to you that the challenges we face are real. They are serious and they are many. They will not be met easily or in a short span of time. But know this, America – they will be met."

– UPI

# Israel's plans for Lebanon

By Claude Salhani

**BEIRUT, LEBANON** – The question that was being asked around Beirut this past week was if the bombing of Gaza by Israel – now in its third week – would come to a halt before Lebanon got dragged into the Middle East's latest conflict.

That question was on the minds of those attending a chic dinner party held in one of Beirut's more affluent suburbs, which included a government minister, local reporters and a visiting journalist; that same question was also on the minds of the working-class Shiites living in a neighbourhood south of Beirut known simply as the suburbs, or in Arabic, Dahiyeh.

At the weekend Israel announced a unilateral cease-fire, and hours later so did Hamas, which in essence solves nothing in the long term, leaving the region in an uncertain limbo. But in the interim the great fear in Lebanon is that the country may get pulled into the Palestinian fight, as it has on multiple occasions in the past. What is encouraging this time is that it appears, at least for the moment, that neither Lebanon nor Israel is anxious for a fight.

Two prominent members of the pro-independent March 14 Alliance, often referred to as the anti-Syrian coalition, told this correspondent that Hezbollah seemed aware of the potential consequences and would stay out of the fight.

Samir Geagea, the leader of the Christian Lebanese Forces, as well as Samir Franjeh (who stands politi-

cally apart from the rest of the pro-Syrian Franjeh clan), told this correspondent in separate meetings in Beirut last week that the next week – leading up to Obama's inauguration – would be crucial. At the same time both leaders told this correspondent they believed the Lebanese Shiite organization Hezbollah would stay out of the current fight.

The economic crisis affecting many of the world's economies might actually play in favour of Lebanon. With the price of a barrel of oil currently at \$33, the Iranians, who had planned their 2009 budget at \$90 a barrel, will face a severe economic shortfall – this in turn translates as less hard cash for Iran to hand down to Hamas and Hezbollah. One immediate outcome is that, unlike in the aftermath of the 2006 war with Israel, when Hezbollah was able to distribute piles of cash to those who lost homes in the battle, this is hardly going to be possible in Gaza, or in Beirut in case of a repeat performance.

And for once there seems to be unanimous agreement from just about every leader across the political spectrum in Lebanon – which runs the gamut from the far left to the far right and includes pro- and anti-Syrians, Iranians, Saudis, etc. – that it would be counterproductive for Lebanon to jump into this fight.

Since the fighting in Gaza began on Dec. 27, the Lebanese have been well aware of the consequences of getting pulled into another war. And one of the big fears here is that Iran may pressure Hezbollah to open a second front on Israel's northern border

to alleviate some of the pressure on Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

The good news amid this dire environment is that some analysts believe Israel is not itching for a fight on its northern border, at least not now.

Ariel Cohen of the Heritage Foundation in Washington told this correspondent that Israel doesn't want a war with Lebanon, as it has no territorial claims towards it. It certainly doesn't want an escalation in southern Lebanon now, when the business in Gaza may not be fully over yet. However, if Hezbollah gets into action now, the Israeli response will be massive, overwhelming and harsh.

Last year several high-ranking Israeli army generals published an outline of their plan of retaliation against Lebanon in the event of an attempt by Hezbollah to attack Israel.

Dubbed the Dahiyeh Doctrine, after the Arabic word for suburb, in reference to Hezbollah's stronghold in Beirut's southern suburbs, often simply called Dahiyeh, the Israeli generals said in the next war with the Lebanese Shiite organization they would unleash unprecedented destructive power against the terrorists' host nation of Lebanon.

Speaking to the Israeli daily newspaper Yediot Ahronoth, the head of Israel's Northern Command, Gen. Gadi Eisenkot, announced that his Dahiyeh Doctrine for fighting Hezbollah had gained official approval. "This is not a threat," he was quoted as saying. "This is policy".

Under Eisenkot's plan, in the event of war the

civilian centres from which Hezbollah operates will be viewed exclusively as military installations. If and when the next conflict breaks out, Israel, said a group of senior army generals, would refrain from chasing mobile Hezbollah missile teams around southern Lebanon. Instead, they would create deterrence by punishing Lebanon and the individual towns and villages that provide the terror group with its fighting force and cover.

"We will wield disproportionate power against every village from which shots are fired on Israel, and cause immense damage and destruction," said Eisenkot.

In so doing, implementation of the Dahiyeh Doctrine would cause massive casualties among the Lebanese civilian population.

And indeed, the Lebanese were given a pretty accurate sneak preview of what Israel's Dahiyeh Doctrine, if implemented, would look like. It was hard for anyone here to escape the non-stop coverage from Gaza being transmitted over the multitude of Arabic-language television satellite news networks broadcasting 24 hours a day.

Watching those television images beamed from the war zone into hotel lobbies, bars, popular hookah bars and individual homes across the country, many Lebanese remain cognizant that all Israel's war planners need to do to implement their deadly doctrine is change the word Gaza to Dahiyeh. The result would be catastrophic for Lebanon.

Claude Salhani is editor of the *Middle East Times*

– UPI

# Armageddinconvenient

## The Hollywoodisation of popular fear

By Peter Curson

For many of us the beginning of the 21st century is a time of apprehension, a time filled with a sense of unease and anxiety as much as hope. No where is this better seen than in our reaction to economic recession, terrorism, infectious diseases like SARS and Bird Flu, the threat of a human pandemic and climate change. Fear is something which underpins much of our reaction to such potential threats, yet curiously fear remains something of a paradox in our society. On the one hand it is a way of coping with anxiety and risk. On the other, it is a vicarious means of gaining pleasure.

Traditionally, fear was very much bound up with reverential awe – usually of God. I vividly recollect New Zealand's national "motto" instilled in every schoolchild of my generation – "Fear God, Honour the King".

Today our fascination with violence, death and disease knows no bounds. We make such things an entertainment – perhaps in the hope that the things we really fear will be made less fearful if we view representations of them rather than the real thing. In this sense perhaps fear serves as a distancing and coping mechanism.

Ironically, there would appear to be a contradiction between direct experience and the aesthetics of representation. Witness the pleasure we derive from looking at things at the movies or on TV which in real life we fear and find painful. Hence our preoccupation with horror and disaster movies and TV programs. Witness the success and our extraordinary reaction to films like *The Day After Tomorrow* and *Fahrenheit 9/11* or to TV programs like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*. Witness also the hundreds of cartoons produced by the world's newspapers and magazines during the SARS and Bird Flu pandemics.

There is a long tradition of making the things we fear seem humorous and everyday. In this way we perhaps render that which we fear most, less fearful. We recognise this by our use of the term 'scary' to cover a wide range of responses from alarm and terror to sheer delight. It is almost as if we derive some deep ecstatic pleasure from such 'unreal' encounters divorced as they are from the terror and repugnance of the real thing. Perhaps we also need to distinguish between fear and disgust. Disgust is excited by the threat of something offensive that assaults



**“THERE IS A LONG TRADITION OF MAKING THE THINGS WE FEAR SEEM HUMOUROUS AND EVERYDAY. IN THIS WAY WE PERHAPS RENDER THAT WHICH WE FEAR MOST, LESS FEARFUL”**

our moral sense and causes loathing and repugnance. Fear on the other hand is concerned with perceptions of risk, of anxiety and awe produced by perceptions of impending personal disaster. In the case of Bird Flu or bioterrorism, disgust and fear may combine into a broad reaction of horror, dread and terror.

Fear is inextricably tied up with our perception of risk and one of the major problems here is the dissonance that exists between how 'experts' see risk and how the average person perceives it. Risk to the 'experts' is a definable, measurable phenomenon, usually established statistically by analysing those exposed to a particular hazard compared to those not exposed, producing measurable outcomes. For most people, however, risk is not related to empirical evidence at all, but shaped by personal attitudes and the way we view the world around us. It is a social phenomenon, socially constructed, and our perceptions of risk are largely intuitive and emotional.

People are also very influenced by the opinions and emotions expressed by others around them. If colleagues, friends and family are fearful, then we too are likely to become more fearful. While we do not fully understand the mechanisms involved in emotional contagion, it would seem that fear is a major example of an emotion that is highly communicable. In all of this the media plays a critical role in the way it manufactures and sells stories. Every day the media crowds our newspapers and TV screens with stories and images of new 'super bugs', of threats of pandemics, bioterrorism or economic collapse. It is small wonder that fear dominates our lives. Terrorism, pandemics and disasters contain the very essence of hard news. In media terms they are 'newsworthy' and 'great copy'. They often involve ordinary people we can identify with, they invoke human interest, particularly in the threat they present, and they involve a 'fright' factor expressed through strong visual imagery such as people in masks or protective suits

or shots of terrorist aftermaths. The way the media presents such things to us undoubtedly hinders the rational assessment of true risk.

Generally, it is not the media's responsibility to consider or assess the effect that their coverage of a particular event will have on the public. Be that as it may, the behaviour and preoccupations of the media often play a defining role. In addition, as Frank Furedi has recently pointed out, fear has been consciously politicised throughout history. There is a long tradition of fear being used as a political weapon to coerce, terrorise and maintain public order. Today the promotion of fear is a means of gaining consensus and of forging unity in the face of outside threats.

Fear also often engenders another common reaction that is the need to find 'scapegoats' or someone to blame. The rage born out of fear is discharged on Governments, 'outsiders' or distinctive minorities or 'others'. In the 19th century smallpox and plague epidemics were blamed on the Chinese. More recently, HIV/AIDS was blamed on gays, SARS on the Chinese, terrorism on Al Qaeda and Hamas and drug abuse on the deranged and homeless on our streets. There is a very long tradition of this in Western culture. Parents for centuries plucked their naughty child with characters plucked from another time and space such as Gypsies, Jews or Blacks who would carry off unruly children.

But does fear serve any useful purpose in our society? Is there such a thing as 'reasonable fear'? How much fear is healthy? Perhaps as some have argued, a certain amount of fear can lead to sensible and appropriate strategies of readiness, vigilance and preparedness. Are we more fearful today than we used to be? I think not. Certainly life is more secure and we are healthier and living longer than ever before. Interestingly enough, however, this has not removed lingering fears about our health and deep underlying fears about contagion and 'outsiders', as well as fears about the economic recession, climate change and chronic diseases like stroke and cancer. Faced with a myriad of threats in our everyday lives, which ones should we be most fearful of? Will the next big episode be SARS like, a pandemic of human flu or possibly a major bioterrorist event? Whatever it is, there is sure to be a movie in it.

Peter Curson is Professor in Population & Security, at the Centre for International Security Studies, Faculty of Economics & Business, the University of Sydney. He is also a *TGIF Edition* subscriber.

## Fear of low oil prices

Carmen Gentile,  
UPI Energy Correspondent

**MIAMI** – Venezuelan energy officials say they are prepared to reduce oil exports to bolster the falling price of oil worldwide. South America's leading oil producer already has decided to cut oil shipments to two U.S. refineries.

Oil Minister Rafael Ramirez said earlier this week Venezuela hoped to help halt the oil slump with a production cut at home. The exact amount Venezuela was willing to cut is not certain, though Ramirez said the cuts were crucial for maintaining the balance in the oil market.

The cut included the discontinuance of oil shipments to two southern U.S. refineries, Sweeney and Chalmette.

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, who plays a decisive role in the operation of his country's most valuable commodity, also said this week that the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, of which Venezuela is a member, is willing to reduce oil production to prevent a further drop in prices.

Chavez told lawmakers at home that OPEC cuts could reach up to 4 million barrels per day, in addition to last month's 1 million bpd reduction.

The Venezuelan economy has been particularly troubled by the fall of oil prices from a high last

year of US\$150 a barrel.

The steep drop-off in the price of oil – almost 60 percent less than it was at its all-time high in July 2008 – forced significant belt-tightening measures for the Venezuelan government and the wide-sweeping social programs favoured by the leftist Chavez.

Venezuela's budget for 2009 was created with a \$60-per-barrel price tag for oil. But with prices hovering in the \$30 to \$40 range, the Chavez administration has admitted that its social efforts, both at home and abroad, would surely suffer.

"The (Venezuelan) economy will endure difficult times in years to come, no doubt," said Chavez in December during a nationwide address.

Venezuela state oil company PDVSA in recent months already announced that production levels would be cut to counter falling oil prices, part of the OPEC agreement to reduce production across the board.

PDVSA in November said it was cutting production by 129,000 barrels per day.

Perhaps one of Chavez's most relished programs, free heating oil for hundreds of thousands of poorer Americans, also was cut earlier this month because of the falling price of oil. However, the program was quickly restarted just two days after the announcement following the international attention the project's cancellation placed on the plight of PDVSA and Venezuela's economy.

The discounted oil program has riled anti-Chavez Washington, U.S. critics contended the program was more about embarrassing the United States than charity, part of the ongoing tensions between Venezuela and its largest oil customer, the United States.

While Chavez maintains his country will endure difficult times in years to come, no doubt, it seems unlikely that PDVSA will be able to endure without some much-needed foreign investment.

Over the last few years, under Chavez's orders, PDVSA has been renegotiating contracts with foreign oil companies to give Venezuela a greater controlling share of projects. Several foreign companies chose to pull up stakes rather than endure a contract renegotiation.

But with oil prices dropping and PDVSA unable to meet even reduced production needs, the Venezuelan government has been forced to once again begin courting foreign oil in hopes of jump-starting production in the short term and perhaps provide PDVSA with much-needed capital for infrastructure improvements long put off in favour of Chavez's social spending.

"If re-engaging with foreign oil companies is necessary to his political survival, then Chavez will do it," Roger Tissot, an authority on Venezuela's oil industry at Brazilian consulting company Gas Energy, told *The New York Times* last week.



# Obama calls for ceasefire to hold

**WASHINGTON** – US President Barack Obama called today for Israel and Hamas to adhere to their fragile ceasefire adopted last weekend after three weeks of fighting in the Gaza Strip.

Obama called on Israel to complete the pullout of its troops from Gaza and declared that Hamas must end rocket attacks.

He called for the opening of border crossings for commerce and humanitarian aid to flow into the territory, and emphasized that the United States remains committed to ensuring that Hamas cannot smuggle weapons into Gaza.

“Lasting peace requires more than a long ceasefire, and that’s why I will sustain an active commitment to seek two states living side by side in peace and security,” Obama said, reaffirming his commitment to press ahead with the peace process.

Obama’s comments came as he announced his appointment of former senator George Mitchell as his special envoy for Middle East peace.

Mitchell, 75, of Maine rose to become leader of the centre-left Democrats in the US Senate. He later helped broker the peace deal in Northern Ireland as a special envoy for then-president Bill Clinton.

Mitchell will now be taking on the challenge of advancing the peace process amid a fragile truce between Israel and Palestinian militant group Hamas, in the wake of three weeks of fighting in the Gaza Strip.

“I don’t underestimate the difficulty of this assignment. The situation in the Middle East is volatile, complex and dangerous,” Mitchell said. “But the president and the secretary of state have made it clear that danger and difficulty cannot cause the United States to turn away.”

Mitchell will soon travel to the Middle East to help ensure that the Gaza ceasefire will be lasting, Obama said, adding that Israel has a right to defend itself against rocket attacks by Hamas, which controls Gaza.

“No democracy can tolerate such danger to its people, nor should the international community, and neither should the Palestinian people themselves, whose interests are only set back by acts of terror,” Obama said.

The United States would fully back an international donor conference for short-term humanitarian assistance and long-term reconstruction for the Palestinian economy under the auspices of the Palestinian Authority, Obama said, while deploring the humanitarian conditions in the tiny Palestinian enclave.

“Our hearts go out to Palestinian civilians who are in need of immediate food, clean water and basic medical care, and who’ve faced suffocating poverty for far too long,” Obama said.

During his first full day in office, Obama tel-



**“NO DEMOCRACY CAN TOLERATE SUCH DANGER TO ITS PEOPLE, NOR SHOULD THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY, AND NEITHER SHOULD THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE THEMSELVES”**

ephoned Thursday with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, Jordanian King Abdullah and Egyptian President Hosny Mubarak. In her first day on the job, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton followed up with calls to Olmert and Abbas.

Israel launched a massive assault in Gaza in response to Hamas rocket attacks. During three weeks of fighting, more than 1,400 Palestinians were killed – many of them while being used as human shields by Hamas – while 13 Israelis died.

– DPA

# UN strangely silent as Hamas steals aid supplies

**RAMALLAH** – A top aide of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has accused Hamas of “obstructing” efforts to reconcile the warring Palestinian political factions, by raising “new conditions.”

Yasser Abed Rabbo said Abbas’ secular Fatah movement was willing to form a national unity government with Hamas.

But the radical Islamist movement was raising new conditions because it was not interested in reconciliation and was instead working to consolidate its hold over the Gaza Strip, he charged.

He accused Hamas of killing, arresting and torturing Fatah fighters in Gaza.

“Hamas has turned its guns from the enemy (Israel) to Fatah after the withdrawal of the occupiers” from Gaza, he said, charging that Hamas had turned hospitals and mosques into detention and interrogation centres for Fatah members after Israel destroyed all the security buildings in the strip during its 22-day offensive.

The two rival Palestinian factions have been locked in a bitter power struggle since Hamas defeated Fatah in January 2006 democratic parliamentary elections, one year after the moderate Abbas was elected in separate presidential elections on a contrasting platform.

The struggle culminated in Hamas violently seizing sole control of the Gaza Strip in June 2007. Abbas’ four-year term as president ended on January 9, but he has vowed to stay in office until new presidential and parliamentary elections can be held simultaneously.

According to Fatah officials, Hamas has killed some 19 Fatah members and shot at least 60 others in the leg during, and in the aftermath of, Israel’s Gaza offensive, which ended Sunday with each side making a unilateral ceasefire.

Mahmoud Habbash, the social affairs minister in the West-Bank based Palestinian government, also accused Hamas of having “hijacked” dozens of trucks carrying humanitarian aid to the people of Gaza reeling from the three-week-long Israeli assault.

While Habbash said the trucks were earmarked for the UN, a Hamas official insisted they were dispatched by Arab donors specifically for the Hamas administration in the strip to distribute to the people of Gaza, and to no other group.

A spokesman for the Hamas Interior Ministry in the strip confirmed today that his movement was arresting “collaborators” with Israel, but would not



say they were Fatah members and added his movement “will do nothing outside the law.”

“Anyone who is proved to have helped the occupation (Israel) will be arrested,” Ihab Ghasein said.

Abed Rabbo, also the secretary general of the Fatah-dominated

Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), said Ramallah-based caretaker Prime Minister Salam Fayyad had informed Abbas in a letter that “the future of his government and its continuation is in the hands of Abu Mazen (Abbas) when he sees an opportunity to form a national reconciliation government.”

This letter “is proof that we want to have reconciliation and have one national authority that includes everyone,” Abed Rabbo told a news conference in Ramallah.

“We heard from (Damascus-based Hamas leader Khaled) Meshaal about new conditions for reconciliation,” he said, charging these had no other purpose “than to obstruct and prevent reconciliation.”

“Hamas’ enemy now is not Israel. It is Fatah and the PLO because it considers them more dangerous to its separatist regime,” he said.

He accused Hamas of working toward total separation of Gaza from the West Bank, calling this a “conspiracy” which was being encouraged by Israel, supported by Iran and aided by other Arab groups.

“We will not allow this conspiracy to happen, no matter what the cost,” he vowed. A Fatah and PLO delegation would travel to Cairo Sunday to discuss the Egyptian-mediated truce in Gaza, he added.

– DPA

**“MAHMOUD HABBASH ACCUSED HAMAS OF HAVING ‘HIJACKED’ DOZENS OF TRUCKS CARRYING HUMANITARIAN AID TO THE PEOPLE OF GAZA REELING FROM THE THREE-WEEK-LONG ISRAELI ASSAULT”**



## Serial killers stalk 2000 victims

**VIENNA** – Austrian police have started to contact Chechen exiles whose names appear on an alleged death list published on the internet, following the murder of a Chechen refugee last week, an interior ministry spokesman said today.

In another sign that police are increasing security for Chechens, around 100 officers and a police helicopter were deployed this morning in Vienna for the funeral of Umar Israilov, 27, who was shot by two unknown men near his Vienna home on January 13.

The interior ministry has come under criticism that it did not protect Israilov, who had informed Austrian intelligence that he was being threatened,

possibly in connection with his claim that he had been tortured on orders of Chechnya's pro-Russian president Ramzan Kadyrov.

Police are currently going through a list with the names of some 2000 Chechens who are in danger of being killed or abducted which was published on Chechenpress, a website sympathetic to Chechen separatists.

"Several people have been contacted" after their names were found on the list, interior ministry spokesman Rudolf Gollia told Deutsche Presse-Agentur dpa.

Earlier overnight, the slain man's father, Ali Israilov, led a small demonstration in Vienna's cen-

tre, calling for measures to prevent additional murders. "Police evidently made a mistake," the father said, according to Austrian news agency APA.

Six days after Israilov's death, a Russian journalist and a lawyer were shot dead in Moscow last Tuesday. Attorney Stanislav Markelov had protested the early release of a Russian officer who had murdered a Chechen woman.

When asked about the Moscow shooting, Vienna's police chief Gerhard Puerstl told reporters that his organization was using "all current events, everything that we learn" for analyzing the potential threat to Chechens in Austria.

– DPA



UPI

## Barack and Hil's excellent adventure

**WASHINGTON** – US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton promised a renewed focus on diplomacy and development aid as tools of US foreign policy during a welcoming ceremony today at the State Department.

"This is going to be a great adventure," she told the crowd of civil service staff that cheered wildly in the lobby of the building, one day after she was confirmed by the US Senate and sworn in as the country's top diplomat.

Clinton said President Barack Obama has set the new tone and promised a new spirit of cooperation with other countries in his inaugural speech on Wednesday.

"I believe with all of my heart that this is a new era for America," Clinton said. "We will make clear as we go forward that ... robust diplomacy and effective development are the best long-term tools for securing America's future."

The US Senate voted overwhelmingly yesterday to confirm Clinton as secretary of state, clearing the way for her to take the reins of US foreign policy as Obama moves quickly to address a host of international challenges.

Clinton will have to deal with pressing issues

including the Iranian and North Korean nuclear programmes, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well as wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Clinton did not speak of the specific foreign policy challenges facing the country, but did tell her staff: "This is not going to be easy."

Clinton, 61, had built up her foreign policy credentials during eight years in the Senate. As a former first lady and presidential candidate she is already well known around the world.

She will now be serving her former rival for the Democratic presidential nomination after the bitter 2008 campaign, while one of her top cabinet competitor's for the president's ear, Defence Secretary Robert Gates, is a Republican who was kept on from former president George W Bush's administration.

But Clinton said the Obama cabinet would put an end to the "divisiveness" that had undermined the Bush administration. The State Department, led by Colin Powell, was often marginalized during Bush's first term in favour of then-defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld.

"We want to send a clear and unequivocal message: This is a team," Clinton said.

– DPA

## Britain's new bank crisis

**LONDON** – The British government is reported to be in talks with Barclays after the bank admitted that raising extra capital from the government could trigger a clause that would deliver control of the bank to its Middle East investors.

Barclays and HSBC are the two major British banks which have so far refused to join a massive recapitalization scheme offered by the government of Prime Minister Gordon Brown last October.

The prospect that Barclays, Britain's fourth-biggest lender, could

be surrendered to Middle Eastern control has alarmed officials, newspaper reports said.

Shares of the bank have plunged dramatically on the London Stock Market this week, falling by 10 per cent to 59 pence this morning.

Last October, Sheikh Mansour Bin Zayed Al



British Prime Minister Gordon Brown faces a new threat to bank bailout

Nahyan, a member of the Abu Dhabi royal family, and two Qatari investment vehicles invested 7.3 billion pounds (US\$10 billion) in the British bank.

Under the deal, the investors have to wait seven months for delivery of the shares, which convert at 153 pence. But if at any time until the end of June, 2009, Barclays raises more capital at a lower price, the investors are able to take their stake at that lower level.

Given the current position of Barclays shares, the bank would have to roughly triple the number

of shares issued to the Middle Eastern investors, a move that would hand them effective control of the bank with a stake of 55 per cent.

Britain's Financial Services Authority (FSA) regulatory watchdog had asked for a "full explanation" of the deal, the Daily Telegraph said.

– DPA

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# New plague sweeps Africa

**ROME** – Hordes of ravenous caterpillars in northern Liberia are destroying crops and vegetation, sending terrified villagers fleeing from their homes, and raising the spectre of a food, health and environmental emergency in West Africa, a United Nations agency said today.

The two- to three- centimetre-long caterpillars, described by villagers as “black, creeping and hairy”, were advancing in the tens of millions, devouring all plants and food crops in their path and in some cases overrunning homes and buildings, the Rome-based Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said.

Some 46 villages in Bong, Lofa and Gbarpolu counties of northern Liberia are confirmed to have been affected, including two-thirds of the 200,000 inhabitants in Bong County, the worst-hit area.

The invasion poses a major threat to the “already precarious food security situation in Liberia and the

sub-region,” the FAO said in a statement.

In some communities villagers are unable to reach their farms, because these are completely surrounded by the pests – a situation that can be described as a “national emergency,” FAO representative in the Liberia, Winfred Hammond, an entomologist, warned.

Unless the invasion was quickly contained it is “very likely” to escalate into a regional crisis involving neighbouring Guinea, Sierra Leone and Ivory Coast, Hammond said.

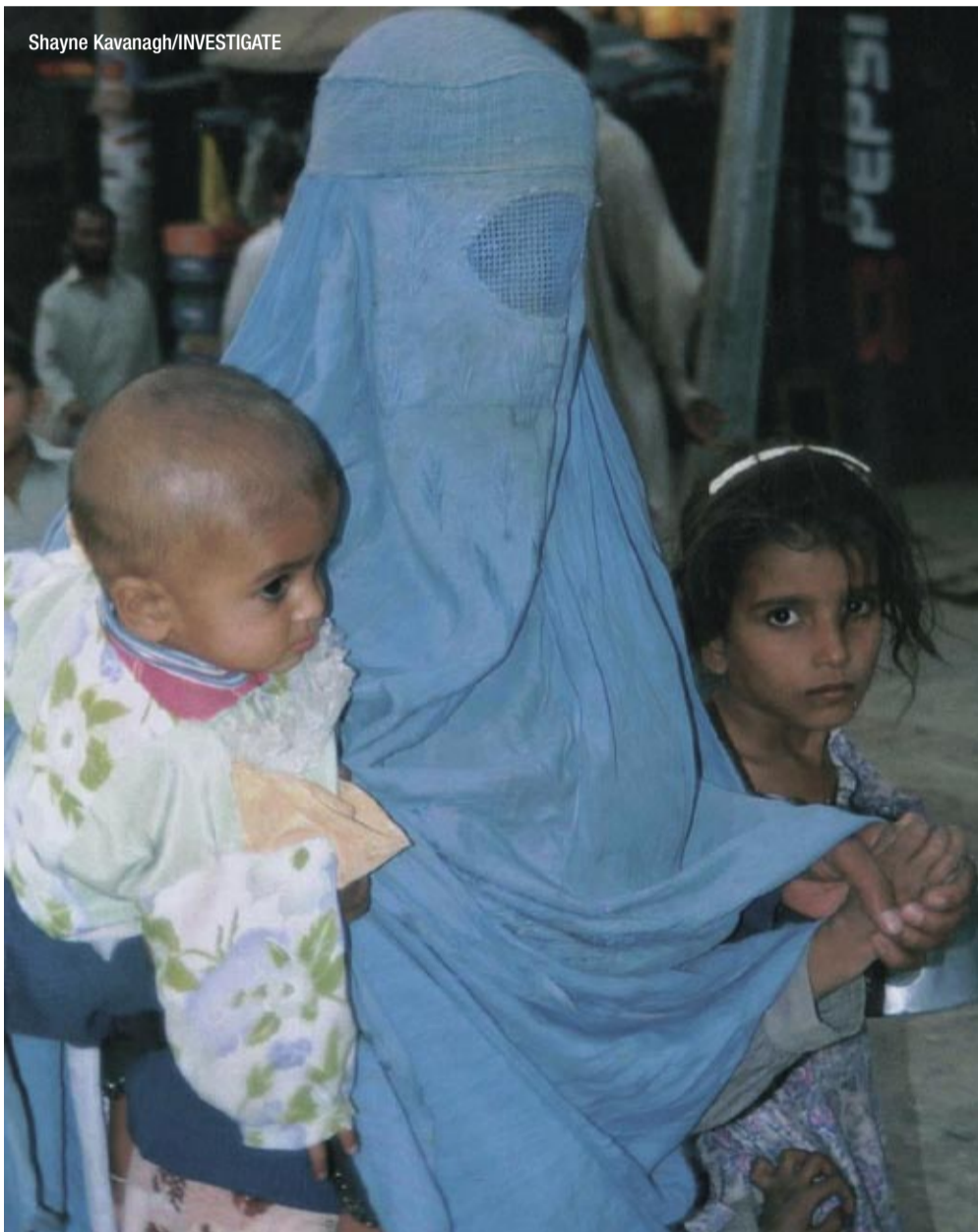
Initial reports suggest the caterpillars, may be African armyworms, known by the scientific name “*Spodoptera spp.*”.

Specimens of the caterpillars have been flown to Accra in Ghana to be identified exactly so that the most appropriate form of pesticide can be determined.

– DPA



Shayne Kavanagh/INVESTIGATE



# Fear of offending Islam

**VIENNA** – Austrian right-wing parliamentarian Susanne Winter has been convicted today of “incitement” because of her anti-Muslim statements, including the claim that Islam’s prophet Mohammed was a paedophile.

A court in Winter’s home town of Graz also found the 51-year-old politician guilty of humiliating a religion. She was sentenced to a fine of 24,000 euros (NZ\$59,000 dollars) euros and a suspended prison term of three months, Austrian news agency APA reported.

The politician, who took a seat in parliament last fall for the Freedom Party (FPÖ), made the anti-Islamic remarks in January 2008.

She also proposed in a discussion with students that Muslim men should commit bestiality rather than making “indecent advances” on girls.

The politician had pleaded innocent Thursday, claiming that she “did not want to insult anyone, but only to point out problems.”

The verdict is not yet legally binding.

Winter’s son Michael, a former youth leader in the Freedom Party, was convicted of the same crime last October. He had suggested in a newsletter that Turkish Muslims were in the habit of committing bestiality.

Criticism of paedophilia within Islam continues to rage, with Saudi Arabia’s senior cleric this month justifying girl children marrying middle-aged men, because Mohammed did it by marrying six year old Aisha and beginning to have sex with the child at the age of nine.

Last month a Saudi court refused to annul the marriage of an 8 year old girl to a 47 year old man, and two weeks ago the kingdom’s grand mufti rebuked Western notions about marriage:

“It is incorrect to say that it’s not permitted to marry off girls who are 15 and younger,” Sheikh Abdul Aziz Al-Sheikh told the regional Al-Hayat newspaper. “A girl aged 10 or 12 can be married. Those who think she’s too young are wrong and they are being unfair to her.”

– DPA

# Dead composer in court battle

**KARLSRUHE, GERMANY** – The European Court of Justice may be asked to decide whether a Berlin library owns the copyright to an opera by composer Antonio Vivaldi, German judges said today.

Vivaldi has been dead for 267 years and everything else which the Italian composed is free to perform without paying fees. But the state-run Berlin Academy of Song says it owns the long-lost Vivaldi opera *Moteczuma*.

The academy published several sheets of the music on its website after rediscovering the opera in its old-music archives in 2002.

Italian and German performers who staged the opera in 2005 are refusing to pay rights fees to the academy. The case was argued in Germany’s federal high court overnight. A verdict is expected tomorrow.



Judges said they expected to ask the European court in Luxembourg to review German legislation on the issue.

While some Vivaldi lovers have been outraged at the notion that a German organization owns his music, presiding judge Joachim Bornkamm said the point of the legislation was to

reward anybody who tracked down lost work and brought it back to public renown.

In a lower court, the academy lost its case claiming that it was the original publisher of *Moteczuma*.

Vivaldi personally conducted the orchestra when *Moteczuma* premiered in Venice on November 14, 1733, in the Teatro Sant’Angelo, Venice. The opera is about the tragic end of the true-life Aztec ruler Montezuma in 1520.

– DPA



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# Get with the programme: Mills



NZPA/Ross Setford

By Daniel Gilhooly of NZPA

**WELLINGTON, JAN 23** – New Zealand Cricket's (NZC) major associations are being advised to go global in the wake of Brendon McCullum's new-found allegiance to New South Wales.

The Otago and New Zealand wicketkeeper sparked headlines on both sides of the Tasman yesterday when he was released by Otago to play for New South Wales in the final of Australia's domestic Twenty20 championship tomorrow.

McCullum will miss an important one-day match

for Otago, against Wellington in Invercargill on Sunday but nevertheless got the green light from his association and NZC.

They insisted the clearance came only because Otago are guaranteed a place in the State Shield semifinals and McCullum will miss the playoffs because of national commitments.

NSW's motivation is that they will have access to McCullum for the \$NZ11 million Champions League in India in October if his Indian Premier League (IPL) team, Kolkata Knight Riders, don't qualify.

New Zealand Cricket Players Association

(NZCPA) executive manager Heath Mills supported McCullum's shift and believed the signing would be the tip of the iceberg.

If, as expected, New Zealand is granted a place in the Champions League in the next two years, Mills suggested all six associations here will look to follow the lead of NSW.

"These sort of opportunities are going to become more and more frequent and I think we have to get our head around it," Mills told NZPA.

"Maybe our major associations need to start thinking now about getting in some overseas players on short-term deals to play in our Twenty20 competition.

"That would be great for our competition and those players would then be eligible to play for them in the Champions League should they qualify for that event."

The first Champions League scheduled for last year was postponed because of the bombings in Mumbai.

It was set to include two domestic teams from Australia, South Africa and the IPL, along with one each from England and Pakistan.

Any expansion, which could happen this year, is likely to include a New Zealand team and add enormous weight to the domestic Twenty20 competition.

"It would be brilliant for our domestic competition and we need to start thinking about the implications.

"Maybe it won't be a surprise to see an Andrew Flintoff or a Kevin Peitersen come down here for 1-2 weeks to play for a side and make them eligible to play in the Champions League.

"They need to be forming relationships with some of the bigger clubs in the world in terms of transferring players with each other. It might provide

coaching and management opportunities.

"Brendon may be the first step in this."

Meanwhile, McCullum's move continued to cause reverberations in Australia today.

Numerous commentators and columnists had their say, with most in support of the 27-year-old's deal, which was brokered by his manager, former New Zealand captain Stephen Fleming.

Andrew Symonds described the McCullum's selection at the expense of a local as being "un-Australian" but the Australian allrounder was called a hypocrite today by NSW chief executive Dave Gilbert.

Gilbert noted Symonds was happy to bank \$A1.5 million (\$NZ1.9 million) for playing for Hyderabad in the Indian Premier League.

"He's happy to sign with the Deccan Chargers and deprive some local of a spot in their side. He can't have his cake and eat it, too.

"If this final was in isolation we wouldn't have brought McCullum over, but the Champions League has put everything in to a different stratosphere.

"There's so much at stake, roughly \$A4 million for the winner."

Australian captain Ricky Ponting said the presence of overseas players on the domestic scene helped improve the standard of competition.

Ponting was unsure whether the inclusion of McCullum hindered the development of younger players but was mindful it was just for one match.

Sports betting agencies in Sydney adjusted New South Wales from narrow outsiders to favourites after news broke yesterday that McCullum would be opening the batting in Sydney.

Injury-struck opponents Victoria were seeking a high-profile signing of their own today, with chief executive Tony Dodemaide indicating former Australian stars Adam Gilchrist and Shane Warne were in their sights.

# Campbell pensive on future, nurses injury

By NZPA Special Correspondent

**DOHA, JAN 23** – New Zealand's Michael Campbell could be staring at another long break from golf after he withdrew midway through the first round of the Qatar Masters in Doha today.

It is the second successive week and the third occasion in three events that Campbell has been forced out with concern for his injured right shoulder.

The 39-year-old now is uncertain whether to return home to his Sydney residence or remain in the Middle East in the hope his shoulder may be strong enough for him to contest next week's Dubai Desert Classic.

"The pain has come back again to my shoulder so I have to be cautious about it and take it easy and be patient," he said.

"I don't know what to do about next week's

Dubai Desert Classic. All I know I have a long season ahead of me and I have to make sure I am fit for the remainder of the year."

He arrived in the Qatar capital on Sunday after withdrawing from last week's Abu Dhabi Championship having played just four holes of his second round.

Campbell was in some pain earlier in the week but felt the shoulder was good enough to participate in the Qatar Masters after playing 18 holes in the Pro-Am on Wednesday while employing a shorter backswing.

The former US Open champion began today's round with a birdie but the familiar pain returned and he lost five shots over the next five holes.

Four-over through nine holes, Campbell's day ended when he scudded his tee shot just 75 yards into bushes down the left side of the 10th hole.

He advised playing partners Rod Pamplung of

Australia and Rory McIlroy of Northern Ireland he was withdrawing.

"Maybe it's better for me that I take the next couple of months off and come back around March," Campbell said.

"The break I had over Christmas was good for the shoulder but it seems now it wasn't long enough. I thought two months would have been sufficient but obviously it wasn't.

"But not having played for so long my heart is saying to go out and but my mind is saying I shouldn't."

It was obvious he was looking to protect his shoulder today and that was resulting in some very erratic shot play.

"I am compromising my golf swing and only hitting the ball about 70 percent," he said.

"My backswing is not a full swing and all these

bad habits are creeping in already and it shouldn't be that way.

"It was not that I was in a lot of pain out there but it's just that the pain comes and goes.

"If I marked the pain out of 10, the Hong Kong Open was a seven, the Abu Dhabi Championship was a five or four."

After leaving the course Campbell consulted immediately with his physiotherapist Dale Richardson who advised he should take further time out from the game and get the shoulder fully healed.

"I'm 40 next month and I have to take better care of my body," he said.

"This injury has really taught me a lesson to really look after myself and I am the first to admit that I haven't done that the last few years so now is the time to regroup and hopefully get myself fit again for the next five to six years out here."

# Injured Tiger ponders return

By Randall Mell

Sun Sentinel

Will Tiger Woods make his comeback at the CA Championship at Doral?

Does the Honda Classic have a shot at hosting Woods for the first time as a pro?

With the PGA Tour's Florida Swing less than six weeks away, the possibility that Woods will tee it up in South Florida for the first time since he limped away from last summer's U.S. Open victory looms among the Florida swing's most compelling story lines. Woods had reconstructive knee surgery seven months ago and is still uncertain when he'll make his return.

The old notion that the PGA Tour doesn't really begin until the Florida Swing will ring true again if Woods makes his comeback in South Florida. There's always a buzz when Woods plays, but the first test of

his repaired knee promises to be intensely hyped.

The PGA Tour season opened in Hawaii with little fanfare. Little more is expected in this week's mostly starless opening of the West Coast Swing at the Bob Hope Chrysler Classic in Palm Springs, Calif.

The top four players in the world rankings were all missing at the Mercedes-Benz Championship in Hawaii last week. Geoff Ogilvy, who jumped to No. 6 in the world with his victory there, was the highest ranked player in the Sony Open in Honolulu. Anthony Kim is the only top-10 player scheduled to compete at the Bob Hope Chrysler Classic.

Woods usually makes his season debut at the Buick Invitational at Torrey Pines outside San Diego, but the first round there is less than three weeks away. Given the history of cold, wet weather there, a return seems unlikely. In a report on his Web site this past week, Woods said he has only played a few holes of practice rounds since beginning reha-

bilitation from surgery.

"As I had hoped, after Jan. 1, I started hitting longer irons and my driver," Woods said. "I'm not swinging as hard as I can, but I'm working toward that goal... So far my knee has held up well, but I don't know when I'll be able to return to competition."

The Associated Press is pointing to the Accenture Match Play Championship outside Tucson as a possible return the last week of February with USA Today predicting a likely return at the Arnold Palmer Invitational at the end of March.

"Whenever he plays the first week, it will be the biggest story of the year, at the time, until something bigger happens," said Ogilvy, who will be the defending champ at the CA Championship March 12-15.

Woods' wife, Elin, is due with the couple's second child in February. That also will be a factor in his return.



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**OUT  
MONDAY**

## TV &amp; Film

**Bride Wars**

➤ **Cast:** Kate Hudson, Anne Hathaway

➤ **Director:** Gary Winick

➤ **Length:** 1:29

➤ **Rated:** PG (for suggestive content, language and some rude behaviour)

★☆☆☆☆

Yeah, *Bride Wars* is only a chick flick, but chicks deserve better than this.

Emma (Anne Hathaway) and Liv (Kate Hudson) are suburban Jersey girls who grew up together dreaming of their own perfect weddings – ceremonies orchestrated by New York's best wedding planner and held at the historic Plaza Hotel.

Today Emma is a sweet, unassertive, financially challenged middle-school teacher. Liv is her polar opposite, a cutthroat attorney with a panoramic view of midtown Manhattan and a fat bank account.

But they remain best friends. It figures that they become engaged in the same week.

A scheduling error finds both women booked to be wed at exactly the same time in different rooms at the Plaza. This means Liv and Emma cannot serve as each other's maid of honour as planned. And their mutual friends will have to decide which wedding to attend.

All would be well if only one of them would cancel (or if they would agree to a double wedding), but they're too stubborn for that. This means war.

Emma sabotages Liv by anonymously sending her irresistible candies and cookies. Soon the bride-to-be cannot squeeze into her Vera Wang wedding dress.

"You don't alter a Vera Wang to fit you ... you alter yourself to fit Vera," she wails.

Liv retaliates and Emma emerges from a tanning salon the color of a fireplug. So Emma dyes Liv's hair blue.

These are best friends, remember?

Here's the problem: Both of these women behave like raving idiots. You can't root for either of them, and the peripheral characters – the grooms are played by Brian Greenburg and Chris Pratt, the high-powered wedding planner by Candice Bergen – aren't particularly important.

It's possible to make an enjoyable movie about unlikable characters, but it takes a lot more humour and cleverness than is displayed in the screenplay by Casey Wilson (*Saturday Night Live*), Greg DePaul (*Saving Silverman*) and June Diane Raphael.

Director Gary Winick made an impressive splash in 2002 with *Tadpole*. Since then, he has been reduced to cutesy stuff like *13 Going on 30* and *Charlotte's Web*, and he's unable to find a way to make *Bride Wars* fresh. Pretty much every cliché of the wedding movie gets trotted out, from the bachelorette party with male strippers to a squad of wedding professionals who act like the Secret Service, talking into their shirt cuffs and dropping military jargon.

An aura of familiarity and desperation hangs over the enterprise. After all, this is the era of *Bridezillas* – every week on TV you can see real-life wedding disasters more interesting than what goes on here.

– By Robert W. Butler



## Oscar nominations: *Benjamin Button*, *Slumdog Millionaire* and some surprises

By Roger Moore

*The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, the curiously *Gump*-like adaptation of an F. Scott Fitzgerald story, was the big winner when the 81st Academy Award nominations were announced today. Director David Fincher's sweetly melancholy musing on age and love took in 13 nominations, including ones for Fincher; his star, Brad Pitt; supporting actress Taraji P. Henson; and screenwriter Eric Roth, who also adapted the Oscar-winning *Forrest Gump* more than a decade ago.

*Slumdog Millionaire*, the uplifting comedy-drama about an orphaned boy of the streets whose life lessons pay off on a game show, landed 10 nominations, but none for its actors. While not nearly the box-office hit *Button* is, *Slumdog* has been the critics' darling this entire awards' season and has to be the favourite for best picture.

Those two films will vie for best picture against *Frost/Nixon*, *Milk* and *The Reader*, which earned a best director nomination for Stephen Daldry and a best actress nomination for its star, Kate Winslet. Winslet won't have the chance to duplicate her Golden Globes feat of winning both actress and best supporting actress honours – the Academy's 5,810 members didn't buy that her lead role in *The Reader* was a supporting performance, and didn't nominate her at all for *Revolutionary Road*.

Surprises? Nine months of critical acclaim paid off for Richard Jenkins, nominated for best actor for *The Visitor*, about a sad man given purpose in life when he allows himself to get involved with an illegal alien's plight. Melissa Leo's career-making turn in the indie drama about immigrant smuggling, *Frozen River*, didn't pay off with pre-Oscars awards. But the Academy remembered her and writer-director Courtney Hunt's riveting, gritty script. Michael Shannon's searing, brief performance as a mental patient who tells an unhappy, repressed married couple the harsh truth about their lives in *Revolutionary Road* earned him a best supporting actor nomination.

An unpleasant surprise, at least for fans and online campaigners at [darkcampaign.com](http://darkcampaign.com), was *The Dark Knight's* being shut out of best picture or best director nominations. The billion-dollar smash, a hit with critics as well, earned a nomination for the late Heath Ledger's performance as The Joker, and for makeup, editing, sound mixing, sound editing, and visual effects.

The best actress field is Meryl Streep, playing a nun in *Doubt*; Anne Hathaway's breakout turn in *Rachel Getting Married*; Winslet, Leo and Angelina Jolie, playing a mother battling bureaucracy in search of her missing son in Clint Eastwood's *Changeling*.

Best actor pits Jenkins against Frank Langel-

**“WHILE NOT NEARLY THE BOX-OFFICE HIT *BUTTON* IS, *SLUMDOG* HAS BEEN THE CRITICS' DARLING THIS ENTIRE AWARDS' SEASON AND HAS TO BE THE FAVOURITE FOR BEST PICTURE.**

la's ferocious but wounded Richard Nixon in *Frost/Nixon*, Sean Penn's vivid impersonation of Harvey Milk in *Milk*, Mickey Rourke's comeback as an aged pro wrestler in *The Wrestler* and Pitt in *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*.

Best supporting actor shapes up as heavy sentimental favorite Heath Ledger versus Josh Brolin (*Milk*), Robert Downey Jr. for his hilarious black-face turn in *Tropic Thunder*, Philip Seymour Hoffman in *Doubt* and Shannon. Best supporting actress will see Amy Adams and Viola Davis from *Doubt* vying with Henson from *Benjamin Button*, Penelope Cruz in Woody Allen's *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* and Marisa Tomei in *The Wrestler*.

The 81st edition of the Academy Awards will be handed out Feb. 23rd NZ time.

## Music



Bruce Springsteen performs during the Obama Inauguration Celebration at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., last weekend. / Rodger Mallison/Fort Worth Star-Telegram/MCT

## Life on E Street

By Ben Wener

*The Orange County Register*

It's a tired question about the very idea of getting tired. But it came up in conversation with Max Weinberg quite naturally. While he chomped away at a late lunch after his flight from Vancouver touched down in Los Angeles, I suddenly found the oh-so-obvious query I'd ordinarily resist reflexively popping out.

"Born to Run," "Badlands," "Rosalita," "Thunder Road" ... those indestructible giants of the Bruce Springsteen songbook, the ones that are rarely left off set lists ... well, c'mon, doesn't Conan O'Brien's favourite bandleader ever get tired of playing them?"

"Nope."

He responds before I even finish the question, like a guy who's been asked it a dozen times too many. But his resolve is so certain, so unwavering, it begs a bit of pressing.

"Never happens?"

"Never happens."

"You gotta be kidding. There has to be that one song ..." I figure the simplicity of "Dancing in the Dark" alone is enough to get even the Mighty Max daydreaming on autopilot some nights.

"Not me. I take each one very separately. And if he wants to play 'em, I'm there to play 'em as best I can."

"It's about staying in the moment," he explains. "I never make a judgment about what he wants to play. The only judgment I make about any song, whether it's for Bruce or on television, is to dig into it and get the most out of it every time. Most people would tell you I take a lot of things seriously ... but I definitely take that seriously."

That's the beauty of Weinberg: Like rock's best unassuming drummers — Ringo Starr, Charlie Watts, the Attractions' Pete Thomas, session greats like Steve Gadd and Jim Keltner — he serves the song, always, not his considerable chops.

He also claims to have a "photographic memory," so to speak, of every Springsteen song he's ever played on — so that when Bruce calls out an audible for, say, the "Born in the U.S.A." outtake "None but the Brave," as he did in Vancouver for the first

time this tour, Weinberg doesn't hesitate. Like the rest of the E Street Band, he knows he has to be fully prepared to pull anything out of his mental kit bag.

"He's really starting to mix it up a lot lately," Weinberg says of his, uh, boss — "our fearless leader," as he refers to him at one point. At all times, "You have to pay attention on stage, keep your eyes and ears open ... or you'll miss it."

"It" being whatever Springsteen wants to serve up to satisfy his mood, or the audience's. "That's key," Weinberg notes. "Or, you know, the bus will leave without you. And that's always an unpleasant feeling."

Not that there's much chance of that happening these days. Chrome-wheeled, fuel-injected and stepping out over the line night after night worldwide, the E Street Band remains a finely tuned machine — even now, with organist Danny Federici taking a leave of absence to battle melanoma. "He's on the injured reserve list," Weinberg says.

Many members, of course, are stars in their own right — chief among them guitarists Nils Lofgren (late of Grin and plenty of noteworthy solo work) and Steven Van Zandt (aka Silvio Dante of "The Sopranos" and host of the widely admired weekly radio program "Little Steven's Underground Garage"). Patti Scialfa, also Mrs. Springsteen, has garnered acclaim for her own music, particularly last year's "Play It as It Lays." The big man on saxophone, Clarence Clemons — he's virtually as recognizable on this Cadillac of rock 'n' roll bands as that car's hood ornament.

Add in bassist Gary W. Tallent and, especially, the graceful touch of pianist Roy Bittan whose work featured so poignantly on Meat Loaf's *Bat Out of Hell*, and you've got a unique, muscular, instantly identifiable sound from a legendary band that, after all these years, should have been properly credited on Springsteen's last album, "Magic." "I don't really know how to respond to that," Weinberg demurs when I suggest that. "That's the way the albums have always been, even predating when I joined the band (in 1974)." Besides, he adds, "Once people hear a record like this, they know."

They're "Blood Brothers," as the title of a 1996 documentary about the gang put it, despite the dou-

**“WE’RE ALL A LOT OLDER NOW, YOU KNOW. WE ALL HAVE FAMILIES AND SEPARATE LIVES. BUT WHEN WE PLAY TOGETHER, WE’RE LIKE THAT SAME BUNCH OF KIDS THAT STARTED THIS ALL THOSE YEARS AGO**

bling of estrogen in recent years with the addition of violinist Soozie Tyrell. And blood brothers don't mind letting their linchpin get the glory. But here's another "duh" question: Does the camaraderie we fans see onstage year after year carry on offstage? Are they as tight as they seem?

"Oh, absolutely," Weinberg responds. Just a few nights before in Vancouver, for instance, Springsteen, 58, and Weinberg, 57, took their sons to see a new favourite, the excitably punctuated Florida band *Against Me!* "Then they came to our sound-check the next day," Max murmurs between bites, "and they said it was almost like we had a sixth sense among us. Especially when we're rehearsing, there's very little talking — and then suddenly we're playing. That's how it is with us."

"We're all a lot older now, you know. We all have families and separate lives. But when we play together, we're like that same bunch of kids that started this all those years ago. These are bonds that have been created over a lifetime. What you see is what we are."

What you'll hear, however, and when ... well, that's up to no one but the Boss.

What's been turning up lately? Several from "The River" — "Sherry Darling," the chilling title tune and "Point Blank." "Because the Night." "Lost in the Flood." Even "Incident on 57th Street," and with some regularity.

True, the era of four-hour Springsteen marathons is long past. These days shows clock in at about two hours and change — "but I think in that period of time you get about five hours of music," Weinberg says, laughing.

"We're still playing on the edge," he insists. "We go out there and play hard — like it's the last time we're ever gonna play. Every single night is extremely meaningful for all of us, and the audience — that's why they keep coming back for more, I believe."

Sure, but let's be honest — many of them keep coming back because they think this will be the night they finally hear "Jungleland" or "Sandy." "Thundercrack" — that was the big surprise from this tour's first leg, though I recall going ape last year at the L.A. Sports Arena when Max started rattling his high-hat to kick off a not-nearly-as-rare "Candy's Room."

"Bruce has a particular set of ideas he wants to get across," he explains, "and we're sympathetic to what he wants to hear. But where we're headed each night is anyone's guess."

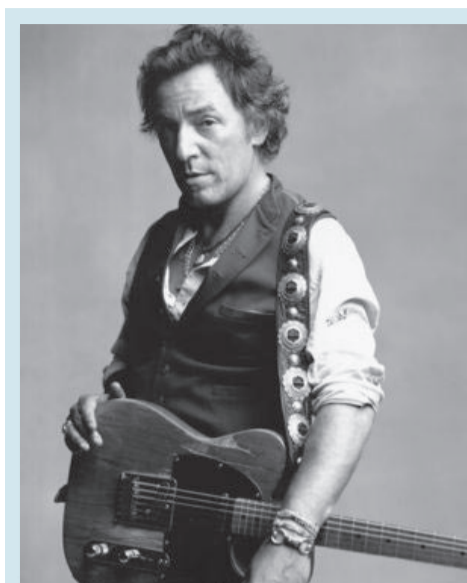
The expectation, he says, "if there is one that we carry with us, is not to live up to this idea of being Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band. It's to live up to something Bruce said many years ago — that we want to give people more than their money's worth."

But how do you do that when the shows are shorter and the prices higher? Reasonable, yes, especially compared to what other Hall of Famers charge now. But still higher.

"Well, I think the point is, when you're buying a ticket — whether it's for a movie or an extremely expensive Broadway show, or to see us — are you moved by the experience? Have you been changed in some way? That's what we try to do every night — come in to your town, play, change you ... and leave."

He chuckled at that thought, but he means it seriously: "On any given night, if you've spent your money and waited in line to see us, you know you're gonna see something that is a standard-bearer of striving toward excellence. You may not hear your favourite song. But if you go to enough concerts, you will."

Dancing In The Dark



## New Springsteen album ushers in Obama years

By Dave Tienen

*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*

It's difficult to separate Bruce Springsteen's "Working on a Dream" from the political optimism of the moment.

Springsteen was heavily invested in President Barack Obama's campaign, and the glow of that triumph ripples through the album, which will be released next Wednesday but is already being streamed at <http://www.npr.org/music>. To these ears, "Working on a Dream" is Springsteen's best album since "The Rising" and possibly his most optimistic work ever. There's a sense of renewal and even deliverance running through tunes such as "What Love Can Do," "This Life," "Kingdom of Days" and "My Lucky Day."

Interestingly, Springsteen almost always frames his optimism in the context of a relationship. "Working on a Dream" is the first-person tale of a working guy seeking to find reward for himself and his woman through the sweat of his own labour.

Unlike so many ordinary Joes in the Springsteen songbook, this doesn't sound like a man who's been betrayed by life.

Complementing the upbeat mood, the music is powerful and energized with the full weight of the E Street Band behind its leader.

There are a few departures. "Tomorrow Never Knows" has a folkish, country fiddle backing that could have slipped easily into "The Seeger Sessions." "Surprise, Surprise" is, of all things, part love song, part birthday song.

Over a loping rhythm, Springsteen tells his lover, this "is the start of a brand new day/and all that you have wished for I know will come your way."

Of course, this is Springsteen, so there are occasional breaks in the euphoria. The best song in the album may be the first track, "Outlaw Pete," about a mythic figure of the best kind: "At 6 months old, he'd done three months in jail." This is the kind of narrative outlaw tale that borrows from such Dylan sagas as "Billy" and "Lily, Rosemary and the Jack of Hearts," the American tall-tale tradition, a dab of Marty Robbins and an apparent swipe at Ennio Morricone's "The Man With the Harmonica."

The album closes with "The Wrestler," a close cousin of Springsteen's "The Hitter" or Simon & Garfunkel's "The Boxer."

"The Wrestler" is the title song of the Mickey Rourke movie, and it's another saga of a used-up warrior who has nothing left to give but his pain: "I can make you smile when the blood hits the floor/Tell me, friend, can you ask for anything more?"

An honest assessment of "Working on a Dream" demands recognition of the one song that seems wildly out of sync, not just with the album but Springsteen's entire body of work.

"Queen of the Supermarket" is a mousy fantasy about a guy who's secretly in love with the bagger at his local grocery.

He's totally smitten with "the way she moves behind the counter" and says, "Each night I take my groceries and I drift away." It's part musical sitcom, part nod to '60s girl-group dramas such as "Leader of the Pack."

But when did Springsteen ever operate on such a broad and campy level?

## NEW CD RELEASES

## Eliane Elias

➔ **Bossa Nova Stories**

➔ Blue Note,

★★★★☆



There are more than a few jazz musicians with classical chops and vice versa. The Marsalis brothers and Yo-Yo Ma spring immediately to mind. But Eliane Elias goes one step further.

The São Paulo-born pianist-singer makes music with both classical sensibility and jazz sounds hard and soft. But it's her take on bossa nova that is most intriguing. Elias brought to "Plays Jobim" (1989) and "Sings Jobim" (1998) both complexity and samba-riffic subtlety. On "Bossa Nova Stories" she adds warm strings to Jobim's becalmed "The Girl From Ipanema" and Harry Warren's plucky "The More I See You." Backed by a capable ensemble (including bassist Marc Johnson and harmonicist Toots Thielemans), Elias gently kicks up her heels on piano. While dancing, Elias sings in Portuguese the likes of "Chega de Saudade" and "Minha Saudade." Elias may have a paper-thin voice, but Astrud Gilberto was no Aretha Franklin, either. More than Elias' previous efforts, "Stories" is playful. Brava.

—A.D. Amorosi

## Steve Martin

➔ **The Crow: New Songs for the 5-String Banjo**

➔ 40 Productions

★★★★☆



Yes, it's that Steve Martin.

The funny-man/actor/author also is an accomplished banjo player, as one might remember from those early "wild-and-crazy-guy" days. "The Crow," is the follow-up to 2007's "Double

Banjo Bluegrass Spectacular" (Tony Trischka's album with Martin, Bela Fleck and others).

Trischka is on hand for "The Crow," along with Vince Gill, Tim O'Brien, Mary Black, Dolly Parton and banjoists Earl Scruggs and Pete Wernick.

Martin wrote 14 of the 15 songs, which range from folk-tinged ballads to more energetic bluegrass. His fleet-fingered picking on "Daddy Played the Banjo" and "Saga of the Old West" is no joke.

—Jim Abbott

## Diego Amador

➔ **Rio de los canasteros**

➔ World Village/Nuevos Medios S.A

★★★★☆



As a potent interpreter of flamenco's bottomless gypsy soul — traditionally or in adventurous hybrids — Spain's Amador is a unique triple threat. The guitar is, of course, central to flamenco conception/expression, and the 35-year-old Andalusian plays well.

(Interestingly, he first appeared to many as a precocious drummer in his older brothers' landmark '80s flamenco-blues-rock band Pata Negra.) As a singer, Amador cuts loose in a moving, cracked-voice style that can recall no less than the late, great modern cantor Camaron de la Isla. And he is self-evidently the flamenco pianist of this era, probing deeper than ever on his latest album. Amador translates his Spanish heart through the ivories, working in impressionistic jazz touches on trad alegrías and bulerías that can evoke Bill Evans, Keith Jarrett, even justify a "gitano Ray Charles" tag. Although flamenco guitar master Tomatito and vocalist La Susi shine as guests, the record's core track is Amador's homage to "nuevo flamenco" artist Manzanita, passionately covering the deceased innovator's "Suenami guitarra" with only voice — and piano.

—David R. Stampone

## Books



## Author unlocks mysteries of networking

**Smart Networking: Attract a Following in Person and Online**

➔ **By Liz Lynch**

➔ McGraw-Hill, (US\$13.22 via Amazon)

Networking is confusing. Merely a few short years ago, it was just a matter of handing out and scooping up business cards then following up with a nice note and/or phone call. The proliferation of e-mail provided another way to keep in touch, then blogs, MySpace, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and other Internet applications afforded additional solutions — and challenges. How do you make sense of it all? More importantly, how can you use these tools to effectively connect with colleagues, clients and others?

Damned if I know. I blog, am on LinkedIn, Facebook, MySpace and even signed up for Seth Godin's new leadership network, Triiibes, but have yet to figure out how to make all these disparate media work cohesively and consistently for me. Right now, in fact, I need it more than ever. Luckily, I have Liz Lynch to learn from!

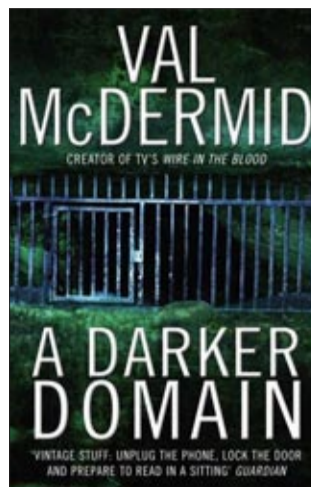
Initially I was a little wary of her new book. After all, the early chapters are devoted to establishing why it's so important to network in the first place. Double duh! Anyone in this age and business climate who is unwilling or unable to grasp why it's still not simply what you know, but who you know — and who they know — deserves their infamous and ignominious fate. Yet, Lynch patiently and painstakingly explains all the whys and wherefores in an effort to allay the sundry fears of the averse.

This entry-level *Networking for Dummies* approach didn't really do much for me, though it's unquestionably of value to newbies or other relatively clueless individuals for whom the process may appear daunting or overly icky.

So I dutifully ploughed through this all-too-familiar territory, read the reasoned arguments for engagement and wondered if we'd be seeing something that would actually justify her use of the word "smart" in the title.

Eureka! After 164 pages, Lynch finally gets to the money shot: creating an action plan with specific goals and the means to achieve them. There's an excellent single-page form you can complete that will add clarity and help define your ends and means. But it's not a one-size-fits-all solution. Instead, it's a menu of strategies and tactics, so it's not simply plug-and-play, but if you have already embarked upon the fundamentals, you'll be well positioned to proceed. For example, how can you integrate your blog with Facebook and/or LinkedIn? Should you produce an e-book, and if so, do you distribute it by e-mail as text, html or as an attachment or download? Lynch doesn't tell you what to do, but presents options since your needs and goals should determine your course of action.

Her Web site, [www.smartnetworking.com](http://www.smartnetworking.com), offers



readers access to a downloadable version of the plan by using a password included in this book. The site has a number of resources for nonreaders, too, and is an extremely useful complement to everything offered herein.

For those of us struggling to leverage our knowledge, experience and contacts, the lucid lessons of Liz Lynch may prove to be not just smart, but lucrative, too.

—By Richard Pachter

## A Darker Domain rooted in 1980 coal strike in Scotland

**A Darker Domain**

➔ **By Val McDermid**

➔ Harper (NZ\$35)

During the 1980s, a coal mining strike changed the landscape of many Scottish towns. Tight-knit communities and families were torn apart by the long strike that drained meagre savings, by the workers who left for other jobs and by Margaret Thatcher's union-busting policies.

That historical footnote provides the background for Scottish author Val McDermid's powerful *A Darker Domain* that looks at the personal and political turmoil that the strike brought. As she did in her outstanding *A Place of Execution* (1998), McDermid illustrates how the past affects the present.

In *A Darker Domain*, two crimes from the mid-1980s affect the lives of families decades later.

Mick Prentice, a union supporter and one of his town's leaders, was one of those men who left with other strikebreakers. To the community he left behind, this was tantamount to treason. With "implacable poverty" affecting the village, "it had been a hard way of life, the community spirit its only real compensation." Mick's abandoned wife and daughter became outcasts who could barely afford food. But now it appears that no one knows exactly what happened to Mick and that he may not have left with those men. Trying to track him down is futile.

His daughter, now a mother with a sick child, files a missing persons report on him more than 23 years later. As insightful cold case detective Karen Pirie looks into that case, she also is pulled into the decades-old kidnapping of an heiress and her baby that happened during that same time. The young woman was killed, but her baby was never found. Now clues about the case surface in Italy.

McDermid keeps the suspense high as she also delivers an emotionally wrenching story about people abandoned by those they trust the most.

*A Darker Domain* also is a personal story for McDermid, who has written 22 novels. The author grew up in the Scottish region where she sets her novel; her father and grandfather were miners.

—By Oline H. Cogdill

## Historical novel rich, insightful

**Land of Marvels**

➔ **By Barry Unsworth**

➔ Hutchinson (NZ\$36.99)

It is always fascinating when two authors, working separately, produce strikingly similar novels. Consider, for example, the way Barry Unsworth's latest historical fiction, *Land of Marvels*, and Peter Ackroyd's *The Fall of Troy* (2007) use nearly identical material to differing ends.

Both novels feature an eccentric European archaeologist pioneering an important Middle Eastern dig. Each man has a strong-minded wife who betrays him and a bright younger British scholar as his assistant.

The synchronicities do not stop with the books. Unsworth and Ackroyd alike are celebrated British writers. Both have been shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize, with Unsworth winning in 1992 for *Sacred Hunger*.

Ackroyd's is the slimmer of the two novels, both in ambition and actual length. *The Fall of Troy* is a farce of scientific egomania. Its presiding spirit might be Evelyn Waugh, that supreme parodist of colonial hubris.

Working with broader scope, Unsworth seems governed by the sombre spirit of Joseph Conrad, informed by a deep notion of the way business, politics and science serve imperialism, to the sorrow of future generations.

Unsworth's principal character, John Somerville, squanders his small fortune excavating a desert mound in Ottoman territory outside Baghdad, just before World War I. Inspired by the success of Austen Henry Layard, who excavated Nineveh and discovered the library of Ashurbanipal, Somerville is certain the site contains an Assyrian palace.

Just as Somerville uncovers tantalizing artifacts, a German-built railroad project threatens to pass through his dig. Seeking the protection of British power, he becomes the dupe of Lord Rampling, a ruthless businessman and politician, who forces Somerville to accept the presence of an American geologist posing as an archaeologist.

Elliott arrives to covertly survey the area's untapped oil reserves. Brash and manly, he makes a decided impression on Somerville's wife, Edith. Other key figures in Unsworth's large cast of characters include the assistant, Palmer; a British major and an Austrian journalist, both mercenaries sent to keep an eye on Elliott; and Jehar, a street-and-desert-smart Arab determined to earn a hundred pounds to buy the girl he's fallen in love with.

Unsworth aims to show how the quagmire of war and factional strife in Iraq today came into being nearly a century ago. His prodigious knowledge of subjects such as history, archaeology, petroleum geology, European politics, Arab tribalism and human psychology serves him well.

And yet, Unsworth both under- and overreaches. He writes with an old-fashioned limited-omniscience narration that switches from one character's point of view to another in the middle of a scene. The resulting density makes the reading unnecessarily difficult, which paradoxically lends the narrative an unearned profundity.

On the other hand, after setting in motion a great, clanking narrative machinery, he brings it up short with a spectacular climax more suited to a movie than a serious novel. *Land of Marvels*, at 287 pages, is simply too short to accommodate its author's grand design.

In this regard, Ackroyd's *The Fall of Troy*, with its narrower focus, is the more completely realized of the two books. Still, *Land of Marvels*, with its insight into its time and region, its satisfying use of character and setting, remains a powerful literary historical novel, of a kind not often assayed anymore.

—By Chauncey Mabe

# Blind human 'dolphin' dies at 16

By Cynthia Hubert

**SACRAMENTO, CALIF.** — Aquanetta Gordon knew that her remarkable son's life on Earth soon would be over.

"You can let go," she told him. "You can go home. When you get to heaven, tell Jesus to save that spot right next to you. That's for your mother."

Hours later, Ben Underwood, the blind Elk Grove, Calif., teenager who dazzled people all over the world with his ability to "see" with sound, died at home with his family surrounding him.

Ben would have turned 17 this Tuesday. Instead, friends and relatives will be gathering on that day for his funeral.

"I am so sad that I won't be able to see him physically anymore," Ben's mother said. "But I'm praising God because I know that he is happy right now. So when I think of him, I just smile."

Ben built an enduring legacy after his story became public in *The Sacramento Bee* in May 2006. He became a worldwide celebrity, an Internet sensation and an inspirational speaker.

"He motivated people who wanted to see again, wanted to live again," Aquanetta Gordon said. "Ben was blind, but he saw more than most."

A cancer called retinoblastoma took both of Ben's eyes when he was a toddler, but he never let his blindness prevent him from navigating the world. Much to the amazement of those around him, including his teachers and doctors, he taught himself a skill called

echolocation commonly used by bats and dolphins but rarely documented in humans. By making clicking noises with his tongue and listening to the sound waves he created, he learned to identify objects and get around safely.

Motivated by his mother, Ben attended mainstream schools, most recently Sheldon High, and engaged in all of the normal activities of childhood and youth. He refused to use a white cane identifying him as blind. He played basketball, danced, practiced karate, skated and rode a bike through his neighbourhood. He mastered video games by memorizing scenarios and identifying sounds that characters made just before they changed positions.

"Ben was perhaps the most inspirational patient I've seen in more than 20 years in medicine," said Kaiser Permanente paediatric eye surgeon James Ruben. He praised Ben and his mother for refusing to consider his blindness a major handicap, and for demonstrating "how to best approach even seemingly insurmountable adversity."

For the past two years, Ben has appeared on television programs across the country and far beyond, travelling from Japan to Great Britain to tell his story and deliver inspirational speeches. He swam with dolphins in San Diego, surfed in Hawaii, danced with Ellen DeGeneres and charmed Oprah Winfrey. He became friends with iconic musician Stevie Wonder, who recently visited him in Elk Grove.

Through it all, Gordon said, her son remained humble and focused.

"None of it went to his head," she said. "He knew his purpose. Many of us focus on acquiring things in life. But love is so much more important than things. Ben understood that."

Ben's cancer was in check until 2007, when he developed a tumor in his sinus cavity. Intensive treatment failed to knock down the disease.

In recent weeks Gordon, who has four other children ages 13 and up and had been working two jobs, cared for Ben at home. As his life slipped away she got help from hospice nurses, family members and friends.

In his final days, Ben enjoyed listening to gospel music and getting neck and back massages. He seemed more concerned about his mother's emotional state than his own pain, forgoing medications and assuring her that he was fine.

"It was hard to watch my baby go from being so active and so happy-go-lucky to not being able to walk or talk anymore," Gordon said. "But the blessing was in seeing all of the people around him, loving on him."

"Now I know that Ben is in heaven. He is able to see, and he has no pain. He's in a place that none of us can even fathom."

To post a message for Ben Underwood's family, go to <http://www.benunderwood.com>

— MCT



**BY MAKING CLICKING NOISES WITH HIS TONGUE AND LISTENING TO THE SOUND WAVES HE CREATED, HE LEARNED TO IDENTIFY OBJECTS AND GET AROUND SAFELY**

# Stevia wonder: the new Coke sweetener

By Mike Hughlett

Type in "aspartame" or "sucralose" into a search engine, and you're bound to come up with all sorts of hits linking the two artificial sweeteners to some sort of malady. Never mind that the Food and Drug Administration says they are safe.

Now, the FDA soon may give the green light to zero-calorie sweeteners derived from stevia, a shrub. Stevia-based sweeteners are regarded as natural, a Holy Grail for makers of soda and other products because it is believed they will appeal to health-conscious consumers.

Major U.S. beverage companies PepsiCo Inc. and Coca-Cola Co. are eager to launch stevia-sweetened products once the FDA gives its blessing. Agribusiness giant Cargill Inc. has a stevia-based sweetener in grocery stores, and Chicago-based Merisant Co., maker of the popular sweetener Equal, soon will do the same.

Federal law allows companies to self-certify products as safe prior to an FDA decision on the matter, even if concerns are being voiced about their safety. But the big beverage companies are waiting because they don't want to have to pull products in case the FDA says no.

And concerns are being voiced about potential cancer-causing properties of stevia, particularly by the Center for Science in the Public Interest, a food watchdog group that is urging that the FDA do more testing.

Artificial sweeteners, from saccharin to aspartame to sucralose, long have been vital to the production of diet food and drinks. But from careful scientific studies to "Internet quackery," they also have been dogged by health concerns, said Mike Richardson, an industry analyst at consultant Freedomia Group.

Rival artificial sweeteners have fought each other over purported health claims. Merisant sued Johnson & Johnson, the maker of sucralose-based Splenda, claiming Splenda's advertising misleadingly implied that it was more natural and healthy. The two companies settled the matter last year but did not disclose the terms.

Health concerns about stevia will probably linger, too, even after any FDA approval, Richardson said. But, he said, "the plant origin of stevia will mitigate that to some extent."

Stevia is native to South America and historically



**A FEW DECADES AGO, JAPAN DEVELOPED COMMERCIAL STEVIA-BASED SWEETENERS, AND SUCH PRODUCTS ARE WIDELY USED IN SEVERAL OTHER ASIAN COUNTRIES**

has been used as a sweetener by people in those lands. A few decades ago, Japan developed commercial stevia-based sweeteners, and such products are widely used in several other Asian countries.

Australia also recently approved stevia as a sweetener. Meanwhile, an international scientific committee affiliated with the World Health Organization this year concluded that highly-pure stevia extracts are safe.

Still, stevia-based sweeteners are banned in much of Europe, and in the United States they have been prohibited as a food additive; that's what's pending before the FDA.

Federal rules haven't been stevia's only problem: As a sweetener, it created an unpleasant, licorice-like aftertaste, which researchers have struggled to erase. Cargill and Merisant believe they've found the answer in their Truvia and PureVia sweeteners, respectively, that will be the labels for all their stevia-based products.

Both contain rebaudioside A, a natural compound derived from the sweetest and best-tasting part of the stevia plant. By isolating that compound, the companies believe they can strip out bad aftertastes and create a product that's much purer than stevia-based food additives so far frowned on by the FDA.

If Cargill and Merisant have scored, the implications could be particularly big for the beverage industry, some analysts say.

"The industry has long looked for the Holy Grail, a natural diet sweetener that has excellent taste," said John Sicher, editor and publisher of Beverage Digest.

Stevia-based drinks "could mean a very substantial change for the U.S. industry," he said. "But I cannot emphasize strongly enough that the impact depends on how good these beverages taste."

Coke and Pepsi believe they've got a winner, tastewise. Coke helped develop Cargill's stevia-based sweetener, while Pepsi has teamed up with Merisant in the creation of PureVia.

Coke won't comment on its Truvia-related plans. But Pepsi has announced it will launch two PureVia-sweetened beverages soon after an FDA approval: a zero-calorie version of SoBe Lifewater and a "light orange juice beverage" called Trop 50. Pepsi owns the Tropicana orange juice brand, which is run from Chicago.

Analysts don't expect Pepsi and Coke to rush into reformulating their flagship diet products; that would be too risky. Instead, the soft-drinks kings are

expected to use stevia in new products and extensions of existing brands.

Cargill's Truvia-brand tabletop sweetener has been sold in major supermarket chains for months, though its cost is considerably higher than that of artificial sweeteners. Merisant says its PureVia packet sweetener should be on grocery shelves soon.

Wal-Mart, the nation's biggest grocer, is one of the few food retailers waiting on the FDA before stocking either stevia-based product.

Under federal law, a company can determine by itself that a food additive is "generally accepted as safe." Companies can ask the FDA to review their scientific rationale for making such a declaration; if they don't, they risk retribution from the FDA if their product turns out not to be safe.

Last spring, Cargill and Merisant both asked the FDA for such reviews. Cargill's evidence for Truvia included several company-commissioned studies published in an independent, peer-reviewed scientific journal. Merisant convened a panel of independent experts that reviewed all safety information on stevia, submitting their findings to the FDA.

"The companies have sent some very useful findings" to the FDA, said Michael Jacobson, head of the Center for Science in the Public Interest. Still, a report prepared for Jacobson's group last summer by toxicologists at UCLA found that several laboratory tests have shown stevia to cause DNA mutations in laboratory animals, a potential precursor to cancer.

Jacobson calls for more testing, and that it be done by the FDA. He also said the federal government should junk the whole concept of allowing companies to affirm the safety of their own products.

"It's a huge loophole in consumer protection," he said.

But Cargill spokeswoman Ann Tucker said the science behind Cargill's research is every bit as rigorous as any direct FDA investigation.

"It's not like there's two sets of science," she said. And Cargill has no incentive to short-shrift safety research, only to have the FDA later yank a product off the shelf, she said. "There's no reason to do it halfway."

Merisant Chief Executive Paul Block, too, backed the rigour of his firm's research.

"There will be debates about health and safety, but that's the American way," he said.



# The Pres gets a geekphone

**WASHINGTON** — The reports are true. US President Barack Obama is carrying an ultra-secure smartphone to keep him from “getting stuck in a bubble,” his spokesman Robert Gibbs confirmed this afternoon.

Before Obama’s inauguration on Wednesday, there were reports of how unhappy he was at the prospect of having strict limits on his communications with family, friends and the outside world for security and legal reasons.

Photos taken during the presidential election campaign often caught him tapping away on a BlackBerry. But security concerns meant he could not keep a standard smartphone as president for fear that his communications would be hacked or his whereabouts revealed.

Gibbs said the security on the device had been “enhanced” to allow him to “stay in touch with senior staff and a small group of personal friends in a way that use will be limited.”

But there was a catch. The e-mails would all be subject to the presidential records law that requires all presidential communications to be documented.

“There are ... some narrow exemptions,” Gibbs said. “But ... the presumption from the counsel’s office is that ... they will be subject to the Presidential Records Act.”

Gibbs, who has worked closely with Obama for a number of years, recounted his own emailing relationship with the president.

“I’ve gotten e-mails from him - not recently, or not in a few days, I should say - that go from anywhere from something that’s very strictly business to, ‘Why did my football team perform so miserably on either any given Saturday or any given Sunday?’”

Gibbs, who called the solution “a compromise,” did not specify the technical details of the device.

A report in *The Atlantic Monthly* magazine Thursday said the solution had been found in a special BlackBerry look-alike made by General Dynamics and called the Sectera Edge.

The device was developed for the National Security Agency’s “secure mobile environment portable electronic device programme,” and is “certified to protect wireless voice communications classified

Top Secret and below as well as access email and websites classified Secret and below,” according to the company’s website.

The price of such devices normally ranges from US\$2,650 to \$3,350.

Obama got a boost in his quest to keep a modern communications device to stay in touch outside the bubble from John D. Podesta, the head of Obama’s transition team, who wrote last week about the issue in an opinion piece for *The Los Angeles Times*.

“I’ve been working with Barack Obama since before the election, and I know that without his virtual connection to old friends and trusted confidants beyond the bubble that seals off every president from the people who elected him, he’d be like a caged lion padding restlessly around



the West Wing, wondering what’s happening on the other side of the iron bars that surround the People’s House,” Podesta wrote.

—DPA

# Trees dying at increasing rate, study finds



By Michelle Ma  
*The Seattle Times*

**SEATTLE** — Trees in the US west coast’s oldest, richest forests are dying at an increasing rate, and scientists point to regional warming as the probable cause, according to a new study published today.

If the mortality rate continues to rise in Washington and across other western states, it’s likely that forests will be made up of smaller, younger trees that

are more susceptible to fires and massive die-offs, the study concludes.

The paper in the journal *Science* says the death rate for trees in Northwest forests remains small, but has nearly doubled over the past few decades.

“It just might be a harbinger of more to come,” said Mark Harmon, a professor at Oregon State University’s Department of Forest Ecosystems and Society and a collaborator to the study. “It has to raise questions about how these forests will function in the future.”

Harmon said the mortality rate in some areas may be changing from 1 to 2 percent a year, “an extra tree here and there.”

“It doesn’t look like a lot of trees, but the concept is it’s happening in many areas,” he said.

The study’s authors compiled data from more than 75 plots in old-growth forests throughout the western United States and Canada. Many of these plots were set up four decades ago as long-term study sites for researchers at various universities and federal agencies. In Washington, a dozen sites are near Mount Rainier, and a handful are on the Olympic Peninsula and close to Mount St. Helens.

The study looked at forest sites that hadn’t recently been through fires or insect infestations. The plots in Washington come from healthy, stable forests with trees up to 2.3 metres in diameter, said Andrew Larson, a doctoral candidate in University of Washington’s College of Forest Resources who helped monitor the sites.

“On the surface, there are no clues — if you just look casually at the forest — that things have really changed,” Larson said. “We normally think of them as being quite healthy and normal.”

And yet by looking at data that tracks the number of trees in each plot, researchers have found that trees of every size and species are dying in greater numbers, and for a variety of reasons, no matter the elevation or climate of their particular forest.

While the death rate was increasing, the rate of

new trees sprouting and surviving was not, the study found.

Scientists looked at factors that can cause trees to die, including competition from overcrowding, tall trees falling on smaller ones and exposure to air pollution. But data analysis ruled out each factor as being a dominant reason for the long-term trend.

Warming temperatures emerged as the probable reason for more tree deaths, the study says. Higher average temperatures can cause greater stress on trees from lack of water, leaving them vulnerable to disease and insects.

Across the West, average temperatures have increased by nearly 1 degree Celsius over the past 30 years or so, said Nathan Stephenson with the U.S. Geological Survey.

“The important message is wherever we looked, mortality rates are increasing,” said Stephenson, a co-author of the study. “In more pristine places — the Olympics in Washington — their mortality rates were skyrocketing also, and that’s an area that’s not polluted.”

Still, forests in the Pacific Northwest are incredibly resilient, and the finding that more trees are dying in otherwise healthy forests shouldn’t signal panic, said Jerry Franklin, a UW professor in the College of Forest Resources who set up and has monitored many of the sites used in the study.

The report should drive home the need for more of the most-basic research — counting trees and keeping track of what’s dead and alive year-to-year, he said.

# Global warming hysteria continues

By Robert Mitchum  
*Chicago Tribune*

**CHICAGO** — The news might seem welcome in the middle of a long, cold winter: Scientists have shown that the start of spring has moved almost two days earlier in the past 50 years.

But scientists claim the finding, one of two papers released Wednesday on climate change, is actually a warning sign. Together, the studies bolster the argument that the planet’s temperatures have shifted significantly in the last half-century, with many of the potential consequences likely to be negative.

Reporting in the scientific journal *Nature*, two teams of scientists presented evidence that all seasons are occurring earlier worldwide and that more of Antarctica is showing signs of warming than had been thought.

The seasonal study, from the University of California-Berkeley and Harvard University, compared temperature data in regions around the world to the distance between the sun and Earth at various

points in time.

The information showed that warming temperatures associated with spring, as well as autumnal cooling, have moved forward by 1.7 days from 1954 to 2007. Such a shift is not seen anywhere else in temperature records stretching back to the 19th century, and much of the change appears to have occurred since 1981, said the lead author, Berkeley graduate student Alexander Stine.

“Really, the last 27 years stand out as being different from anywhere previous in the record,” Stine said.

The other report, led by University of Washington climatologist Eric Steig, addresses previous observations that only the northwestern peninsula of Antarctica has shown significant warming over the past 40 years, while the bulk of the continent appeared to be cooling.

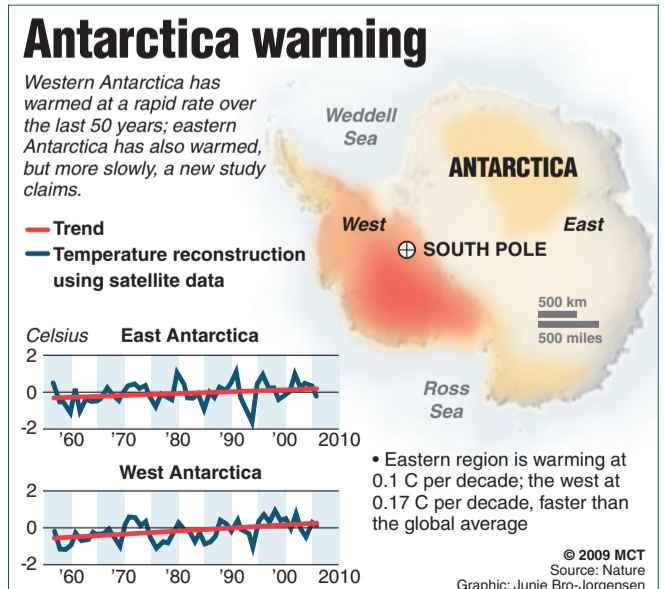
Those measurements were fixed on by climate change skeptics who are unconvinced that the planet is undergoing a universal warming trend.

But by adding satellite data to temperatures collected from weather stations in Antarctica from

1957 to 2006, Steig’s team found that a large portion of western Antarctica has been warming at a rate of 0.17 degrees Celsius per decade, roughly double the global warming rate in the past century.

Steig cautioned that the limitations of the data make it hard to predict future temperature changes in the region. But if warming is occurring across a wider area than previously observed, that could increase the possibility of large ice shelves melting off the continent and changing sea levels around the world.

“This study showing warming means we can’t be complacent about thinking the West Antarctica ice sheet is invulnerable,” Steig said. “It will eventually melt if warming like this continues.”





## A Honduras vacation in ruins

By Patti Nickell

**COPAN, HONDURAS** – The early-morning sun bur-nishes the stone temples to a golden sheen, while on their facades, serpents writhe, jaguars crouch, birds preen and gods grimace in a pantomime that has been going on for nearly 2,000 years. The silence is shattered only by the screech of a howler monkey living in the surrounding jungle.

In a few hours, the chiselling of archaeological teams combined with the chattering of tourists will imbue this primeval scene with a sort of 21st-century immediacy, but now, just after dawn, when it's nearly deserted, it's easy to imagine the ghosts of ancient Mayans treading the sacred ground.

Copan, once one of the four major capitals of the Mayan world, is today Honduras' major tourist attraction. Along with its three sister cities – Palenque and Calakmul in Mexico, and Tikal in Guatemala – it gives visitors insight into an empire that stretched from Mexico's Yucatan across Belize, Honduras and Guatemala to El Salvador, encompassing most of Central America.

Although there is archaeological evidence that the Copan Valley was inhabited as early as 1200 B.C., it wasn't until A.D. 426 that it was first ruled by a king (Yax K'uk' Mo', which means Great-Sun First Quetzal Macaw; successive monarchs had equally descriptive monikers, including names that translated to Smoke Monkey, Waterlily Jaguar and 18 Rabbit). By A.D. 750, the civilization had reached its zenith.

The 12-square-mile area of Copan includes more than 750 sites and 4,500 structures: temples, tombs, sacrificial altars and courtyards, as well as caves that are considered portals to the Mayan underworld.

Excavations reveal that Copan was a ceremonial centre and meeting place for the Maya. From here they predicted solar and lunar eclipses; made calculations on the movements of Jupiter, Mars and, some think, even Mercury; and interwove aspects of

nature with a belief in supernatural forces. In the first system of writing in the New World, they carved all their findings on huge stone tablets called stelae. The most prominent of these monoliths recounts the life and death of the aforementioned 18 Rabbit, an eighth-century king and patron of the arts who was beheaded by a rival tribe.

Modern visitors to Copan enter the ruins from the western Mayan Road, the same route taken by the Maya and later by their Spanish conquerors. A cedar-lined alley leads to the entrance, which, on my visit, was guarded by five colourful macaws.

This is a good spot to pause and reflect on how Copan must have looked when it was discovered in the 16th century after having been swallowed up by the jungle and hidden for several centuries. Or to consider how it must have looked in 1839, when a local farmer sold it to American archaeologist John Stephens for \$50, and how it continued to look until the 1930s, when the first excavation began.

Mayan kings might rest uneasily in their graves if they knew that many of Copan's greatest treasures now grace public museums, including the British Museum in London and Harvard's Peabody Museum, and assorted private collections; still, enough remains to titillate the professional and armchair archaeologist.

Most visitors gravitate first to the Acropolis, a large complex of overlapping step pyramids, plazas and palaces, or to the Great Plaza. Here, stone buttresses surround a grassy knoll where the Maya congregated to watch performances of music and dance. Athletic contests were held at the opposite end of the plaza, and if you think today's fans are rabid, consider the Maya. Spectators, sitting in what might have been the world's first stadium seats, wagering jade, gold, houses, even themselves into slavery, should they lose bets on games that were a combination of soccer and basketball.

But if you pity the poor spectator who bet on the

wrong team and found himself in servitude, consider the plight of the athlete who dropped the ball. Believing that the ball couldn't touch the ground because the lords of hell would rise up in anger, the Maya had an effective penalty for a fumble: They sacrificed the fumbler.

Leaving the Great Plaza, most visitors next explore the funerary temple, where archaeologists think many of Copan's 16 kings are buried. At the temple entrance is an elaborate altar where the remains of 16 jaguars (representing the kings) were found. Next to the temple is the tomb of the royal scribe, the keeper of the culture, whose stature in Mayan society was almost equal to that of the king.

If you really want to feel as if you're in an Indiana Jones movie (and aren't claustrophobic or afraid of the occasional snake), you can follow a candle-wielding guide into the labyrinth of narrow, dark tunnels – one

of which cloisters Copan's earliest dynastic temple.

Just as drawings on Rome's catacomb walls depict early Christian lore, the etchings on the tunnel walls are a text of Mayan philosophy. A 40-foot-long crocodile stencilled on the wall, for example, reflects their belief that the surface of the earth was the back of a giant crocodile floating in an immense pond.

Back above ground, check out the Mayan world's longest hieroglyphic staircase (a complete written history of the Maya, with 2,000 glyphs, some of which, over the years, have become indecipherable). In the courtyard, freestanding sculptures approximate a Mayan version of Stonehenge.

After spending a day touring these magnificent ruins – now a UNESCO World Heritage Site – I came away with a better appreciation of a complex people whose civilization was advanced long before Europe began emerging from the Dark Ages.



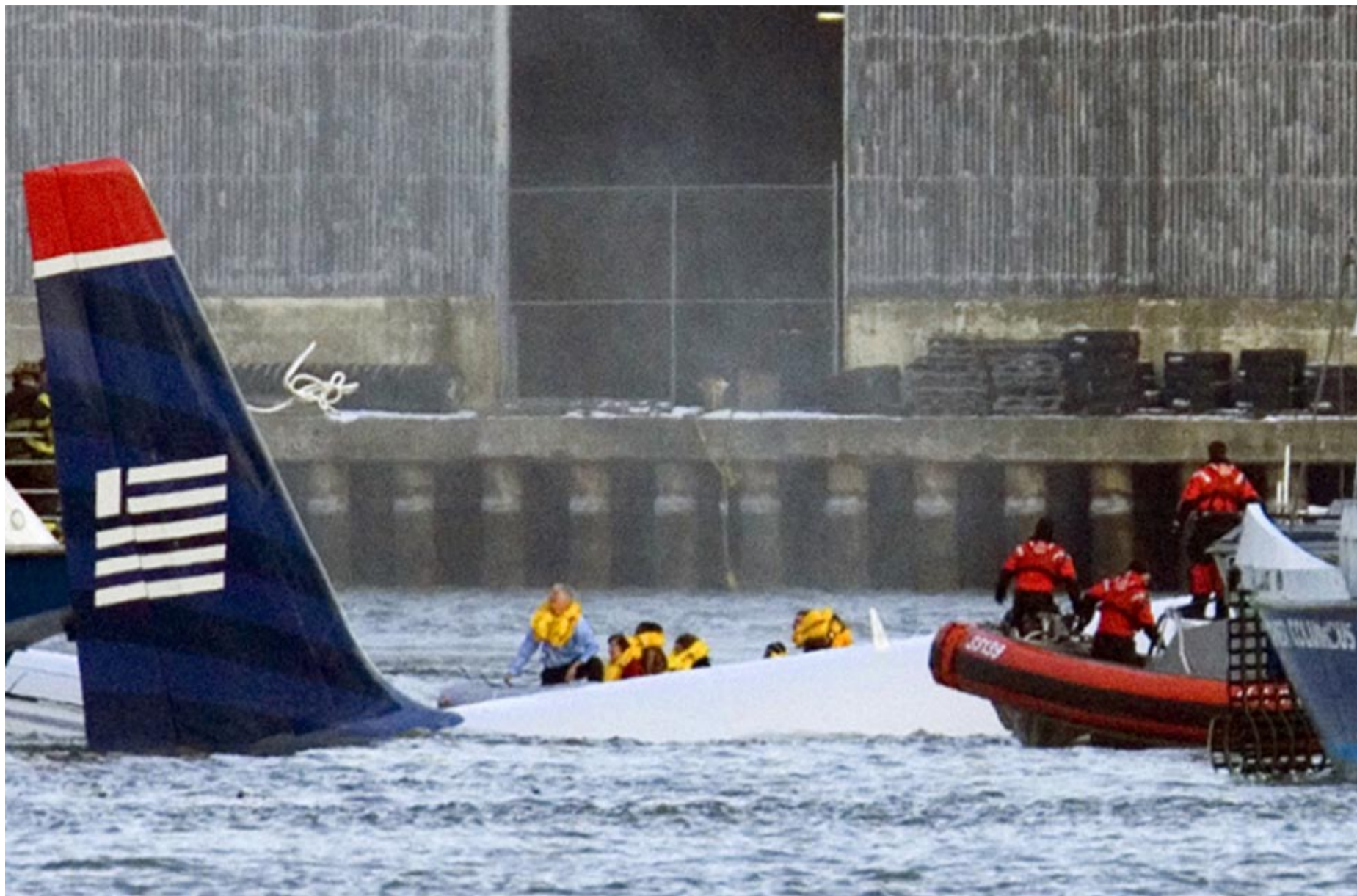
### IF YOU GO

**WHERE TO STAY** ▶ The Marina Hotel is the best place to stay for proximity to the ruins. Not exactly a five-star property, it is clean and comfortable. Rates begin at US\$80 for a single room and \$90 for a double. [www.hotelmartina.com](http://www.hotelmartina.com).

**WHERE TO EAT** ▶ The place to hang out with locals and archaeologists working at the ruins is El Tunkul Restaurante y Bar, a block west of the Central Park. Always lively, El Tunkul has food that is good and inexpensive. My dinner plus a bottle of Salve Vida, a good Honduran beer, came to about \$11.

**VISITING THE RUINS** ▶ Tours can be arranged at the park entrance with an English-speaking guide. There are various prices for different tours, so it is best to establish the price upfront.

**LEARN MORE** ▶ For information on Copan and other sites in Honduras, go to [www.letsghonduras.com](http://www.letsghonduras.com).



Passengers wait on the wing of Flight 1549 for rescue, moments after the miracle landing. / RAPPORT

## There but for the grace...

### Passengers struggle with why their lives were spared

By Tim Funk

**NORTH CAROLINA** — Not overly religious. That's how Don Norton describes himself. Raised Catholic, converted to Judaism when he got married, rarely goes to temple.

But last Friday, bracing himself in seat 11F as US Airways Flight 1549 headed for a crash landing in the Hudson River, he said a prayer. He repeated it, over and over, in his head.

"Please, God, don't let me die. Please, God, don't let me die ..."

Norton survived, as did the other 154 passengers and crew members. Now, like the rest of them, this 35-year-old husband and father is trying to make sense of what happened and what role God and faith may have played in the happy ending.

Some of the survivors, such as Lori Lightner, who was able to celebrate her 36th birthday on Monday this week, say it was a miracle.

David Sanderson, who works for Oracle and flies 160,000 km a year on business, says he felt a guardian angel — his late mother — had a role in protecting him.

Clay Presley, a Catholic who felt at peace during the most terrifying moments, says it was a reminder to pay even more attention to what's truly important: family and always doing the right thing.

And Norton?

He says he's still struggling to figure out why he's not dead.

Was it a warning to change his life? Or a case of a master pilot using his God-given talents to save them all?

Norton knows one thing: He feels that God wants him to talk about it with others, to tell them what a precious thing life is.

So on Sunday, Norton accepted a pastor's invitation to appear with fellow passenger Sanderson at Southbrook Community Church in Weddington, N.C. Just to talk with the Rev. Rob Singleton, while his congregation of 2,000 evangelical Christians looked on.

"I believe in God. I feel like I owe him, almost," Norton, a vice president with LendingTree who was on only his second business trip in eight years, said afterward. "That's one of the reasons I think I'm here: God wants me to tell people about this and show appreciation. Because this is going to give me appreciation for life like I've never had before."

Sanderson, who sat beside Norton on the church stage Sunday, wasn't initially scheduled to be on Flight 1549. But when his New York meeting ended early, he managed to get on the earlier flight — the one ditched in the Hudson River.

A devout United Methodist, Sanderson, 47, of Charlotte, said his own prayer from seat 15A, asking Jesus to forgive his sins and give the pilot strength.

"God put that pilot on that plane for a reason," Sanderson said, breaking down for the first time since he saw his children waiting for him at Charlotte/Douglas International Airport. "And I think he put me on that plane for growth. It was my time to stretch."

His testimony brought applause, even an "Amen!"

Lightner and Presley, reached at their homes Sunday, also saw God's hand in their survival — and in their lives.

Lightner, a merchandise manager, says she and husband Erik have been meditating anew about adoption plans.

"Maybe there's a child out there, waiting for us to take care of," she says.

Presley, 54, president of Carolina Pad, a fashion stationary company, says his memories of Friday include hearing passengers quietly praying, some reciting the Lord's Prayer, others asking for God's help.

As for Presley, who text-messaged an "I love you" to his wife, the thought of possibly dying brought calm, not terror.

"I knew I was in God's hands," he said. "I wasn't in control. I was at peace."

— *The Charlotte Observer*

Wreckage of the aircraft became trapped by ice on the Hudson two days later. Had the plane landed on the ice, it's unlikely anyone would have survived. / UPI



## More survivors' stories

### ANDREW GRAY

Andrew Gray of Fayetteville, N.C., faced life-threatening situations during his two tours in Afghanistan.

But going down in a plane crash wasn't the same.

"Over there, you've got armour, you've got a weapon to defend yourself and you're surrounded by peers to your left and your right who are also trained," he said. "On the plane, I felt helpless."

Gray, 28, was an Army captain in the 173rd Airborne based in Italy until last month. He has jumped out of aircraft 14 times as part of his job.

Gray was in New York with his fiancée, Stephanie King, an attorney from Milwaukee. They were celebrating her 29th birthday in true New York style, a show, an expensive restaurant, music and pubs.

### DAVE SANDERSON

Like many frequent fliers, Dave Sanderson took the safety drills for granted. Not anymore. He says he saw everything work right, from the pilot's calm instructions to the way people sitting by emergency exits got the doors open quickly.

Sanderson is scheduled to fly again a week from Monday. He'll be on the plane, he says.

### CHRIS COBB

The thing that sticks with Chris Cobb is the way people worked together.

He grabbed his seat cushion when he got off the plane. Others forgot. A brigade of passengers farther back quickly

began passing up cushions.

As Cobb and several other passengers emerged onto the plane's wing, they noticed the inflatable slide, which also serves as raft, flipped over and drifting away. They formed a human chain, about eight men clasping hands and stretching themselves onto the wing. One reached out and grabbed it. They flipped it over and started helping passengers step onto it as the plane continued to sink.

"I remember looking out to the shore and thinking that it was a long swim."

But rescue ferries arrived, and Cobb jumped onto an ice-covered ladder. He nearly fell into the river, but the workers grabbed him and pulled him aboard.

Looking back, he was most amazed by everyone's calm. "You think when a plane hits and there's water coming into the aisle that people are going to be trampling. But I don't remember people even pushing me."

### JOE HART

Joe Hart of Davidson, N.C., says most passengers stayed calm — until they had to step out onto a wing with water lapping over it.

"Some people started to scream and panic and figured it was the end of their time," said Hart, 50.

He turned to a woman next to him, who was getting panicky.

"I said 'Next flight, demand an upgrade.' That seemed to get her mind off the impending (death) she thought she was facing."

# A bold stratagem

Acclaimed science fiction writer Jules Verne didn't just write *Around the World in 80 Days*, he also wrote an epic about New Zealand and Australia called *In Search of the Castaways*, published in 1867. If you missed the previous instalment of this serial, you can download it [here](#).



Next day, February 17th, the sun's first rays awoke the sleepers of the Maunganamu. The Maoris had long since been astir, coming and going at the foot of the mountain, without leaving their line of observation. Furious clamour broke out when they saw the Europeans leave the sacred place they had profaned.

Each of the party glanced first at the neighbouring mountains, and at the deep valleys still drowned in mist, and over Lake Taupo, which the morning breeze ruffled slightly. And then all clustered round Paganel eager to hear his project.

Paganel soon satisfied their curiosity. "My friends," said he, "my plan has one great recommendation; if it does not accomplish all that I anticipate, we shall be no worse off than we are at present. But it must, it will succeed."

"And what is it?" asked McNabbs.

"It is this," replied Paganel, "the superstition of the natives has made this mountain a refuge for us, and we must take advantage of their superstition to escape. If I can persuade Kai-Koumou that we have expiated our profanation, that the wrath of the Deity has fallen on us: in a word, that we have died a terrible death, do you think he will leave the plateau of Maunganamu to return to his village?"

"Not a doubt of it," said Glenarvan.

"And what is the horrible death you refer to?" asked Lady Helena.

"The death of the sacrilegious, my friends," replied Paganel. "The avenging flames are under our feet. Let us open a way for them!"

"What! make a volcano!" cried John Mangles.

"Yes, an impromptu volcano, whose fury we can regulate. There are plenty of vapors ready to hand, and subterranean fires ready to issue forth. We can have an eruption ready to order."

"An excellent idea, Paganel; well conceived," said the Major.

"You understand," replied the geographer, "we are to pretend to fall victims to the flames of the Maori Pluto, and to disappear spiritually into the tomb of Kara-Tete. And stay there three, four, even five days if necessary – that is to say, till the savages are convinced that we have perished, and abandon their watch."

"But," said Miss Grant, "suppose they wish to be sure of our punishment, and climb up here to see?"

"No, my dear Mary," returned Paganel. "They will not do that. The mountain is tabooed, and if it devoured its sacrilegious intruders, it would only be more inviolably tabooed."

"It is really a very clever plan," said Glenarvan. "There is only one chance against it; that is, if the savages prolong their watch at the foot of Maunganamu, we may run short of provisions. But if we play our game well there is not much fear of that."

"And when shall we try this last chance?" asked Lady Helena.

"Tonight," rejoined Paganel, "when the darkness is the deepest."

"Agreed," said McNabbs; "Paganel, you are a genius! and I, who seldom get up an enthusiasm, I answer for the success of your plan. Oh! those villains! They shall have a little miracle that will put off

counted the hours. All was made ready for flight. The urupa provisions were divided and formed very portable packets. Some mats and firearms completed their light equipment, all of which they took from the tomb of the chief. It is needless to say that their preparations were made within the enclosure, and that they were unseen by the savages.

At six o'clock the steward served up a refreshing meal. Where or when they would eat in the valleys of the Ranges no one could foretell. So that they had to take in supplies for the future. The principal dish was composed of half a dozen rats, caught by Wilson and stewed. Lady Helena and Mary Grant obstinately refused to taste this game, which is highly esteemed by the natives; but the men enjoyed it like the real Maoris. The meat was excellent and savoury, and the six creatures were devoured down to the bones.

The evening twilight came on. The sun went down in a stormy-looking bank of clouds. A few flashes of lightning glanced across the horizon and distant thunder pealed through the darkened sky.

Paganel welcomed the storm, which was a valuable aid to his plans, and completed his program. The savages are superstitiously affected by the great phenomena of nature. The New Zealanders think that thunder is the angry voice of Noui-Atoua, and lightning the fierce gleam of his eyes. Thus their deity was coming personally to chastise the violators of the taboo, or 'tapu' as the Maoris pronounced it.

At eight o'clock, the summit of the Maunganamu was lost in portentous darkness. The sky would supply a black background for the blaze which Paganel was about to throw on it. The Maoris

could no longer see their prisoners; and this was the moment for action. Speed was necessary. Glenarvan, Paganel, McNabbs, Robert, the steward, and the two sailors, all lent a hand.

The project of Paganel was therefore adopted, and certainly with the superstitious ideas of the Maoris there seemed good ground for hope. But brilliant as the idea might be, the difficulty was in the modus operandi. The volcano might devour the bold schemers, who offered it a crater. Could they control and direct the eruption when they had succeeded in letting loose its vapour and flames, and lava streams? The entire cone might be engulfed. It was meddling with phenomena of which nature herself has the absolute monopoly.

Paganel had thought of all this; but he intended to act prudently and without pushing things to extremes. An appearance would be enough to dupe the Maoris, and there was no need for the terrible realities of an eruption.

How long that day seemed. Each one of the party inwardly

could no longer see their prisoners; and this was the moment for action. Speed was necessary. Glenarvan, Paganel, McNabbs, Robert, the steward, and the two sailors, all lent a hand.

The spot for the crater was chosen thirty paces from Kara-Tete's tomb. It was important to keep the urupa intact, for if it disappeared, the taboo of the mountain would be nullified. At the spot mentioned Paganel had noticed an enormous block of stone, round which the vapours played with a certain degree of intensity. This block covered a small natural crater hollowed in the cone, and by its own weight prevented the egress of the subterranean fire. If they could move it from its socket, the vapours and the lava would issue by the disencumbered opening.

The workers used as levers some posts taken from the interior of the urupa, and they plied their tools vigorously against the rocky mass. Under their united efforts the stone soon moved. They made a little trench so that it might roll down the inclined plane. As they gradually raised it, the vibrations under foot became more distinct. Dull roarings of flame and the whistling sound of a furnace ran along under the thin crust. The intrepid labourers, veritable Cyclops handling Earth's fires, worked in silence; soon some fissures and jets of steam warned them that their place was growing dangerous. But a crowning effort moved the mass which rolled down and disappeared. Immediately the thin crust gave way. A column of fire rushed to the sky with loud detonations, while streams of boiling water and lava flowed toward the native camp and the lower valleys.

All the cone trembled as if it was about to plunge into a fathomless gulf.

Glenarvan and his companions had barely time to get out of the way; they fled to the enclosure of the urupa, not without having been sprinkled with water at 70 degrees. This water at first spread a smell like soup, which soon changed into a strong odour of sulphur.

Then the mud, the lava, the volcanic stones, all spouted forth in a torrent. Streams of fire furrowed the sides of Maunganamu. The neighbouring mountains were lit up by the glare; the dark valleys were also filled with dazzling light.



**MOLLIES INVITES YOU TO A DISTINCTIVE DINING EXPERIENCE**  
Nestled in St Mary's Bay, the "Dining Room" at Mollies is now open to the public for a relaxed, gourmet dining experience. With elegant cuisine and a selection of the finest wines, the a la carte and degustation menus feature the best of local produce, prepared by Mollies talented and creative young team of Kiwi chefs.

Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner are available and reservations are recommended.